

A watercolor-style illustration of a globe, showing continents in shades of green, yellow, and brown, and oceans in various shades of blue. The globe is positioned on the left side of the page, with the text overlaid on it.

On Earth as it is in Heaven

REVELATION

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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The last book of the Bible is a Revelation. It goes beyond the other biblical letters and prophecies in its astonishing complexity, beauty, and challenge. There be dragons and beasts, angels and demons, fire and plagues, thrones and martyrs, devastation and the tree of life; along with a great deal of singing. It is a multisensory, cosmic narrative vision, which is perhaps the best way to communicate what is ultimate. God stands before, after, and in the midst of all things, and that is why the letter trenchantly stands against every human attempt to mask and domesticate evil.

The book is God's Revelation of the incomparable Jesus Christ, to churches facing the dual and related dangers of persecution and spiritual lethargy. With the Apostle John, we are taken up into heaven to see what we cannot see: the Lion who is the Lamb, who alone is worthy to bring God's plan to fulfillment. The Lamb stands among his churches that endure as beacons of light, bearing witness to the truth that the way of victory is the way of sacrifice.

READ, MARK, LEARN, AND INWARDLY DIGEST

INTRODUCTION – The steps of these studies are designed to:

- help us to understand more fully what John is saying in Revelation;
- enable us to see how each passage bears on the circumstances of our lives;
- assist us to pray the Scriptures into our lives through the meditation on God's word.

The next two pages give a fuller explanation of each step, which will help you in preparing.

READ

1. Read the passage. Pray for God to draw you to himself and aid you in understanding as you read, also praying that he will transform you by his Spirit.

MARK

2. Mark up the printed text.

a) Ask yourself: What kind of literature is this (genre)? Revelation a mixture of genres: it is a letter, and John tells us it is prophecy (1:3) but is mainly considered apocalyptic teaching, with most of this letter dealing with John's vision. Naturally it follows that each kind of literature is to be read differently.

b) Notice and underline/circle: (*You might like to use different colours for this part*)

- repeated words and phrases
- contrasts
- specific instructions / commands
- the setting and the main characters (often, but not always the Father, Son or Spirit)
- images and symbols used, and what effect they have
- similes or metaphors (note the use of 'like' and 'as')
- the dialogue/songs (who is speaking/singing to whom)
- the verbs

After you have made your observations, try and think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

LEARN

3. Context: How does this passage connect to what has been said in the preceding passage? How does it connect to the passage that follows it? Is it part of a larger teaching section? Notice that often John uses an 'interlocking' literary device that ties two sections together.

Wider context: There are often suggested OT scriptures that shed light on our understanding of what is being taught in Revelation (especially in helping us understand the meaning of the images, metaphors and symbols). The whole Bible is the context for reading Revelation.

4. Apocalyptic genre questions:

Due to the nature of the book of Revelation, questions in this section may vary study to study, but some standard genre questions that may apply, to ask of the text, are:

- Is there a crisis in the passage? What is the tension/conflict about, and how does it relate to the original readers and to us?
- What is the tone of the passage? (ie: what emotions does it arouse?)
- Are there descriptions being used to portray God, Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit? What are they?
- Are there things in the text that reveal we are reading about events from God's historical viewpoint?

5. What does it all mean? Ask the following questions:

- How does the text anticipate or recall the death, resurrection and reign of Jesus Christ?
- What does it tell us about God and his purposes in the world?

INWARDLY DIGEST

6. This question is designed to help you think through the things God wants to grow in you and change as you read Revelation. To do this, we will need to listen well, share honestly, be courageous and grow in trust, seeking to show the grace of Christ towards one another. Some questions to ask:

- How does this passage compel you to respond to the death, resurrection and reign of Jesus Christ?
- How does it challenge (or strengthen) your understanding?
- Does it call you to change the way you live?
- How does it lead you to trust God and his promises?

PRAYER

7. This question will ask you to turn the things that God has addressed into prayer and share it with your prayer triplet or group. Pray for God to do his work of transformation in you. Remember you cannot change yourself...we are too weak for that! Praying is an acknowledgement of your real need and weakness in all spiritual things.

STUDY NOTES (at the back of the booklet)

These study notes are by Lee Gatiss, writing for St Helen's Bishopsgate Bible Study Resources. The passage breakdown of the notes don't follow our study breakdown exactly, but will be a useful tool to read once you have worked on your study.

Study 1 – Revelation 1:1-8

1. READ - *Pray for God to draw you to himself and help you to understand as you read.*

2. MARK - *Mark up the printed text.*

**** Note the several things that these introductory verses tell us about what kind of book (genre) Revelation is, and think through what that will mean for how we read it.**

After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ,
which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.
He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,
2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ,
even to all that he saw.
3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy,
and blessed are those who hear,
and who keep what is written in it,
for the time is near.
4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:
Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come,
and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,
5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness,
the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of kings on earth.
To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood
6 and made us a kingdom,
priests to his God and Father,
to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him,
and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.
Even so. Amen.
8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God,
“who is and who was and who is to come,
the Almighty.”

3. LEARN – Context: What do some of the verses following our passage tell us about John’s situation as he is writing Revelation?

Wider context: There are often Old Testament scriptures that shed light on our understanding of what is being taught in Revelation. What OT echoes do you hear in this passage and how do they help shape our understanding of what is being said? (especially in vv. 5-8)

4. Summarize all that is said about Jesus in this passage. How does that impact the tone being set by John?

5. What does it tell us about God and his purposes in the world?

6. INWARDLY DIGEST

Revelation issues a strong call 'to hear and to see' (2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22), as well as a huge promise of blessing. The book opens and closes urging us to 'hear and to keep' (1:3, 22:7). What in this introductory passage helps you with this call for obedience, as you live as a follower of Jesus?

7. PRAY

We see that the glory of Christ Jesus is the goal in v. 6. Spend some time praising him for what this passage tells us about who he is and all he has accomplished. Pray together for the help of the Holy Spirit as we tackle this wonderful book this year: for 'ears to hear, eyes to see', and hearts to respond.

Study 2 – Revelation 1:9-20 & 3:14-22

The number 7 is prominent in Revelation, representing fullness/completeness (Gen. 2:2, Zech. 4:10, Lev. 4:6).

1. **READ** - *Pray for God to draw you to himself and help you to understand as you read.*

2. **MARK** - *Mark up the printed text.*

****As John describes his vision, notice the use of similes (use of ‘like’) and figurative speech. Notice the ‘beholds’. We often miss that they are a command that means ‘look!’.**

After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

1:9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet

11 saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,

13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

14 The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow.

His eyes were like a flame of fire,

15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.

16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

But he laid his right hand on me, saying,

“Fear not, I am the first and the last,

18 and the living one.

I died, and behold I am alive forevermore,

and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands,

the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

3:14 “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

‘The words of the Amen,
the faithful and true witness,
the beginning of God's creation.

15 “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot.
Would that you were either cold or hot!

16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold,
I will spit you out of my mouth.

17 For you say,
I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,
not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire,
so that you may be rich,
and white garments
so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen,
and salve to anoint your eyes,
so that you may see.

19 Those whom I love,
I reprove and discipline,
so be zealous and repent.

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock.
If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,
I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

21 The one who conquers,
I will grant him to sit with me on my throne,
as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

3. LEARN – Context: How does this passage connect to what has been said in the preceding passage? How does it connect to the passage that follows it?

Wider context: Read Daniel 7: 9-14 for help in understanding the ‘one like a son of man’ described in John’s vision. What impressions do you get of Jesus as described in vv. 12-16, and why do you think John has placed this at the beginning of Revelation?

4. Are there descriptions being used to portray God, Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit? What are they?

5. Jesus gives the church in Laodicea a particularly strong rebuke (3:15). What is their attitude to him and his counsel to them? What do we learn is Jesus’ particular hope for the church in 3: 20-21?

6. INWARDLY DIGEST

What is surprising about the attitude of the church in Laodicea in the light of what we read in 1:12-20?

How does 1:12-20 and the rebuke to the Laodiceans challenge your own understanding of what Christ wants for his church?

7. PRAY

a. Scripture to meditation - Choose one scripture and take a couple of minutes on your own to think about what it is teaching you.

b. Meditation to prayer

- turn something you have learnt from this verse into thanksgiving

- turn something from this verse into confession

- turn something from this verse into praise to God

- turn something from this verse into supplication (asking)

Study 3 – Revelation 2:1-11

1. READ - *Pray for God to draw you to himself and help you to understand as you read.*

2. MARK - *Mark up the printed text.*

**** In this section we hear more of the messages that Jesus has commanded John to write to the angels of each of the churches. Note the similar structure of the message to each church. Also note the contrast in language.**

After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

2:1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand,
who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

2 “‘I know your works,
your toil and your patient endurance,
and how you cannot bear with those who are evil,
but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not,
and found them to be false.

3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake,
and you have not grown weary.

4 But I have this against you,
that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen;
repent, and do the works you did at first.

If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place,
unless you repent.

6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life,
which is in the paradise of God.’

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

‘The words of the first and the last,
who died and came to life.

9 “‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)
and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not,
but are a synagogue of Satan.

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer.
Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison,
that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation.
Be faithful unto death,
and I will give you the crown of life.

11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

3. LEARN – Context: How does this passage connect to what has been said in the preceding passage? How does it connect to the passage that follows it? Is it part of a larger teaching section?

4. What do you find both comforting and challenging about 2:1?

5. What is commendable about the ministry of the Ephesian church and what do they lack? (It seems they heard Paul's warning to them in Acts 20:28-32). What is the strong warning to them?

6. Jesus finds nothing lacking in the church in Smyrna, but v.10 is likely both comforting and very concerning for them. Why do you think this is? How does it affect the way you pray for the persecuted church around the world?

7. What are both the warning and the comfort of verses 7 and 11?

8. INWARDLY DIGEST

Think through how we, as the church of St. John's, share any of the characteristics of these two churches. Note that Jesus moves in each letter from the whole church to the response of the individual. What is Christ calling you to do personally? Discuss with the group.

9. PRAY

a. Scripture to meditation - Choose one scripture and take a couple of minutes on your own to think about what it is teaching you.

b. Meditation to prayer

- turn something you have learnt from this verse into thanksgiving

- turn something from this verse into confession

- turn something from this verse into praise to God

- turn something from this verse into supplication (asking)

Study 4 – Revelation 2:12-29

1. READ - *Pray for God to draw you to himself and help you to understand as you read.*

2. MARK - *Mark up the printed text.*

**** Once again note the similar structure of the message to each church.**

Think through the significance of the symbols Jesus uses in describing himself in v. 12 and 18.

After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

2:12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

13 “‘I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is.

Yet you hold fast my name,

and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness,
who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

14 But I have a few things against you:

you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam,
who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel,
so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.

15 So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

16 Therefore repent.

If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna,
and I will give him a white stone,

with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’

18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire,
and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

19 “‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance,
and that your latter works exceed the first.

20 But I have this against you,

that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching
and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.

22 Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed,

and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation,
unless they repent of her works,

23 and I will strike her children dead.

And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart,
and I will give to each of you according to your works.

24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching,
who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan,
to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden.

25 Only hold fast what you have until I come.

26 The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end,
to him I will give authority over the nations,

27 and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces,
even as I myself have received authority from my Father.

28 And I will give him the morning star.

29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

3. LEARN - Context: How does this passage connect to what has been said in the preceding passage? How does it connect to the passage that follows it? Is it part of a larger teaching section?

4. What is at the heart of the complaint Jesus has about both of these churches?

5. What do you notice about the call to repentance on both of these churches?

6. INWARDLY DIGEST

From the five letters we've read so far, according to Jesus, what does it look like for us to conquer?

7. How is it possible to do this 'conquering' in the light of everything we face as a church and individually?

8. How are verses 17 and 26-28 a particular encouragement or challenge to you personally?

9. PRAY

a. Scripture to meditation - Choose one scripture and take a couple of minutes on your own to think about what it is teaching you.

b. Meditation to prayer

- turn something you have learnt from this verse into thanksgiving

- turn something from this verse into confession

- turn something from this verse into praise to God

- turn something from this verse into supplication (asking)

Study 5—Revelation 3:1-13

1. READ - *Pray for God to draw you to himself and help you to understand as you read.*

2. MARK - *Mark up the printed text.*

****Notice the repetition of ‘name’ in this text and think through the significance of it.**

Also notice the contrasts.

After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

3:1 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

“‘I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive,
but you are dead.

2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die,
for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.

3 Remember, then, what you received and heard.

Keep it, and repent.

If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief,
and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.

4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments,
and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments,
and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.

I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘

The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David,
who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

8 “‘I know your works.

Behold, I have set before you an open door,
which no one is able to shut.

I know that you have but little power,
and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not,
but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet,
and they will learn that I have loved you.

10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance,
I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world,
to try those who dwell on the earth.

11 I am coming soon.

Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

12 The one who conquers,
I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.

Never shall he go out of it,
and I will write on him the name of my God,
and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem,
which comes down from my God out of heaven,
and my own new name.

13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

3. LEARN - Context: How does this passage connect to what has been said in the preceding passage? How does it connect to the passage that follows it? Is it part of a larger teaching section?

4. What is the complaint regarding the church in Sardis and what do they have to do to put it right?

5. Other references in Revelation to the 'book of life' are helpful in understanding the depth of the promise in v. 5, (See 13:8 and 17:8). What is Jesus saying here?

6. What does Jesus promise the church in Philadelphia? What is the common thread that links the promises to that church?

7. INWARDLY DIGEST

How does this passage compel you to respond to the glorious, conquering risen Jesus? What is Christ calling you to change in the way you live?

8. PRAY

a. Scripture to meditation - Choose one scripture and take a couple of minutes on your own to think about what it is teaching you.

b. Meditation to prayer

- turn something you have learnt from this verse into thanksgiving

- turn something from this verse into confession

- turn something from this verse into praise to God

- turn something from this verse into supplication (asking)

Study 6—Revelation 4:1 – 5:14

Chapter 4 opens with a glimpse into heaven! This section, which continues through to 22:7, begins unpacking John’s vision.

1. READ - *Pray for God to draw you to himself and help you to understand as you read.*

2. MARK - *Mark up the printed text.*

**** Notice the crisis and the resolution, and the dialogue/ songs. Notice the repetition of numbers, symbols and phrases that we’ve already seen in Revelation, thinking through their significance.**

After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

4:1 After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven!

And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said,
“Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

2 At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven,
with one seated on the throne.

3 And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian,
and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones,
and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders,
clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.

5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder,
and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire,
which are the seven spirits of God,

6 and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.
And around the throne, on each side of the throne,
are four living creatures,

full of eyes in front and behind:

7 the first living creature like a lion,
the second living creature like an ox,
the third living creature with the face of a man,
and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.

8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings,
are full of eyes all around and within,
and day and night they never cease to say,

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!”

9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him
who is seated on the throne,
who lives forever and ever,

10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne
and worship him who lives forever and ever.

They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

11 “Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.”

5:1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.
2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?”
3 And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it,
4 and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.
5 And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”
6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.
7 And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.
8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.
9 And they sang a new song, saying,
 “Worthy are you to take the scroll
 and to open its seals,
 for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
 from every tribe and language and people and nation,
10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
 and they shall reign on the earth.”
11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,
12 saying with a loud voice,
 “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
 to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
 and honor and glory and blessing!”
13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,
 “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
 be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”
14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!”
and the elders fell down and worshiped.

3. LEARN - Context: How does this passage connect to what has been said in the preceding passage? How does it connect to the passage that follows it?

Wider context: Some OT scriptures help to give us additional understanding. Read Isaiah 6:1-4, Daniel 7:9-10, Ezekiel 1:4-28.

4. What is the picture of God given in these chapters? Note words used to describe him, with verses.

5. What is the picture given of Jesus in these chapters and the significance of the titles given to him? Why do you think is it placed here in the book?

6. INWARDLY DIGEST

How do you think this vision would have impacted the churches facing the dual and related dangers of persecution and spiritual lethargy?

7. We see repeatedly that the response to the vision of God and Christ is worship. How does this strengthen your understanding of what should motivate, shape and revive our collective and private worship of God?

8. PRAY

This is an amazing picture of worship of both God and Jesus. Choose one of the several hymns of praise in this passage and spend time with your group in praise and thanksgiving for all that God is and for all he has done.

Study 7—Revelation 6:1-17

The first six seals are opened by the Lamb in this passage and from here on the apocalyptic language of the vision can sound quite strange, but is symbolic. Remember though that this is all part of the same book that is addressed to the seven churches.

1. READ - *Pray for God to draw you to himself and help you to understand as you read.*

2. MARK - *Mark up the printed text.*

****Notice where these events are happening.** After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

6:1 Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals,
and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!”
2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse!
And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him,
and he came out conquering, and to conquer.
3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!”
4 And out came another horse, bright red.
Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth,
so that people should slay one another,
and he was given a great sword.
5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!”
And I looked, and behold, a black horse!
And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand.
6 And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying,
“A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius,
and do not harm the oil and wine!”
7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!”
8 And I looked, and behold, a pale horse!
And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him.
And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth,
to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.
9 When he opened the fifth seal,
I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God
and for the witness they had borne.
10 They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true,
how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”
11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer,
until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete,
who were to be killed as they themselves had been.
12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake,
and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood,
13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.
14 The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up,
and every mountain and island was removed from its place.
15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful,
and everyone, slave and free,
hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains,
16 calling to the mountains and rocks,
“Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne,
and from the wrath of the Lamb,
17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

3. LEARN - Context: How does this passage connect to what has been said in the preceding passage? How does it connect to the passage that follows it?

Wider context: Read Luke 21:9-12, 25-26 for some NT connection to the signs in vv. 12-17.

4. As the first four seals are opened, note the descriptions of the four horsemen in vv. 1-8. What do we learn they represent?

5. What is different about what is revealed by the opening of the fifth and sixth seals and why do you think it is placed here?

6. INWARDLY DIGEST

How do you think the churches of Asia may have found the coming judgment of the Lord (vv. 12-17), both comforting and challenging? How does it affect you?

7. PRAY

a. Scripture to meditation - Choose one scripture and take a couple of minutes on your own to think about what it is teaching you.

b. Meditation to prayer

- turn something you have learnt from this verse into thanksgiving

- turn something from this verse into confession

- turn something from this verse into praise to God

- turn something from this verse into supplication (asking)

Study 8—Revelation 7:1-17

This chapter marks a ‘pause’ before the opening of the seventh seal in chapter 8. Here we are introduced to the followers of the Lamb.

1. **READ** - Pray for God to draw you to himself and help you to understand as you read.

2. **MARK** - Mark up the printed text.

****Notice both the heritage and the number of people addressed in this passage. Think through how this relates to the promises given to Abraham in Genesis 13:16, 32:12.**

After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth,
holding back the four winds of the earth,

that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

2 Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God,
and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea,
3 saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees,
until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”

4 And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

5 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben,
 12,000 from the tribe of Gad,

6 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali,
 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh,

7 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi,
 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar,

8 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph,
 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number,
from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,
standing before the throne and before the Lamb,

clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

10 and crying out with a loud voice,

“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders
and the four living creatures,

and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

12 saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power
and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying,

“Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?”

14 I said to him, “Sir, you know.”

And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 “Therefore they are before the throne of God,

 and serve him day and night in his temple;

 and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;

 the sun shall not strike them,

 nor any scorching heat.

17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,

 and he will guide them to springs of living water,

 and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

3. LEARN *Context:* Why do you think this interruption to the opening of the seals is placed here? How is the question of 6:16-17 answered in this passage?

Wider context: What more do we learn in Revelation about the ‘seal on the foreheads’ of v. 3-4? See 9:4, 14:1 and 22:4.

4. Remember that the numbers given in Revelation are often not literal, but biblical symbols that John uses to make a particular point. Note the difference between what John ‘heard’ in v. 4 and what he actually ‘saw’ in v. 9. What does that tell us?

5. What have we learned so far in Revelation about the significance of the robes? What do you think it means that ‘they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’ in v. 14?

6. INWARDLY DIGEST

How do you think the message of this chapter would have been both a warning and an encouragement to the seven churches?

7. Revelation doesn't allow us to become complacent about our place in this vision. How is it both a warning and an encouragement to you?

8. PRAY

Use this wonderful picture of worship to shape your prayers together.

a. Scripture to meditation - Choose one scripture and take a couple of minutes on your own to think about what it is teaching you.

b. Meditation to prayer

- turn something you have learnt from this verse into thanksgiving
- turn something from this verse into confession
- turn something from this verse into praise to God
- turn something from this verse into supplication (asking)

Study 9—Revelation 8:1 – 9:21

Within the opening of the 7th and final seal, 7 trumpets are given to 7 angels. The first 6 are blown in these two chapters, each bringing escalating judgments.

1. READ - *Pray for God to draw you to himself and help you to understand as you read.*

2. MARK - *Mark up the printed text.*

****Notice the role that the prayers of the saints (8:3-5) play in the sequence of events. Notice the setting (i.e. where the action takes place). Notice the use of simile too.**

After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

8:1 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal,
there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.
2 Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God,
and seven trumpets were given to them.
3 And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer,
and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints
on the golden altar before the throne,
4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints,
rose before God from the hand of the angel.
5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar
and threw it on the earth,
and there were peals of thunder, rumblings,
flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.
6 Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.
7 The first angel blew his trumpet,
and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood,
and these were thrown upon the earth.
And a third of the earth was burned up,
and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.
8 The second angel blew his trumpet,
and something like a great mountain, burning with fire,
was thrown into the sea,
and a third of the sea became blood.
9 A third of the living creatures in the sea died,
and a third of the ships were destroyed.
10 The third angel blew his trumpet,
and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch,
and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.
11 The name of the star is Wormwood.
A third of the waters became wormwood,
and many people died from the water,
because it had been made bitter.
12 The fourth angel blew his trumpet,
and a third of the sun was struck,
and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars,
so that a third of their light might be darkened,
and a third of the day might be kept from shining,
and likewise a third of the night.
13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead,
“Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth,
at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!”

9:1 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet,
and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth,
and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.
2 He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit,
and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace,
and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.
3 Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth,
and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth.
4 They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree,
but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.
5 They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them,
and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone.
6 And in those days people will seek death and will not find it.
They will long to die, but death will flee from them.
7 In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle:
on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold;
their faces were like human faces,
8 their hair like women's hair,
and their teeth like lions' teeth;
9 they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was
like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle.
10 They have tails and stings like scorpions,
and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails.
11 They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit.
His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.
12 The first woe has passed;
behold, two woes are still to come.
13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet,
and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God,
14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet,
"Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."
15 So the four angels,
who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year,
were released to kill a third of mankind.
16 The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand;
I heard their number.
17 And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them:
they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur,
and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads,
and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths.
18 By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed,
by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths.
19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails,
for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.
20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues,
did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold
and silver and bronze and stone and wood,
which cannot see or hear or walk,
21 nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

3. LEARN - Context: How does this passage connect to what has been said in the preceding passage? How does it connect to the passage that follows it?

Wider context: Recall other biblical references to ‘peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning’ 8:5. (See Rev 4:5 and Exodus 19:16, 20:18) What do they represent and why is it significant?

4. Many of the images used in these judgments come from OT and NT references. (Exodus 7:14-25, 10:12-20; Luke 10:17-20) What is their effect in this passage?

5. We’re introduced to a new character, Abaddon/Apollyon, which mean ‘destroyer’ and ‘king over death’. From heaven’s point of view who is behind the conflict and the destruction on earth?

6. Who is affected by the ‘woe’ revealed in 9:1-11, and what do we learn is the purpose of the ‘woes’ in 9:20-21?

7. INWARDLY DIGEST

Revelation forces us to grapple with the reality of God’s wrath and his attitude towards sin, and is a sobering reminder of the urgency of repentance. Think through carefully why God has only judged 1/3 in chapter 8. How does this affect your attitude towards those you know who do not yet live under the grace of God in Jesus Christ?

8. PRAY

Pray together for those in your circle of influence who don’t yet know the reality of the Lord and his saving grace. Pray for how you might impact their understanding of this truth.

Study 10—Revelation 10:1 – 11:19

Just as chapter 7 was a ‘pause’ between the openings of the 6th and 7th seal, these two chapters mark the second ‘pause’ in Revelation, between the 6th and 7th trumpet.

A 2nd *mighty angel* is introduced here in 10:1 (the 1st being when the sealed scroll is first mentioned in 5:2), showing the scroll finally completely open in 10:8.

1. **READ** - *Pray for God to draw you to himself and help you to understand as you read.*

2. **MARK** - *Mark up the printed text.*

**** Note the use of simile and metaphor in this passage, thinking about what tone and emotion they arouse. Notice any new symbolism used here and any others that we’ve seen already in Revelation. Once again notice the setting (i.e: where the action takes place).** After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying.

10:1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven,
wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head,
and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire.

2 He had a little scroll open in his hand.

And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land,

3 and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring.

When he called out, the seven thunders sounded.

4 And when the seven thunders had sounded,

I was about to write,

but I heard a voice from heaven saying,

“Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.”

5 And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven

6 and swore by him who lives forever and ever,

who created heaven and what is in it,

the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it,

that there would be no more delay,

7 but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel,

the mystery of God would be fulfilled,

just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying,

“Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea
and on the land.”

9 So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll.

And he said to me, “Take and eat it;

it will make your stomach bitter,

but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.”

10 And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it.

It was sweet as honey in my mouth,

but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter.

11 And I was told,

“You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.”

11:1 Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told,

“Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there,

2 but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out,

for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

3 And I will grant authority to my two witnesses,

and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

5 And if anyone would harm them,
fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes.
If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed.

6 They have the power to shut the sky,
that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying,
and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of
plague, as often as they desire.

7 And when they have finished their testimony,
the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them
and conquer them and kill them,

8 and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called
Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.

9 For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at
their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb,

10 and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents,
because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.

11 But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them,
and they stood up on their feet,
and great fear fell on those who saw them.

12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!"
And they went up to heaven in a cloud,
and their enemies watched them.

13 And at that hour there was a great earthquake,
and a tenth of the city fell.
Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake,
and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

14 The second woe has passed;
behold, the third woe is soon to come.

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet,
and there were loud voices in heaven, saying,
"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,
and he shall reign forever and ever."

16 And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces
and worshiped God,

17 saying,
 "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
 who is and who was,
for you have taken your great power
 and begun to reign.

18 The nations raged,
 but your wrath came,
 and the time for the dead to be judged,
and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints,
 and those who fear your name,
 both small and great,
 and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened,
and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple.
There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder,
an earthquake, and heavy hail.

3. LEARN - Context: How does this passage connect to what has been said in the preceding passage? How does it connect to the passage that follows it? How are chapters 10 and 11 connected (particularly 10:8-11:1)?

Wider context: Read Ezekiel 2:1-3:11. What are the similarities and differences about the message to Ezekiel and the message to John here in 10:7-11? What are we learning from this about what we read here in chapter 10?

4. Notice the description of the two witnesses in 11:3-12 (called two prophets in 11:10). What OT and NT echoes do you hear that give us a hint as to whom (what) this might be referring to and what specifically their job is? (Hint: See the lampstand image of 1:20, and notes on this section)

5. What is the central message that connects these two 'pause' passages (7:1-17 and 10:1-11:14)?

6. In 11:15 the 7th and final trumpet is blown. What does the response of the heavenly voices vv.15-19 teach us?

7. INWARDLY DIGEST

In this passage we see a strong call to perseverance in the face of persecution for testifying to Christ. What does that look like in your own life? How does it challenge you?

8. How does this passage lead you to trust God and his promises?

9. PRAY

Spend time in prayer with your group or triplet in response to the ways you have been encouraged and/or challenged by this passage.

Study 11 – Revelation 12:1-17

To worship God and testify to the reign of Christ is to become embroiled in war with those in the ‘heavenly places’ of Eph. 6:12. We were introduced to the witnesses in the last study, and the beast briefly in 11:7. These next few chapters expand on the enemies of God and the reality of the conflict.

1. READ - *Pray for God to draw you to himself and help you to understand as you read.*

2. MARK - *Mark up the printed text.*

****Notice the vivid imagery John uses. Notice too the language of conflict.** After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

12:1 And a great sign appeared in heaven:

a woman clothed with the sun,
with the moon under her feet,
and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.

3 And another sign appeared in heaven:

behold, a great red dragon,
with seven heads and ten horns,
and on his heads seven diadems.

4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth,
so that when she bore her child he might devour it.

5 She gave birth to a male child,
one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron,
but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,

6 and the woman fled into the wilderness,
where she has a place prepared by God,
in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

7 Now war arose in heaven,
Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon.

And the dragon and his angels fought back,

8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

9 And the great dragon was thrown down,
that ancient serpent,

who is called the devil and Satan,
the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth,
and his angels were thrown down with him.

10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying,
“Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of his Christ have come,
for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down,
who accuses them day and night before our God.

11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony,
for they loved not their lives even unto death.

12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them!

But woe to you, O earth and sea,
for the devil has come down to you in great wrath,
because he knows that his time is short!”

13 And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth,
he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

14 But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle
so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness,
to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.

15 The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman,
to sweep her away with a flood.

16 But the earth came to the help of the woman,
and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.

17 Then the dragon became furious with the woman
and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring,
on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.
And he stood on the sand of the sea.

3. LEARN - Context: How does this passage connect to what has been said in the preceding passage? How does it connect to the passage that follows it?

4. What are the descriptions being used to portray God, Jesus and Jesus' followers? How do these descriptions strengthen our understanding?

5. What is the tension/conflict in this chapter about, and how does it relate to the original readers and to us, individually and as a church?

6. What do we learn about how Satan is conquered, and what he still wars against in vv. 10-17?

7. INWARDLY DIGEST

As a follower of Christ, what does this passage lead you to expect? What is the specific challenge for you in that and what is the encouragement?

8. PRAY

a. Scripture to meditation - Choose one scripture and take a couple of minutes on your own to think about what it is teaching you.

b. Meditation to prayer

- turn something you have learnt from this verse into thanksgiving

- turn something from this verse into confession

- turn something from this verse into praise to God

- turn something from this verse into supplication (asking)

REVELATION STUDY NOTES

By Lee Gatiss

St. Helen's Bishopsgate
Bible Study Resources

Revelation 1 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

John is told to write a prophetic, revelatory, letter to seven churches, for their blessing (if obeyed) in the midst of hardship, and for the glory of Christ. Blessing for obedience is the key in verse 3, glory is the goal in verse 6, and hardship as the context comes in verse 9.

Details

1-3 The introduction to the whole book, which is an unveiling or revelation (Greek: *apokalypsis*) of hidden things, given by God to Jesus Christ and then for the benefit of God's servants shown via an angel to the Apostle John, who testifies that he has written it all down (God→Jesus→Angel→John→us). Verse 3 pronounces a blessing on those who read aloud this book to the churches, and on those who hear and obey. Note that the book is called both a revelation and a prophecy: it both unveils things previously hidden and speaks God's word to the current situation. Both revelation and prophecy *can* also have reference to the future, although neither means *just* a word about the future. The future is in mind to some extent, however, as it says the time for these things to start happening (but not necessarily finish) is close, motivating readers to keep what is written here and persevere in obedience. The purpose of the book is not merely to tantalise curious minds but to promote obedience to God (see 22:7).

4-5 Revelation is also a letter and begins as many other New Testament letters do by announcing the sender and the recipients, with an opening blessing or greeting ("grace and peace"). This blessing comes not from "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (as in Ephesians 1:2 for instance) but from "the one who is, who was, and who is to come", a distinct title for God emphasising his eternity. It also comes from the "seven spirits" or sevenfold spirit which is a slightly enigmatic and potentially confusing reference to the Holy Spirit. It's background is probably Isaiah 11:2 (the Messiah is endowed with the Spirit of the LORD, wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and godly fear = 7 fold); and also Zechariah 4:2-7 where the seven lamps of verse 2 are identified with the one Spirit of God in verse 7. To complete the Trinitarian reference, the blessing of grace and peace also comes from Jesus Christ, who himself was a witness to the truth (like John in verse 2), was first to be raised from the dead, and rules over all earthly kings.

5-8 There then follows a doxology (giving of praise and glory) especially to Christ who loves his people, has freed them, and who has given his saved people the privileged status of being a kingdom of priests (see Exodus 19:6). All this is demonstrated and achieved through his death – it is "by his blood". This reminder of the gospel encourages the seven churches to victory through perseverance, suffering, and faithful witness themselves – and reminds them to give all credit for their salvation to God. Their afflicted lover-saviour is coming back soon, in an obvious and open way, to be received by those who formerly mourned over his death. This alludes to Zechariah 12:9-14 where, as judgment comes on the world, Israel are granted repentance and all tribes mourn for God, who was pierced. This shows that the wailing is probably not the hopeless anguish of the unbelieving world in the face of impending judgment, but the sobriety of penitent sinners awaiting their saviour. They mourn for Jesus, not themselves or their sin. But they will see him!

9-11 Identifying himself as a fellow suffering Christian, John describes the origin of the book in his enforced exile (as a result of his teaching the word of God). On a Sunday ("the Lord's Day") he heard and saw this vision and was commanded to write it down for the benefit of the seven churches. These were not the only churches in Asia (Colosse also had a church, for instance, to which Paul wrote), but they were chosen, presumably, as representative or as major centres. Note how often Revelation uses the number 7 (influenced by the Old Testament's liking for it too: Gen 2:2; Lev 4:6, 26:18-28) as figurative for "fullness" (sevenfold Spirit, seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets etc). Though he writes to only seven, he speaks to *all* (see the plural "churches" in 2:7).

12-16 John turns to "see" the "voice": he sees a figure in the midst of seven golden lampstands. The figure is described in terms reminiscent of Daniel 7:13 (he is "one like a son of man") and Daniel

10:5-9, clothed in royal and/or priestly garments, with bright white hair and fiery eyes, sturdy feet, and a loud voice – he is no man of dust like Adam and his descendents, but a “metal man”, a heavy, weighty man of great dignity and importance. He holds seven stars in his hand and a sharp sword comes out of his mouth, set in the middle of a brightly shining face. This is not meant to be entirely literal: note how many times the words “as” or “like” are used (6 times in the Greek of verses 14-15). These verses stress the glory of Jesus (as in verse 6) who speaks to the churches in chapter 2.

17-20 This person John sees is overwhelming, powerful, bright. No wonder he falls at his feet and feels dead. And yet the man is gracious and stretches out his hand to him, while declaring that he is God – “the first and the last” being equivalent to the titles for God in verses 4 and 8 – and Christ (the only man ever to have died and come to life again). He claims also to have authority over death and Hades, so that they should hold no fear for his followers. He is a potent figure, and so John obeys when commanded by him to write all that he sees with reference to the current and future situation. Verse 20 unlocks the images: the lampstands are the churches in the midst of whom Jesus walks, and the stars are the angels of the churches, to whom the letters following are addressed.

Application

1. Studying and obeying the teaching of this book will result in blessing for us (verse 3) if we obey it. That means it is worthwhile studying Revelation over the next two terms even when it seems tough going!
2. All glory and praise should go to Christ who has saved us and rules as a glorious king. Spend some time praising him for all this chapter says about his person and work.
3. We should be encouraged that Revelation is not a completely different book to others in the New testament we may have studied – it is about the gospel, giving glory to Jesus, and keeping God’s commands.

Revelation 2:1-7 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

Christ speaks to commend, warn, and encourage the keen church at Ephesus, particularly warning them to return to their first love or risk the end of their church. There is both commendation and warning here, so we should not focus solely on the negative. The fact that all are called to hear, and other churches are in the Spirit's sights here too (verse 7) means that we are to examine our own hearts and church as we overhear Christ's comments to this one.

Details

1 Jesus commands John to write a letter to the angel of the church which is in Ephesus. The angel could refer to an angelic being (as in the rest of the book) with special concern for that church (like the "guardian" angels of children in Matthew 18:10); or "angel" could be used in its literal sense of messenger, i.e. the pastor of that church, or perhaps more narrowly the one who read out communications from other churches or in this case from Jesus. Whichever it is, each of the letters is addressed to the angel of each church (see 2:8, 12, 18 etc). John is told to write the words of Jesus, a description of whom follows, taken from the vision of chapter 1. The aspect of Jesus' character stressed is his presence among the church, which is of particular comfort and challenge to the Ephesians: he is always with you and is keenly aware of how you are living. It also pictures Jesus walking around the churches "as if he owned the place" – because he does! (See also Genesis 3:8).

2-3 Christ assures his church at Ephesus that he is well aware of how they are putting their faith into practice, working hard for the kingdom and not tolerating evil, especially false apostles who they have carefully discerned to be false (in obedience to Paul's warnings in Acts 20:28-32). Patient endurance is mentioned twice, and their constant zeal is not wearied by difficulties. They are a keen, sound, hard-working church, and they are doing it for Jesus ("for my name's sake").

4-5 Jesus has one problem with this church – they have abandoned the love they formerly had. This could mean they have lost their love for one another or for Jesus in internal fights for doctrinal purity. This is possible (see Jeremiah 2:2) but it is also possible that it refers to their losing sight of their external obligation to be witnesses of the truth in a pagan world (see Matthew 24:12-14 where loss of love is linked with witness to the world). The call in verse 5 is therefore to remember that they have fallen from a great height, and to repent, returning to their original works (note: not just attitude / emotion). There is a sanction attached to this warning: if they do not remember and repent then Jesus will come in judgment (not a reference to the second coming at the end of the age but to his ongoing disciplinary action in the church, as in 2:16, 3:20). He will remove their lampstand (see 1:20, 2:1), that is, if they do not shine and act as lights to the world, they will cease to be a church altogether as he decisively withdraws from them (see also the idea of letting a lamp shine in Matthew 5:14-16).

6 Christ returns from this warning in verses 4-5 to a positive point, by way of continued encouragement. They hate the works of the Nicolaitans, a sect whose theology we don't know a lot about (see also 2:15) except for the one vital fact that Christ hates their works. The fact that the Ephesians felt similarly about this heresy is a point in their favour: if they do not always love what Christ loves, they do at least hate what he hates.

7 The call to hear what the Spirit says to the churches is repeated in each letter (see 2:11, 17, 29 etc). This is intended to jolt us out of spiritual lethargy and pay attention (see the same formula in the Gospels, e.g. Mark 4:9), though some will *not* have ears to hear and will ignore what they see as just a strange message. This is many people's reaction to Revelation as a whole. Interestingly it is the *Spirit's* voice that we are called to hear, despite the fact that it is *Christ* who was introduced as the speaker in chapter 1. The members of the trinity speak as one to the churches. Note too that though the letter is primarily for Ephesus, *all* churches are called to hear it and take note. The letter concludes with a promise to the one who conquers, that is, who continue to walk with Jesus and conquer the temptations of lovelessness / not witnessing to the world. The promise of the tree of life alludes back to Genesis 2:9 and forwards to Revelation 22:2, and offers eternal life with God himself for those who

persevere. A church's lampstand may be removed, but individuals within it may buck the ecclesiastical trend and conquer.

Application

1. What is commendable about the Ephesian church, which Christ is pleased by? Does St. Helen's display any such characteristics as hard work, patient endurance of suffering, doctrinal discernment, or hatred of heresy? If not, how can those things be encouraged so that we please Christ more?
2. What is lamentable about the Ephesian church, which Christ is displeased with? Does St. Helen's display any such characteristics? If so, what can we expect as a result of this? And how can we put it right?
3. As well as thinking about the application of these things to our church as a whole, can we apply them to ourselves as individuals and families too? Would we personally be commendable for the things the Ephesians are commended for, or rebuked for the things they are rebuked for? How can we as individuals "conquer"?

Revelation 2:8-11 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

Be encouraged that when we suffer as Christians, nothing is quite as it seems. The church is suffering some persecution, with more to follow, and needs a revelation from Jesus Christ to keep it going on the right track. So a big theme here in this short letter is reversal: nothing in the present or future is quite what it seems to worldly eyes.

Details

8 Jesus introduces himself as the one who has control and oversight of everything from first to last (see 1:17, which links Jesus to the Father, the Alpha & Omega of 1:8, who is and was and is to come 1:4). This is encouraging in the context of suffering: he also died but then rose again, a reassurance to those who may be facing death for their faith in the near future (verse 10).

9 Christ is aware of the tribulations and difficulties faced by this church. They are poor in worldly terms, and face pressure from outside. Yet Christ says they are actually rich in his eyes. And he reveals to them that the Jews who are slandering them (informing on them to the authorities in Smyrna?) are actually doing the will of Satan (literally, “the accuser”): they belong to “the synagogue of Satan”, which is obviously not the title they would have given their own assembly but is, rather, what Christ sees as the reality behind their words and actions, much like he did with Peter’s words and actions in Mark 8:33 (see also 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Ephesians 6:12 for the idea of the devil being behind spiritual blindness and opposition to the gospel).

10 Jesus then announces to the church in Smyrna that they are about to suffer further, but that they should not fear this. The devil’s plan is to throw some of them into prison, to test their faith (to see if it is genuine or not). This tribulation (the word also used in verse 9 meaning stress, pressure, oppression, distress) will only last 10 days, Jesus says – i.e. only a short time, but possibly this is an allusion to the 10 days of Daniel’s testing in Babylon (Daniel 1:12-15). However, the rest of the verse seems to indicate that it might end in death, at least for some, since they are exhorted to “be faithful unto death”. In 2:13 we do hear about another Christian (in nearby Pergamum) who was killed; he is described as a *faithful* witness. The reward for enduring death is life – another reversal which is revealed to the church. They will go from prison to heaven, from a cell to a crown, just as Jesus himself died and came to life. 10 days is nothing compared to eternity (or even 1000 years).

11 The churches are called to hear what the Spirit says to them, especially through this letter. The implication is that some will not pay proper attention to what he is saying, and will therefore not be strengthened by the encouragements contained here, encouragements focused on divine reversal of the world’s judgment on Christians. The promise of life is filled out further in the last sentence, as the one who conquers (overcomes the temptation to be unfaithful to Christ, to deny him and therefore escape persecution) is not hurt by the “second death” – which is a reference to hell (see Revelation 20:6, 14; 21:8). They may be hurt by their imprisonment and martyrdom, but the eternal flames of God’s judgment will not touch those who are faithful.

Reversals revealed in this letter:

Your poverty	but you are rich
They say they are Jews	but they are not, they are a synagogue of Satan
You may die	but you will receive the crown of life and will not be hurt by the second death
10 days of tribulation	but eternity with Jesus!

Application

1. This letter is an encouragement to all Christians who undergo suffering, slander, and persecution for their faith. It shows clearly that when we are suffering as Christians, nothing is quite as it seems. Persecution does not mean Jesus has lost control of the situation. We need to adjust our vision, so that we see it in the proper perspective through Jesus' eyes. And this readjusted vision will spur us on to endure to the end.
2. How is the devil at work behind those who persecute or slander or attack Christians in some way today? What is a Christian response to such persecution? Clearly we need to pray for those undergoing such pressure, that they would be "faithful unto death". Spend some time praying for the persecuted church in other parts of the world where it is not so easy to be a Christian. Plus: we should also remember the perspective of Ephesians 6:12 that we are not fighting against flesh and blood, with worldly weapons, but against the devil and his cronies.
3. The reversal of the church's fortune does not depend on its faithful perseverance alone, but ultimately on Jesus. It is he who promises to change their death to life, and he who sends this revelation to spur them on. God's initiative remains key, even while a response from us is demanded: we respond as we hear the Spirit's voice (v.11).

The Martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna

This wonderful account of the death of the most famous Christian from Smyrna was written about 150 AD.

...But the most wonderful Polycarp, when he first heard it [persecution arising again in Smyrna], was not disturbed, but wished to remain in the city; but the majority persuaded him to go away quietly, and he went out quietly to a farm... doing nothing but pray night and day for all, and for the Churches throughout the world, as was his custom. And while he was praying he fell into a trance three days before he was arrested, and saw the pillow under his head burning with fire, and he turned and said to those who were with him: "I must be burnt alive."

And when the searching for him persisted he went to another farm; and those who were searching for him came up at once, and when they did not find him, they arrested young slaves, and one of them confessed under torture... Taking the slave the police and cavalry went out... as if they were advancing against a robber... And he might have departed to another place, but would not, saying, "the will of God be done." So when he heard that they had arrived he went down and talked with them, while those who were present wondered at his age and courage, and whether there was so much haste for the arrest of an old man of such a kind. Therefore he ordered food and drink to be set before them at that hour, whatever they should wish, and he asked them to give him an hour to pray without hindrance. To this they assented, and he stood and prayed - thus filled with the grace of God - so that for two hours he could not be silent, and those who listened were astounded, and many repented that they had come against such a venerable old man.

Now when he had at last finished his prayer...they set him on an ass, and led him into the city... And the police captain Herod and his father Niketas met him and removed him into their carriage, and sat by his side trying to persuade him and saying: "But what harm is it to say, 'Lord Caesar,' and to offer sacrifice, and so forth, and to be saved?" But he at first did not answer them, but when they continued he said: "I am not going to do what you counsel me." And they gave up the attempt to persuade him, and began to speak fiercely to him, and turned him out in such a hurry that in getting down from the carriage he scraped his shin; and without turning round, as though he had suffered nothing, he walked on promptly and quickly, and was taken to the arena, while the uproar in the arena was so great that no-one could even be heard.

Now when Polycarp entered into the arena there came a voice from heaven: "Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man." And no one saw the speaker, but our friends who were there heard the voice... [T]here was a great uproar of those who heard that Polycarp had been arrested. Therefore when he was brought forward the Pro-Consul asked him if he were Polycarp, and when he admitted it he tried to

persuade him to deny, saying: "Respect your age," and so forth, as they are accustomed to say: "Swear by the genius of Caesar, repent, say: `Away with the Atheists'" [*Christians* were called atheists because they didn't believe in 'the gods'] but Polycarp, with a stern countenance looked on all the crowd of lawless heathen in the arena, and waving his hand at them, he groaned and looked up to heaven and said: "Away with the Atheists." But when the Pro-Consul pressed him and said: "Take the oath and I let you go, revile Christ," Polycarp said: "For eighty and six years have I been his servant, and he has done me no wrong, and how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

But when he persisted again, and said: "Swear by the genius of Caesar," he answered him: "If you vainly suppose that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as you say, and pretend that you are ignorant who I am, listen plainly: I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn the doctrine of Christianity fix a day and listen." ... [T]he Pro-Consul said: "I have wild beasts. I will deliver you to them, unless you repent." And he said: "Call for them, for repentance from better to worse is not allowed us; but it is good to change from evil to righteousness." And he said again to him: "I will cause you to be consumed by fire, if you despise the beasts, unless you repent." But Polycarp said: "You threaten with the fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. But why are you waiting? Come, do what you will."

And with these and many other words he was filled with courage and joy, and his face was full of grace... [T]he Pro-Consul, on the other hand, was astounded and sent his herald into the midst of the arena to announce three times: "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian." When this had been said by the herald, all the multitude of heathen and Jews living in Smyrna cried out with uncontrollable wrath and a loud shout: "This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our Gods, who teaches many neither to offer sacrifice nor to worship." And when they said this, they cried out and asked Philip the Asiarch to let loose a lion on Polycarp. But he said he could not legally do this, since he had closed the Sports. Then they found it good to cry out with one mind that he should burn Polycarp alive...

...[T]he crowd came together immediately, and prepared wood and faggots from the work-shops and baths and the Jews were extremely zealous, as is their custom, in assisting at this... and he put his hands behind him and was bound, as a noble ram out of a great flock, for an oblation, a whole burnt offering made ready and acceptable to God; and he looked up to heaven and said: "O Lord God Almighty, Father of your beloved and blessed Child, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received full knowledge of you, the God of Angels and powers, and of all creation, and of the whole family of the righteous, who live before you! I bless you, that you have granted me this day and hour, that I may share, among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of your Christ, for the Resurrection to everlasting life, both of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. And may I, today, be received among them before you, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as you, the God who does not lie and is truth, has prepared beforehand, and shown forth, and fulfilled. For this reason I also praise you for all things, I bless you, I glorify you through the everlasting and heavenly high Priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Child, through whom be glory to you with him and the Holy Spirit, both now and for the ages that are to come, Amen."

*Translation abridged and adapted by Lee Gatiss from
<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/martyrdompolycarp-lake.html>.*

Revelation 2:12-17 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

Christ speaks to commend the church at Pergamum but also to warn it of impending judgement on those among them who try to keep a foot in both the world and the church. The big issue is a clash of authority: Satan who considers Pergamum his home and kingdom vs. Christ who bears the sword of judgement and authority even here.

Details

12 Jesus is introduced as the one having a sharp two-edged sword, a description which comes from 1:16 (with an Old Testament background in the Servant Song of Isaiah 49:2). The sword comes from his mouth, thus indicating that his *word* is his weapon and symbol of judgement / authority (see also Ephesians 6:17 for a similar idea, and perhaps Hebrews 4:12). Right from the start, the picture of Jesus we have here is fearsome and powerful. He rules and judges, even in Pergamum.

13 Christ assures them that he knows where they live and the particular issues they face there. It is both the place where Satan has his throne (i.e. rules as king) and the place where he dwells (i.e. considers home). Such a place would be very uncomfortable for a Christian, whose home is heaven and whose king is Jesus. Yet they are holding fast to Jesus, even in the midst of such difficulty. The pressure had recently caused the death of one church member called Antipas, who was faithful to Jesus even “unto death” (see 2:10). This endurance under fire is commended by Christ.

14-15 Jesus has, however, a few things against the church (the word does mean only *a few*, rather than “here’s a long list”!). The one he singles out for special mention is the fact that among their number are those who hold to the teaching of Balaam and those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, rather than “holding fast” to Jesus’ name (verse 13, same word for hold). It is unlikely that those holding to this teaching associated it with the Old Testament character Balaam themselves; Jesus is drawing this negative connection to make a point about the destructive nature of the heresy being propagated. The stumbling block Balaam put before the Israelites was a mixture of sexual immorality and spiritual adultery. It is described in Numbers 25:1-2 and Balaam is specifically identified as the genius behind it in Numbers 31:16. It is nothing to do with the more famous incidents involving Balaam’s talking donkey and the blessings in Numbers 22-24, but is rather about provoking God’s anger by leading his people astray into immorality and the worship of other gods (which two things are so often linked). Jesus’ point is that heretics are encouraging the same behaviour in the church in Pergamum as Balaam encouraged Israel to on the edge of the Promised Land in Moab. When in Moab God’s people should not live like the Moabites do; when in the place where Satan dwells and rules, one should not live like his worldly people - or compromise with the pervasive idolatry and immorality there.

16 Christ calls the whole church to repent of any such compromise. If they do not, he will come soon, not to judge them all with the sword of his mouth (see verse 12) but to judge “them” – i.e. those among them who hold to the dodgy teaching. They must not tolerate such teaching or living among them. When Christ fights with the sword of his mouth later in Revelation (19:15, 21) it is neither a fair fight or a pretty sight (Jesus wins, easily, and there’s a lot of blood and gore). There he judges the beast and his other enemies: here in Pergamum he warns that these Balaamites are also his enemies, even though they might appear to be helping the church fit into Pergamum society, or be only fringe members of the church.

17 All the churches are called to hear this warning, lest they too follow the same path (which some have, see 2:18-29). The promise for the one who conquers and overcomes the temptations to conform and compromise is somewhat enigmatic. “Hidden manna” certainly alludes to the divine provision for the Israelites in the desert (see Exodus 16). The significance here may well be related to *eating*: idol feasts occurred in the Balaam story (Numbers 25:2) and in verse 14 here. Since eating is a sign of fellowship, participating in idol feasts means having fellowship with idols (or the demons behind them, see 1 Cor 10:20). For Christians avoiding such practices, Jesus offers fellowship with himself: don’t eat that tainted food, trust God and you will have divine food to eat. This could be a reference to

God's word again: the (hidden?) food Jesus ate of which his disciples knew nothing (John 4:32) was not bread but every word which comes from the mouth of God (Deut 8:3). He himself is also living bread (John 6). The stone with a new *name* on it (alluding to Isaiah 62:2) probably refers to their uniqueness, and encourages them not to let their identity become bound up with their residence in a sinful city but rather be allied to the future city which is their real home (see 3:12). In a place which ostracised or alienated Christians, Christ pledges to accept them.

Application

1. The issue of sexual immorality is always a relevant one for any church. Why is that? In what ways do *we* tolerate sexual immorality, or tolerate teaching which allows or promotes it?
2. The issue of food sacrificed to idols is not always an immediately relevant one. It is a live issue for some who interact with certain eastern religious practices or who may be confronted with Halal food over which an Islamic prayer has been said. We have other idols, perhaps – money, success, power. Are there also practices with which Satan is 'at home' and which the world encourages which we need to avoid getting ensnared in, such as debauched weekends, binge drinking, or even getting drunk on fine claret or champagne at a civilized dinner party? How do the culture, values, and 'worship' of The City subtly lure us away from wholehearted devotion to our true King...?

Revelation 2:18-29 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

Christ's purpose is to warn the church to hold on to their faith, love, and hope until Jesus comes and to distance themselves from prominent false teaching or false judgment. So hold on to him and let go of the false teachers before it is too late.

Details

18-19 Jesus introduces himself as a heavy and weighty man (feet of burnished bronze) who must be reckoned with, having eyes like a flame of fire. This description from 1:14-15 is calculated to inspire awe – this is not someone to be trifled with. “Son of Man” in 1:13 becomes “Son of God” here, in line with Psalm 2:7 (and the further allusion to Psalm 2 in verses 26-27 below). Jesus is pleased with many aspects of the church's work, especially the fact that they are making progress (their latter works exceed their first) unlike Ephesus which as well as having no love is also going downhill (their latter works are worse, 2:4-5).

20 Christ puts his finger on a problem: their toleration of a false teacher given the name Jezebel (her real name, or a suitably appropriate biblical insult alluding to 1 Kings 16-21). She is given the title “prophetess” not because she is from God but because she was prominent in spreading a heresy, which sounds very much like that in 2:14-15. Its effects are to involve Christians in immorality and idolatry. See notes on Revelation 2:14-15 on idol-food and immorality for more on this. It is likely ‘Jezebel’ is part of the same movement as the Balaamites and Nicolaitans.

21-23 Jesus has given this false prophetess time to repent already, but she has been stubborn in refusing that opportunity to change her ways and her teaching, specifically regarding sexual immorality. Therefore Christ's judgment is announced: Jezebel and her followers will experience sickness and trouble – a very temporal “now” judgment which can only be mitigated if Jezebel's followers repent of her works. “Her children” could refer to her followers, but since they have been referred to in the previous verse already it could also mean her actual children will suffer as a result of her sin too. These judgments will not just be retributive (punishing) but will have a deterrent affect on other churches, as they see how their heavenly ruler searches hearts and minds in the church at Thyatira (see verse 29 which also calls for all to ponder this). Jesus the judge who sees all will be utterly fair.

24-25 Christ demands nothing more from the church in Thyatira but to distance themselves from Jezebel (not tolerating her or holding to her teaching, verse 20) and hold fast to what they already have and know until Christ comes again. They must not be lulled into thinking that a “deeper” teaching will help them – which is perhaps how Jezebel was presenting her theology (and accounts for the ironic title Christ gives to such teaching: “the deep things of Satan”). They have all they need already (see 1 Corinthians 2:9-13), so no other burden is put on them by Christ.

26-29 Jesus promises that the one who conquers and overcomes such temptations as are faced by Christians in Thyatira will have authority over the nations, just as Jesus does (see Psalm 2:9, also alluded to in Revelation 12:5). They will, in that perfect future, rule over the world as God intended humanity to rule over it (under him). They will also have the morning star, which later in the book is a reference to Jesus himself (22:16). These things will be particularly reassuring for embattled Christians who have had to fight within the church this side of paradise for the truth and purity of God's word. If they hold out, the battle will be won: a great hope to hold onto in troubled times.

Application

1. The issue in Thyatira is the toleration within the local church of teachers and teaching which leads to idolatry and immorality. This leads to a temporal “now” judgment. Does it always do so? What would such a temporal judgement look like in our day for a church which sins like Thyatira?

2. In what ways are we tempted to tolerate false teaching in the church? What would it look like to distance ourselves from it? (Remember that a denomination is not a 'church' as such...!).
3. In what ways can the church today learn from this letter's insistence that Jesus searches hearts and minds and judges us according to our works (verse 23)?
4. If you did not get time for applications on either idolatry *or* immorality in last week's study on Pergamum, give some attention to the omitted element this week (see last week's applications).

Revelation 3:1-6 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

Christ's purpose in this letter is to nudge the church in Sardis to 'wake up!' or face judgment for their complacency and greater interest in the approval of other people than the approval of Christ. The issue seems to be hypocrisy: they are not what they seem to be. They seem more interested in having a name or reputation amongst people than they are for true spiritual vigour, whereas Christ is more interested in how they appear to him and how this affects their witness to him. So the call is to wake up and get our priorities straight, which may affect several areas of life.

Details

1 Jesus is introduced as the one who has the seven spirits (see 1:4 and notes on that verse). In 5:6 the seven spirits are like seven eyes sent by God into the world. The implication is that Jesus (through the Spirit) sees all. He also has the seven stars, which in 1:20 are the angels or messengers of the churches held in Jesus' hand (1:16). The implication is that he is in control of the message and its proclamation.

1-3 Jesus is totally aware of the works of this church. He knows that they have a reputation (literally, a "name") for being alive. Yet he also knows that they are not what they appear to be to the human eye. They are – shock! - dead (v 1), or at least, almost dead (v 2). They are called to wake up and bring new life to the church before it dies completely. Their problem is that their works, though they may look complete to others (hence their reputation) are not so *in the sight of God*. What they seem to be is not what they are in God's sight. They need to repent, wake up, and return to the message they received and heard at first (what they *received* may also be a reference to the Spirit (see verse 1) who they received at conversion, Galatians 3:2, 14). If they don't wake up Jesus will come suddenly and unexpectedly to judge them, perhaps letting their church die out (as in other temporal "now" judgments in 2:5, 16, 22-23). This could refer to judgment day (the 'thief' language is used of this in 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10), although the coming here seems to be conditional, specifically linked to their repentance or lack of it, so is more likely to be specific and temporal; also, it is *against you*, whereas the day of judgment is against all.

4 There are some people in Sardis who have not fallen foul of the same spiritual problem as the rest. Working out what they have done right might help us work out what the others did which was wrong. These commendable people are referred to as "names" – again the idea of name or reputation is stressed (as in 3:1; see also 3:5 twice). They have not soiled (or defiled) their garments; a similar phrase in 14:4 (defiled = soiled) refers to those who remain pure by resisting immorality. It at least means these people have not gone along with the sinful behaviour of others or been compromised by the pollution of the world. They are "worthy", not in the sense that they are sinless and therefore deserve heaven (their purity is not down to their merits but to the blood of the lamb, 7:14) but they have shown themselves worthy by enduring suffering and hardship for the gospel: in Revelation 5:9 and 6:9-11 being "worthy" is related to suffering / dying for the gospel, as it is in Jesus' earlier words in Matthew 10:37-38. They accepted loss of face and loss of everything for Jesus, unlike some in Sardis who kept their heads down for the sake of a quiet and reputable life (in the sight of men). Those who were truly alive (spiritually) were willing to die (physically). Perhaps if more in Sardis were as alive as they were reputed to be, more would be dead (like Antipas in 2:13)!

5-6 The one who conquers the temptations of Sardis will be clothed in white, a sign of their unstained purity and worthiness.

On white as denoting purity see Isaiah 1:18; Daniel 11:35 and 12:10. It is also the colour worn by God and Christ (Daniel 7:9; Matthew 17:2, 28:3; Revelation 1:14) and also by angels (Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10). In Revelation white garments cover shame (3:18), are worn by those around God's throne (4:4, 7:9 - whitened by atoning blood, hence without the stains of sin) and by the armies of heaven (19:14, in which "white and pure" are linked as synonyms). It is possible that white also denotes 'victory', in that a white horse in 6:2 carries a conqueror (cf. 19:11); but then it could also denote 'rest', as in 6:11 those slain are given white robes and told to rest. The primary thought is purity

(as in Isaiah and Daniel) and other connotations derive from the fact that those who rest and are victorious are in fact those who are pure and unstained / un-polluted.

Those who conquer will also *not* be blotted out of the book of life – a doubly-emphasised negative in the Greek which means that it is not even close to being a possibility for them (as in 2:11 – they will “certainly not, definitely not, by no means” be hurt by the second death). In Revelation, one’s name is either in or out of the book of life from before the foundation of the world (see 13:8, 17:8), and there is no hint that a name can be in and then later scrubbed out. They may not get their *names* into the history books or scrolls of honour in Sardis, but this book of life is a more important book to be in. It is more significant to be *named* by Christ in the book of life than to have a reputation of life and a name in the world. The last part of verse 5 combines Matthew 10:32-33 and Luke 12:8 where Jesus gives us a choice to either confess his name openly before men or deny him (see 3:8) and hence be rejected by him. The worthy in Sardis *were* willing to confess his name before men and so can claim the promise of recognition by Christ on the last day. To confess Christ was certainly to be involved in evangelism, but it would include far more in terms of lifestyle and priorities too if *he* was named publicly as one’s Lord or ‘Master’.

Application

1. How would being more interested in people’s approval than in Christ’s approval affect our evangelism? Given that we might still feel it important to evangelise in some way, how might we go about it if we were really most interested in having a name amongst people as a great church?
2. How might being complacent and spiritually asleep affect our lifestyle more generally? What would a holiness that was incomplete in God’s eyes look like to human eyes?
3. How might we react to the prospect of suffering for being a Christian if we were more interested in the approval of people than in God’s approval?
4. In what ways is our church ‘famous’? Is this reputation truly deserved – that is, is God as pleased with us as a church as other people (in the church or the world) might be? Would God praise the things for which we have a name, and is our reputation merited by the underlying spiritual facts as he sees them?

Revelation 3:7-13 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

Christ's purpose in this letter to Philadelphia is to strengthen a weak church in the midst of alienating religious persecution by promising, because of their faithfulness, to act for them not their oppressors. Christ acts because of their faithfulness in verse 8 and 10. He acts in several ways in verses 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. His supreme power over all opposition, for their benefit, is stressed in verses 7, 8, 9 and 10. Alienation is a keynote of the persecution: the image of the key/door, the implicit temptation to deny Christ, the affirmation that they *are* loved, the promise of pillar-status in the future, and a secure home – all stress that they are excluded by the persecutors, yet accepted by Jesus.

Details

7 Jesus is the holy one – a title given to God, especially in Isaiah (“the holy one of Israel”, Isaiah 1:4; 40:25; 60:14 etc.). But now he is the holy one *of the Church*. He is also the true one, the only real God. The “key of David” which opens and shuts so effectively alludes to Isaiah 22:22 where the royal authority and power of the Davidic kings of Judah is given to a man named Eliakim, symbolised by the key on his shoulders (cf. “the government shall be upon his shoulder”, Isaiah 9:6). Jesus, the promised king in David’s line, has great power.

8 This mighty messiah king acts on behalf of the church of Philadelphia. The “I know that” in the middle of verse 8 can be translated (as the same word is in verse 10) “Because”, i.e. “Because you have but little power...” Christ comes to help them because of their faithfulness to him in the midst of weakness. They can’t do it, they need his help. They are weak, but he is strong – stronger than anyone who might threaten to ‘close the door’ on them. The door is sometimes thought to be an open door for evangelism (as in 1 Cor 16:9, 2 Cor 2:12, and Col 4:3). But in Revelation (4:1) it is the open door of *access into heaven* (see Luke 13:24, John 10:9, and Acts 14:27 for a similar idea). Their access to God depends not on their strength (numerically or spiritually) but on the Christ who comes to their aid.

9 So while some supposedly religious Jews try to alienate, isolate, and keep them out of God’s kingdom (a Satanic ploy from “the Synagogue of Satan”, see 2:9), Jesus declares that he has let them in. This may be part of a Jewish effort to keep gentiles and Jews separate, or an attempt to distance the church from the synagogue in order to remove the Christians’ protection as a special “permitted religion” in the Roman Empire (a privilege granted to Jews, and at first to Christianity as a ‘sect’ of Judaism). The irony is that the messiah long-awaited by the Jews does not act for the Jews in Philadelphia, but for the Church (consisting at least partly of gentiles). The enigmatic phrase about making their enemies bow down before them utilises another allusion to Isaiah (60:14) which says: “*The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel*” (a key text here: see also Rev 3:7 for another mention of “holy one” and 3:12 where they are also called the city of God). Whatever the Jews think, God has accepted these gentile believers in Christ, and wants everyone to know it.

10-11 Again Christ promises to act *because* of their faithfulness to him and their endurance. Having *kept* his word, he will *keep* them from an approaching ‘hour of trial’ that is coming on the worldly inhabitants of earth (in Revelation “those who dwell on the earth” are ‘worldly’ people as opposed to Christians, not just those who happen to live on this planet: see 6:10, 8:13, 13:8, 14, 17:8 etc). This includes the judgments described in the rest of the book, probably even including things like the second death (which will not harm believers, 2:11). Ultimately, these will not damage believers, even if they have to suffer a little while. The key thing is to hold fast to Christ and the gospel (see e.g. 2:13 “hold fast my name”, and 2:25) so the heavenly prize awarded to those who persevere will be theirs (see also ‘crown’, 2:10).

12-13 The one who conquers the temptations in Philadelphia and endures opposition from the synagogue of Satan will be a pillar in God’s temple. This is of especial comfort to those who, in this life, feel excluded from those who claim to be God’s people (verse 9). They will be an integral,

important part of God's new creation, permanently at home there with official passports, green cards etc (being marked with God's name and the name of his city, as permanent residents). This looks forward to Revelation 21:1-2 later in the book.

Application

1. How are faithful Christians made to feel isolated or alienated by the world? By our attitude to God, the Bible, and many different moral issues we stand out (or should) and can be mocked, legislated against, ridiculed, or berated for holding to such views. This happens in workplaces, schools, and in the nation at large in many different ways.
2. How do religious people attempt to distance themselves from faithful Christians, and keep them at arms length? Is it by labelling those they disagree with "fundamentalists" or "extremists", and hence saying "we should not bother about those people, or let them in to our 'club'?" Are we sometimes guilty of a similar attitude towards other faithful Christians?
3. What is the temptation for Christians in such a situation? To give up their faith, or at least to water it down so that it is more acceptable to those around them in either the church or the world? We want to feel part of things, as social beings. No-one should really enjoy being an outsider or part of an embattled minority, because in God's plan we are meant to live together in harmony. How the temptation to give up or compromise looks in practice depends on the context of the individual believer or church: to resist it we are to keep his word, confess his name, and keep going (verses 8 and 10) so it probably involves corrupting the word, keeping quiet, and giving up.
4. How would this passage encourage people who feel excluded and marginalised in this world? The main thrust of it is to force us to look heavenwards, to Christ and what he has done for us, and to the future and our eternal home with him. Discuss how we can foster a sense of our home being in heaven in the midst of alienating persecution.

It has struck me as I've prepared these notes, how the song "Jesus loves me" could well have originated in Philadelphia...

Jesus loves me, this I know (Revelation 3:9)
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong;
They are weak but he is strong. (Revelation 3:8)

Yes, Jesus loves me...

Jesus loves me, he who died
Heaven's gate [door] to open wide, (Revelation 3:7-8)
He will wash away my sin;
Let this little child come in. (Revelation 3:12)

Yes, Jesus loves...

Jesus loves me, he will stay
Close beside me all the way, (Revelation 3:10?)
On the cross you died for me;
I will ever live for thee. (Revelation 3:8 & 10)

Yes, Jesus loves me...

Revelation 3:14-22 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

Christ's purpose in this letter to Laodicea is to shake a complacent self-sufficient church out of its deluded lethargy so that they may repent and be of use. They are not what they think they are (verses 15-17), the problem being a lack of zeal (verse 19) which makes them useless and distasteful (like lukewarm water, verse 16) to Christ.

Details

14 Jesus is the Amen, the end (the last word), a faithful and true witness to God, and also the beginning (the first) in God's creation (see Colossians 1:15, "firstborn of all creation"). This description is reminiscent of that in 21:6 and 22:13. It is appropriate at the end of the letters section in Revelation 1-3, as it is at the end of the book itself. It also emphasises Jesus' exaltation and supremacy over the church in Laodicea, as the reminder at the end of the letter (verse 21) focuses on his conquest and victorious rule over the universe.

15-16 The supreme exalted Jesus has no use for the lukewarm Laodiceans. In contrast to their own self-image, Christ finds no use for them because they are lukewarm. This doesn't mean that they need to "warm up spiritually", because verse 15 indicates that cold water would be equally acceptable to Christ (and Jesus doesn't encourage spiritual coldness!). The issue is, rather, usefulness: both cold and hot water are useful for something (drinking / washing), whereas lukewarm water is useful for neither. Indeed, if it is drunk it can be nauseating, and that is how Christ feels about this church. Alternatively, a lukewarm bath is comfortable, which is a picture of them – too comfortable!

17-18 The "for" at the beginning of verse 17 shows that their repulsive effect on Jesus is caused by their complacent self-sufficient attitude. They consider themselves rich and in need of no help or sustenance from anyone else. Whether this was true of them physically and materially speaking, Christ's devastating verdict is that spiritually they are desperately needy and yet in their complacency they do not realise this. Christ's words are intended to make them realise it. He then counsels them to seek from him what will make them truly rich and fulfilled. First they are to buy refined gold which will make them rich. This seems odd – if they have the money to buy such gold surely they are rich already and not poor at all, and don't need to buy this in order to be rich? The gold is, therefore, a metaphor for another commodity which will make them truly, spiritually, rich. This is probably the gospel. They also need to look the part if they want to be spiritually rich – and so buying white garments, a metaphor for 'clothing oneself' with righteousness and purity, is essential. Finally they need spiritual eye ointment to cure their blindness – perhaps this letter itself is the medicine they need to be able to realise what's going on. Whether or not first-century Laodicea had warm springs as opposed to cold or hot ones in nearby towns, and whether or not they had a thriving clothes-making or eye-ointment manufacturing industry is not necessary for us to know: the text contains sufficient clues to its own meaning without us needing to dig around in the ancient ruins of Asia Minor. Still, background like this can be of some small interest.

19-20 This is a harsh and stark warning – they are repugnant to Christ and about to be spat out. So he reassures them that his warning is not a dismissive one but a purposive one: he intends by this to correct and discipline them, because he loves them (as in 3:9). Their response should not be depression, despondency, or despair but repentance expressed in renewed zeal. He stands at the door of the church and by his knocking asks: do you want to let me in, or do you prefer to remain spiritually complacent? Shall we eat and share together, or do you wish to carry on thinking you need nothing and no-one (verse 17)? This is not, therefore, as sometimes popularly thought, an *evangelistic* text in the first instance but a rebuke to a self-sufficient church ignoring Christ. That is not to say it cannot also be used, in an extended application, to shake those who are not Christians out of a similarly complacent attitude. Jesus definitely does not, however, knock on the door of our hearts in a begging, plaintive, weak sort of way, reliant on our changeable hearts and minds to achieve his purposes. That would be to interpret the knocking image in the way which is totally at odds with the image of Christ in verse 14 (not to mention how chapter 1 or the rest of the book portrays the Lord!). To a repentant church Christ offers real acceptance and loving friendship in the here and now.

21-22 The future promise for those who conquer the temptation to remain autonomous and independent of the supreme Christ is that they will rule with him from the throne of God, over the new creation (see the idea of “reigning with Christ” in 20:4, or 2 Timothy 2:12).

Application

1. In what ways has this letter shocked you? How are we tempted to think we have it all and need nothing? How does spiritual complacency show itself in a church's life? How does it look in an individual Christian's life?
2. Specifically, what would it look like for us to be truly “zealous” – as a church or as an individual? Why are we not more zealous? Is it that we see it as ‘un-English’ or only for the younger Christian to be “keen” and enthusiastic? Is it because wealth or comfort or years have made us conservative and complacent? Where do we need to take risks and make sacrifices more? If we are complacent in that we, say, trust in our structures alone to fulfil God's purposes (even Central Focus!), then we should be wary of applying this simply by saying “let's be more regular at the Prayer Supper” or something like that (just another structural thing). What about our hearts?
3. Which of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 do we feel St. Helen's most resembles? This could be an enlightening discussion, revealing as much about where we are at as a group as it does about the church itself. A further, more personal, question to ask is in which Revelation church would we ourselves be least out of place? That is, which one sounds like it has the same spiritual hang-ups or problems or challenges as me?

Revelation 4 & 5 - Study Notes

As we've studied the letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3 we have noted a number of allusions back to the opening vision of chapter 1. Here we start again with a vision of God and Christ, which is then alluded to on numerous occasions in the following chapters. This makes chapters 4-5 an ideal way to start our second term looking at Revelation.

Main Point and Purpose

The purpose of these chapters is to stimulate us to worship and persevere in serving God and Jesus in all their holiness and majesty, prompted by their work of creation and redemption. The chapters themselves both end with praise and glory to God and Christ. The focus in chapter 4 is on the Father as creator, sustainer, and ruler; in chapter 5 it is on Christ as suffering but victorious saviour. Or... "God rules. Jesus wins. Keep going!"

Details

4:1-6 After the opening vision of the book and the letters he is told to send to the angels of the churches, John is now shown a vision of heaven itself (the place where God dwells now, not the final dwelling place of redeemed humanity - which is more properly referred to as the new creation, see Revelation 21-22). In the Spirit (1:10) John is first shown a vision of God on his throne, like a king. His appearance is described using precious gems and images of purity and glory. Minor dignitaries (elders on 24 thrones) sit surrounding God's throne, gloriously attired but giving even more glory to the God they serve. The elements lend their voices to his praise (lightning and thunder) as does the Spirit (verse 5, "seven spirits" see notes on 1:4). The glassy sea surrounds God, giving his throne an added majesty and dignity.

4:7-8 Then we are introduced to other creatures "full of eyes" and like a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle, but all with 6 wings (like the seraphim, "burning ones", of Isaiah 6 who use 4 of their 6 wings to shield their feet and faces from the glory of God). They praise God and acclaim him as the magnificently holy and almighty God. The thrice-repeated "holy" indicates exceptional, unique holiness rather than being merely a veiled intimation of the Trinitarian nature of God. Holiness means separate, sacred, set apart, hallowed, awe-some. When applied to God it can also have ethical connotations, referring to his purity and perfection. The second half of the creatures' acclamation is not the same as that in Isaiah 6. Instead, it emphasises God's eternity – he always existed and always will (see also verse 10) – which implies his independence and self-sufficiency from his creation: he is above it, and rules it, and is glorified by it.

4:9-11 The creatures must say more than verse 8 because they also give glory and honour and thanks to God. They are joined in this by the elders on the thrones around God's throne, who fall down and worship (bow the knee to) God. They cast their crowns before him, showing that their authority and glory is derived from him and owed to him. They also hail God, cheering his achievements in creating and preserving the existence of everything that is. These accomplishments of God render him worthy of praise and glory, not just from the elders and the living creatures but from all who read this chapter. The God described here is in command of everything and deserves the highest loyalty and applause from all that he has made, everything that exists because of him.

5:1-5 John then sees something in God's right hand – a scroll written on both sides and officially sealed. We learn as the seals are broken that what is contained in the scroll is the plan of God for his creation (see chapter 6 onwards). But the question is – who is worthy and able to open the scroll? Who can reveal God's plan, and execute it? When no-one is found in the universe to do this, John is greatly upset. One of the elders tells John there *is* someone worthy – and it's Jesus! John was obviously aware before this that Jesus is the Son of God who reveals God's plan and brings it to fruition, but in his vision it is all happening quickly and he hardly has a moment to, or connect what he knows to the heavenly realities he is seeing in front of him. As readers, we *do* have the chance to make those connections and think things through. John is told that the Lion of the tribe of Judah is worthy – Jesus was born of this tribe (Heb 7:14) and just as it is prophesied in **Genesis 49:10**. The lion is a kingly, regal symbol (1 Kings 10:19-20 refers to lions on Solomon's throne. See also

Isa 38:13, Gen 49:9). He is also the Root of David – the “root of Jesse” (Jesse was David’s father) in Isa 11:1 refers to the messiah who would conquer and renew the world, bringing enemies from all nations into subjection. Jesus is the fulfilment of all God’s plans as outlined in the Old Testament.

5:6-8 After the description of the conquering Lion, John looks and sees... a Lamb, which looks like it has been slain. The mixture of images is striking and describes a suffering, sacrificial lamb who is also a glorious king. He is accompanied by the Spirit (see 4:2, 5 and 1:4) and takes the scroll. The elders and creatures then fall down before him holding the prayers of all God’s people, which have been answered in this person. They then sing in his honour, that he is worthy to open the scroll because of his death, by which he ransomed people for God from all nations (see verse 5 and the allusion to Isaiah 11), that they might be God’s people and rule the earth.

5:11-14 Angels now join the happy crowd in heaven and add to the noise – the sacrificial lamb is worthy also to rule in power and be praised. He receives glory from them all, mentioned together in the same breath as God himself. Note that Father and Son are both worshipped here (Jesus is also worshipped in Luke 24:52), the two chapters being placed side by side to show us this very clearly (God in chapter 4, Christ in chapter 5). The Spirit is not absent: the whole vision is “in the Spirit” (verse 2) and he appears as “the seven spirits of God” in 4:5 and 5:6 (see also 1:4). The picture here is thus of God the trinity, worshipped and adored in heaven for all he is and has done.

Application

1. The main application is to worship and adore God for all he is and all he has done. It should be easy to “pray in” his attributes and achievements as described here. Why not pause after chapter 4 to pray and then again after chapter 5?
2. This vision of God and Christ would specifically encourage the Christians in the churches we’ve got to know over the last term in Revelation 2-3. It would encourage them that God is in control of their situation, and worthy to be served (unlike Caesar or any other authority which claims to be governing the world or our lives). It would demonstrate that perseverance in the midst of suffering was justified, and that they were part of something so much bigger than just their time and place.

Revelation 6:1 - 8:5 - Study Notes

From now on, the book of Revelation can start to sound a little bit strange! It is well worth remembering that it is all part of the same book, and that the weird and wonderful visions of chapters 6 onwards are still addressed to (and therefore have a message for) the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum and other places we have got to know already in Revelation 2-3.

Main Point and Purpose

The purpose of these chapters is to encourage us that God is coming to judge the world and to save his people, giving them a perfect new creation to enjoy with him forever. The events unfold like a story, so that judgment comes and then we see God's people saved from it. We will see this again in later chapters. Standing back from the story, we grasp its big message.

Details

6:1-8 The famous 'four horsemen of the apocalypse' ride out (though there are actually 5 of them if Hades in verse 8 has a horse as well!). What they represent is described in verse 8 – death by sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts. Each of these appears as one of the seals of the scroll is broken – the scroll which contains the plan of God for the world. The plan itself is being enacted as the seals are broken. The rider on the white horse is sometimes thought to be Jesus, because in 19:11 Jesus rides a white horse. That does not follow logically of course (would I be Jesus if I rode a white horse?!) and the contexts are different. It is more likely that the rider of the white horse is just like the other riders – an evil force let loose by God's permission (the riders are *given* power) with limited power and authority. The beast is allowed to conquer the saints in 11:7 and 13:7 and this white horse image is perhaps part of the imitation of Christ by him and his minions (which we'll see more of in 12-14). The first four trumpets and bowls all seem to go together in the next chapters so it seems to make sense to view the first four seals in the same way (as all referring to parallel evil forces). Similar "four horsemen" images in Zechariah 1 and 6 seem to be the background here, and would again indicate that the horses and riders, even the white one, are the same in nature.

6:9-11 The fifth seal reveals that in the midst of sundry kinds of death inflicted by the horsemen, the souls of those who have been martyred for Jesus are longing for judgment day to arrive and for God to inflict vengeance on his enemies. Antipas in 2:13 was one such person. Judgment day is not coming yet though, they are told, because more Christians need to die as martyrs first. The judgments described in the first five seals are all happening "now", rather than one after another in some kind of chronological sequence – they describe the situation continually faced by the saints until God chooses to judge bring his creation all to an end.

6:12-17 As the sixth seal is opened, God finally judges and brings the old creation to an end. The camera pans to a great earthquake and natural disasters as signs of impending doom. The old creation (sky, earth, sun, moon, mountains, islands) is shaken and vanishes. Every person (seven kinds of person in verse 15) is terrified in the face of the anger of God and of the lamb (note: this *lamb* is not a soft cuddly skipping thing called Peter – his wrath is frightening to kings and generals). This is a picture of judgment day – it has finally arrived. The question (as in Psalm 130:3 and Malachi 3:2) is "who can stand?" when he appears? That is answered in the next section...

7:1-12 The description of the sixth seal is longer than the others, as an interlude in the opening of each one provides more detail. The wind is suddenly held back by four angels, who restrain judgment from falling on everything until God's servants have been sealed, marked out and protected from the oncoming judgement. 1440,000 is 12 x 12 (a complete number of people/tribes squared) multiplied by 10 x 10 x 10 (a big number). So the significance of this is that the complete number of God's people will be saved, and it will be a vast multitude. This number is *heard* and then unpacked in terms of Israelite tribes (minus Dan and splitting Joseph into Joseph and Manasseh). Verse 9 makes this even more explicit as the same people are *seen* from another angle as "a great multitude no-one could number" (so the numbering of verses 4-8 is not literal, but rather reassuring – God knows each one to be saved individually). God will save, from judgment, people from every tribe and nation (as in 5:9). That this is the same group (and *not* saved Jews in v.4-8 and saved gentiles in v.9) is implied by the

qualities and blessings ascribed to the 144,000 elsewhere (14:1-5, they are the redeemed and follow the Lamb), and also by the fact that the “multitude” from every nation inherit in verses 15-17 the promises made to *Israel*. What John sees is often interpreted by what he then hears and vice-versa (e.g. 5:5 and 5:6 describe the same person). Praise and worship fill the air as they are saved from judgment.

7:13-17 It is now made clear that these people are the ones who have been saved from the great tribulation (the terrible time of difficulty). In 1:9 and 2:10 Christians face tribulation in ‘the present’, rather than it being just some far off future event, though the word “great” might imply that they have been saved from the final judgement described in 6:15-17 (but see Jezebel’s “great tribulation” in 2:22). God steps in and saves his people from this troublesome time. The blood of Christ washes them (that is, their purity before God is due to the sacrificial death of Jesus in their place); they serve God as priests in his temple (see also 5:10), and are sheltered by God from heat and famine (see Isaiah 49:10) while Jesus leads them to pastures green and quiet waters (see Psalm 23) and God wipes every tear from their eyes (see Isaiah 25:8). In other words, those marked out by God will be saved from judgment day, and as the old creation vanishes they will inherit the new one and the promises of God’s presence which accompany it.

8:1-5 The seventh seal is opened after a long interlude since the 6th (all of chapter 7!). There is then silence (a dramatic pause) before we are introduced to seven trumpets (briefly – more next time) and the “prayers of the saints” which God hears, and which in 6:10 brought judgment day (6:12-17). God will answer his people’s prayers and no-one will be able to answer him back when he does.

Application

1. The main application is to thank God for the salvation he has promised at the last day for his faithful people who have “washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14) that is, appropriated for themselves the benefits of his substitutionary death so that they will not face God’s wrath on the day he comes.
2. When we see war, famine, and disease (6:8) alongside persecution of Christians (6:9-11) we know the last days are coming and that the next act in the drama is Judgment Day, but we don’t know how long it will be in coming (6:10). Rest assured, however, that God knows the exact numbers involved (6:11) and hears his people’s prayers (8:3-4). *It is coming...*

Revelation 8:6 – 11:19 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

The purpose of these chapters is to reveal God's current judgment on the unrepentant in the context of the church's continuing witness and the certainty of God's ultimate victory. There is an intensification of God's judgment portrayed in this cycle of visions, as the proportion of the earth affected increases from a quarter (6:8) to a third (8:7, 9, 11, 12). Again, there is a movement from general description of the here and now to describing the last day (as with the seven seals) but not following a chronological order that we can trace from the first to twenty-first centuries in an exact way.

Details

8:6-12 The seven trumpets from 8:2 are now blown, in response to the prayers of the saints in 8:3-4 (see 6:9-11). They introduce calamities affecting the earth, sea, and trees (as in 7:3) as well as the waters and the sky, all reminiscent of the plagues of Egypt in Exodus 7-11 (hail, blood, death, darkness). Just as the human world was affected by the horsemen in 6:1-8, so the natural world experiences disaster too (Rom 8:18-25; 2 Peter 3:10-12). The 7 trumpets are split into two groups of 4 and 3, just as the 7 seals were.

8:13-9:12 The eagle introduces great woes ("woe" is repeated three times for added effect, as in "holy holy holy" in 4:8, but also because there are three trumpets left). These are limited, and discriminate between believers and unbelievers (e.g. 9:4) as did some of the Egyptian plagues (e.g. Exodus 9:1-7). The first "woe" is the fifth trumpet which unleashes a plague of demonically-stirred mutant locusts whose sting makes people despair and long for the seeming relief of death. This plague is limited in duration, to five months. Poythress says it "depicts the self-defeating and tormenting nature of wickedness in the human soul" as opposed to the success expected by unbelievers.

9:13-21 Four restrained angels are released to rampage, right on time, using 200 million cavalry troops. Every aggressive military empire has, while worshipping power and domination, eventually suffered catastrophic defeat and humiliation - a foretaste of what is to come for the wicked (a final battle is narrated in chapters 16, 19, and 20). These things should inspire unbelievers to repent of not worshipping God, which 9:20 reveals is actually to worship demons, who stand behind idols of every kind encouraging murders, sorceries (the word refers to "black magic", and especially when linked to murder can refer to voodoo-like death rituals, poisons, or potions used to provoke abortions), sexual immorality and thefts. The order of these sins, and the perhaps slightly odd inclusion of theft, may be due to the Ten Commandments: do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal (see a similar underlying pattern in 1 Timothy 1:9-10).

10:1-11 Just as chapter 7 was an interlude between the 6th and 7th seal, so chapters 10-11 are an interlude between the 6th and 7th trumpet. Attention is therefore drawn to this section. Both interludes concern God's people in the midst of the judgments described: their salvation from every nation (7) and now their witness to every nation (10-11). In 10:1-11 John receives messages concerning God's plan to be fulfilled in line with the word of the prophets (10:7) and is commissioned to proclaim (some of) them. Just as the prophet Ezekiel found (see Ezekiel 2-3), God's word can be sweet and bitter: the message of judgment on God's enemies is good for the saints (see 6:10) but also unpleasant to take to heart. The message concerns (verse 11) many nations – a universal context as in Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 (22:2).

11:1-14 Much about this chapter is controversial and disputed by different interpreters. But... the two witnesses (a picture of the church, see the lampstand image in 1:20, rather than two literal humans) are a combination of Moses and Elijah in their role as representatives of God (as John himself is in chapter 10) and preachers of the gospel. They (God's temple and city) are under attack as families (like Lot in Sodom), in larger groups (like Israel in Egypt), and individually (like Christ in Jerusalem), because people don't like their message (verse 10). But it is for a limited period between the ascension and the second coming (not a 'complete' period of 7 days or 84 months or 2520 days) and ends in vindication. In the midst of God's judgment on the world, God's people speak his word confidently despite opposition.

11:15-19 The seventh trumpet ushers in the proclamation of God's everlasting kingdom, which leads to worship from the crowned elders (see 4:4). The nations may rage against the Lord and his anointed one (as in Psalm 2) but God will win on the last day, a day of rewards and punishments, when the temple of God in heaven itself will be opened up to us, even the holy of holies itself (where the ark is).

Application

1. A powerful application of the plague-like trumpet judgments is to the spiritual sufferings of unbelievers at the hands of the demons they (probably unwittingly) worship. This revelation of what is truly going on in the souls of such people (or at least, in a proportion of them and for some - perhaps limited - periods of time) is a sobering reminder of the seriousness of God's judgment and urgency of repentance. The concepts of idol worship (not worshipping God, but focusing on something else in life) being demonically inspired (9:20), and that the plagues here describe spiritual sufferings experienced even in the here and now, will need to be carefully established. It may not look like this to us – but that's why this is a "revelation"!
2. The main application of chapters 10-11 according to Poythress is "In your own life, see the deadly conflict and persevere unflinchingly in witness and loyalty to Christ. In the lives of earthlings, see beneath the veneer of pleasantries the deadly opposition that only divine saving power can cure. Witness is a weighty factor in spiritual war." God rules, Jesus wins, so persevere in faithful witness.
3. The seventh trumpet is a powerful reminder of the awesome Day of Judgment and reward to come for everyone. The nations may rage (11:18) but the world *will* be ruled by the Lord and his anointed. Whose side will we be on then...?
4. According to some Revelation 8:11 refers to the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster, as Chernobyl is the Ukrainian word for Wormwood; stars are powered by nuclear explosions; several witnesses saw a star above the plant following the explosion; and the ground water within the 30km exclusion zone is radioactively contaminated and will continue to be so for several millennia (see www.wikipedia.org). This is extremely controversial, and most probably a load of old wormwood...
5. You may be interested to know that a man born on Bishopsgate in 1609 called Lodowicke Muggleton proclaimed himself and his cousin, John Reeve, to be the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3 when he started having strange revelations in 1651. Although convicted of blasphemy in 1677, he had something of a following. Sadly, the last "Muggletonian" died in 1979.

Revelation 12-14 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

The purpose of these chapters is to make us aware of the war in heaven behind our struggles on earth to be faithful Christians, and the final outcome. Aware of the bigger perspective and God's victory, we can better endure suffering now.

Details

12:1-6 Having had seven seals and seven trumpets, we focus on the war in heaven before we get the seven plagues (Rev 15-16). The two sides in the war are symbolised by the woman and the dragon. The woman is accompanied by symbols of the sun, moon, and stars – a picture used in Genesis 37:9-10 for God's people. From them comes the Messiah, pictured in verse 5 using Psalm 2 (see Rev 2:27). The dragon tries to kill him but fails; instead he ascends into heaven and sits on God's throne. Some see the woman as Mary, Jesus' mother and the dragon as Herod who tried to kill baby Jesus. The symbolic language of the passage indicates that the reference is broader, while Mary and Herod do, of course, epitomise the opposing forces (she as one of God's people, and he as an agent of the devil). Besides, verse 9 identifies the dragon as Satan. So we have here the ancient conflict of a serpent with a woman and her seed (see Genesis 3:14-15). Verse 6 shows that after Messiah's ascension, the church will be looked after by God during the war (as in v.14) which won't last forever.

12:7-17 The war is seen from a heavenly angle: Michael, a leader of angels (see Daniel 10:13, 21) fights against the devil and his angels, throwing them down. This leads to celebration, the victory being ascribed to "the blood of the lamb" and the word of testimony about him (i.e. the victory of the cross, and gospel-inspired perseverance). The devil knows his time is short after this (verse 12), but before his final end (see 20:10) he persecutes God's people, all who keep the commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus (verse 17).

13:1-10 The beast vision is yet another way of looking at the war between the devil and God's people. In verse 2, he resembles the earthly kingdoms of Daniel's visions (see Daniel 7:1-8 and the four empires of Daniel 2). He is a picture of human powers organised against God, Satan-inspired state tyranny (v.4) exercising authority over people but hating God and his people, even being allowed to conquer them (v.7). Everyone follows and worships this power, except those who have been chosen by God (a choice not based on their merits, since it occurs before the world is made). Some of the saints may die (v.10, alluding to Jeremiah 15:2 in a similar situation of oppression). Yet in the midst of this, we are called to faithful endurance (see also 14:12). God rules, Jesus will win; but the devil still fights, so keep going!

13:11-18 The second beast is also a tool of Satan (he speaks like the dragon and points people to the first beast – an unholy trinity!). He is able to perform miracles, and deceives people into making religious images for the beast. He is, therefore, Satan-inspired false worship, idolatry, which lives in peace with the persecuting power of the state and does the will of the devil. Verses 16-17 indicate that this false worship will also be associated with trading: to buy and sell successfully – make money, do well at work – it will be necessary to compromise with this beast and join in with its false worship. This clearly has echoes of the first century situation where many commercial activities (even the meat market, see 1 Corinthians 8-10) were deeply immersed in idolatry, which could sometimes prove difficult for Christians, who resisted taking part in pagan rituals.

The second beast is able to enforce business practices which involve identification with the beast – no one can buy or sell unless marked by him (see the contrast in 7:3 and 9:4 of those who are marked by God for their safety). They are given a number, which is both the name of the beast and the number of his name, as well as being the number of a man (verses 17-18). There are literally hundreds of suggestions as to what 666 means! Don't get *too* sidetracked into long debates about this... One option is that whereas 7 is a divine number (e.g. the seven spirits of God in 1:4, 4:5, 5:6), 6 might be a good number for mankind (created on the sixth day, less than God); so 666 is a very human number, a superlative human, but definitely not God. It is likely then to refer to a human figurehead who rules over the kind of society described in this chapter, where state-tyranny and idolatrous worship and

circumscribed economic activity are the norm. Such figureheads have often arisen (Caesars, Emperors, Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, etc) and will do again. In the “idealist” way of interpreting Revelation which generally we have been following, this points us to the *pattern* of human existence before the last day. There may well be a final perfect embodiment of the beast when the final curtain comes, but we should expect several shadowy imitations in the meantime.

14:1-5 This is a vision of God’s people, marked not with the beast’s name but the name of God and Christ. It is an exclusive society surrounded by glory and noisy joy, populated by God’s redeemed people, saved from the societies pictured in chapter 13, enjoying the victory of God in the spiritual war. They are pure and blameless – symbolic language, not literal (non-virgins who have told a lie will be in heaven!) – their perfection comes from having followed the Lamb. What an encouragement that they will make it, by following him.

14:6-20 Three angels bring messages. The first proclaims the eternal gospel to everyone on earth (every tribe etc, see 5:9, 7:9, and especially 13:7). This gospel is outlined in verse 7, and commands us to fear our creator God, glorify him, and worship him in the light of the coming judgment day. The second angel declares the fall of God’s enemies, symbolised by the city of Babylon (see Isaiah 21:9 and Revelation 18). Babylon is characterised by immorality whereas the Lamb’s people are characterised by purity in verses 4-5. The third angel announces judgment on all who follow the beast or compromise with his system of worship and government by receiving his mark. The picture of judgment here is stark and graphic. The call, again, is to endure, keeping the faith and following God’s commandments (verse 12; see 13:10). If we do that, we shall be blessed and have rest, says verse 13, whatever our situation may have been in this life. The 4th and 5th angels in verses 14-20 accompany a vision of Jesus coming to judge the world, like a farmer at harvest time (see Joel 3:13).

Application

1. The main application of chapter 12 is to encourage us that the war in heaven has been won, through Christ’s death, and so even if we are pursued by the devil now (persecution, suffering, hardship) the battle is decided and the devil cannot ultimately win. He and his minions may trouble us now in various ways, but these are only their death throes – their doom is nigh!
2. The beasts in chapter 13 warn us that the political, religious, and commercial worlds will be battlegrounds in the spiritual war we read about in chapter 12. The state bears the sword (Romans 13) and may even be able to kill Christians. The devil may be capable of enforcing economic sanctions against Christians (unless they compromise) or make life very difficult for those who do not join in his idolatrous worship. The call is to endure and be faithful to Jesus, even if it means death, poverty and alienation from society. Are there ways in which we are tempted to compromise our faith in order to fit in and get on in the political, social, religious, or commercial worlds in which we live and work? Revelation shows us the devil behind this.
3. The vision of chapter 14 warns us that there are two final destinations: singing around God’s throne on Mount Zion, or trodden down in the wine press of God’s wrath. In the centre (v.12) is a call for endurance and encouragement (v.13).