

A watercolor-style illustration of the Earth, showing continents in shades of green, yellow, and brown, and oceans in various shades of blue. The style is soft and artistic, with visible brushstrokes and color blending.

On Earth as it is in Heaven

REVELATION

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION
Chapters 13-22

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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. Structure or shape of the passage.

Outline the structure of the text in a way that represents the author's organization of the text. (for example: Look for the natural breaks or sections in the author's thinking.)

Provide an outline that clearly indicates verse breaks for each unit and provide headings for each. To help find the structure: Ask yourself is there a scene change, or is dialogue/song introduced? Also make observations that consider repetition, key terms, sequence, sudden grammatical/topical changes, tone, book ends. **Ask yourself what emphasis the structure reveals.**

5. 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?

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

- How does the text recall or draw out the implications of 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 biblical 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 breakdowns 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 12 – Revelation 13:1-18

Chapter 12 ended with the dragon (Satan) heading off to make war on the rest of the woman's offspring, 'on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus', the followers of the Lamb. These next two chapters give more insight into Satan's indirect attacks on God's people.

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.

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

13:1 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads.

2 And the beast that I saw was like a leopard;

its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth.

And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

3 One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.

4 And they worshiped the dragon,

for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying,

“Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?”

5 And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months.

6 It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

7 Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them.

And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation,

8 and all who dwell on earth will worship it,

everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

10 If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes;

if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

11 Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth.

It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.

12 It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.

13 It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people,

14 and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth,

telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

15 And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast,

so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

16 Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead,

17 so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark,

that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.

18 This calls for wisdom:

let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

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 1 John 2:18-25 for additional NT understanding.

Read Dan. 7:2-28. Daniel's vision included four beasts rising from the sea. John describes a beast in Rev. that seems to be a composite of these four. How does that help our understanding of this passage?

4. Structure or shape of the passage.

Outline the structure of the text in a way that represents the author's organization of the text. (for example: Look for the natural breaks or sections in the author's thinking). Indicate verse breaks for each unit and provide headings. ***Ask yourself what emphasis the structure reveals.***

5. What are several things that characterize the beasts in this passage? What does this teach us about how Satan makes war against God's people.

6. INWARDLY DIGEST

What does the passage call us to as followers of Christ? What is the very real challenge in doing that and how have you seen the results in your personal circumstances?

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 13 – Revelation 14:1 – 15:4

John takes us from the assault on followers of Christ on earth in chapter 13, to beholding the Lamb in heaven and with him, in joyous worship, the complete number of his redeemed.

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.*

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

14:1 Then I looked, and behold,
on Mount Zion stood the Lamb,
and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

2 And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters
and like the sound of loud thunder.

The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps,

3 and they were singing a new song before the throne
and before the four living creatures and before the elders.

No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

4 It is these who have not defiled themselves with women,
for they are virgins.

It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

These have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb,

5 and in their mouth no lie was found,
for they are blameless.

6 Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead,
with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth,
to every nation and tribe and language and people.

7 And he said with a loud voice,

“Fear God and give him glory,
because the hour of his judgment has come,
and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

8 Another angel, a second, followed, saying,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great,
she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.”

9 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice,

“If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead
or on his hand,

10 he also will drink the wine of God's wrath,
poured full strength into the cup of his anger,

and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels
and in the presence of the Lamb.

11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever,

and they have no rest, day or night,

these worshipers of the beast and its image,

and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints,

those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying,

“Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”

“Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors,
for their deeds follow them!”

14 Then I looked, and behold,
a white cloud,
and seated on the cloud one like a son of man,
with a golden crown on his head,
and a sharp sickle in his hand.

15 And another angel came out of the temple,
calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud,
“Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come,
for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.”

16 So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

17 Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle.

18 And another angel came out from the altar,
the angel who has authority over the fire,
and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle,
“Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.”

19 So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth
and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

20 And the winepress was trodden outside the city,
and blood flowed from the winepress,
as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.

15:1 Then I saw another sign in heaven,
great and amazing,
seven angels with seven plagues,
which are the last,
for with them the wrath of God is finished.

2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—
and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name,
standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.

3 And they sing the song of Moses,
the servant of God,
and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!

4 Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

3. LEARN - Context: How does this passage connect to what has been said in the preceding passage? Notice the ‘bookends’ (11:15-19 and 15:1-4) that enclose these three chapters (12-14) on the enemies of God. How does this wider book context help inform your understanding?

Wider context: For some further understanding of v. 8 read Isaiah 21:9-10 and Rev 18:1-3. Also read Daniel 7:13-14 and Matt. 26:64 concerning v. 14.

4. Structure or shape of the passage.

Outline the structure of the text in a way that represents the author’s organization of the text. (for example: Look for the natural breaks or sections in the author’s thinking). Indicate verse breaks for each unit and provide headings. *Ask yourself what emphasis the structure reveals.*

5. This passage provides a rich description of the people of God. What do we learn about their identity, character and purpose?

6. What messages do the five angels announce in 14:6-20? Why do you think the statements of vv. 12-13 are in the midst of the announcements?

7. INWARDLY DIGEST

What do you think the purpose is of this section (chapters 12-14) as a whole? What is at the heart of it?

8. Vancouver might be considered by many, a ‘modern day Babylon’, with no end of things to compromise our faith and draw us away from following the Lord to false worship. What has the Holy Spirit revealed to you specifically in regard to this in your own walk with Christ?

9. PRAY

Pray together about some of the things the Lord has revealed to you through this study. Use the song in 15:3-4 to give thanks to the Lord God the Almighty.

Study 14 – Revelation 15:5 – 16:21

Here, the seven angels with the seven plagues in seven bowls mark the third cycle of judgment. The three series of judgments are closely related. The bowls are within the seventh trumpet, and the trumpets in the seventh seal, all ending at the same time and with the same earthquake, but with increasing severity.

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 repetitions and imagery of 15:5-8. Think through why it is placed here.**

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

15:5 After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened,
6 and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues,
clothed in pure, bright linen,
with golden sashes around their chests.
7 And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls
full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever,
8 and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power,
and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

16:1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels,
“Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”
2 So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth,
and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast
and worshiped its image.
3 The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea,
and it became like the blood of a corpse,
and every living thing died that was in the sea.
4 The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water,
and they became blood.
5 And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say,
“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,
for you brought these judgments.
6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink.
It is what they deserve!”
7 And I heard the altar saying,
“Yes, Lord God the Almighty,
true and just are your judgments!”
8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun,
and it was allowed to scorch people with fire.
9 They were scorched by the fierce heat,
and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues.
They did not repent and give him glory.

10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast,
and its kingdom was plunged into darkness.
People gnawed their tongues in anguish
11 and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores.
They did not repent of their deeds.
12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates,
and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east.
13 And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast
and out of the mouth of the false prophet,
three unclean spirits like frogs.
14 For they are demonic spirits, performing signs,
who go abroad to the kings of the whole world,
to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.
15 (“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake,
keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”)
16 And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.
17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air,
and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying,
“It is done!”
18 And there were flashes of lightning,
rumblings, peals of thunder,
and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth,
so great was that earthquake.
19 The great city was split into three parts,
and the cities of the nations fell,
and God remembered Babylon the great,
to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.
20 And every island fled away,
and no mountains were to be found.
21 And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each,
fell from heaven on people;
and they cursed God for the plague of the hail,
because the plague was so severe.

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 Exodus 40:34-35.

4. Structure or shape of the passage.

Outline the structure of the text in a way that represents the author's organization of the text. (for example: Look for the natural breaks or sections in the author's thinking). Indicate verse breaks for each unit and provide headings. *Ask yourself what emphasis the structure reveals.*

5. These plagues are reminiscent of the plagues in Exodus 7-10, but with greater severity and scope. Recall the function the plagues performed in Exodus to help think through their purpose here in Revelation. What is their dual purpose?

6. INWARDLY DIGEST

This section of the plagues is deeply sobering and challenging to read. How do vv. 5-7 help inform our understanding?

7. In v. 15, John quotes Jesus' words in Luke 12:35-40. From all we have learned in Revelation about what Christ has secured and promises and warns, how are you helped to 'stay awake, be clothed and unexposed'?

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 15 – Revelation 17:1 – 18

In this chapter we are given another view of the beast first introduced in chapter 13, with seven heads, ten horns and blasphemous names. This time a woman, named as ‘the great prostitute’, rides upon his back. We are told in v. 18 that she symbolizes a great city. First century Christians often referred to Rome as Babylon (1 Peter 5:13), as a way of depicting Rome in the same light as that of this great enemy of Israel in the past.

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 repetitions and think about how they help inform your understanding.** After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

17:1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me,
“Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters,
2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality,
and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.”
3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness,
and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names,
and it had seven heads and ten horns.
4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet,
and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls,
holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations
and the impurities of her sexual immorality.
5 And on her forehead was written a name of mystery:
“Babylon the great,
mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.”
6 And I saw the woman,
drunk with the blood of the saints,
the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.
When I saw her, I marveled greatly.
7 But the angel said to me,
“Why do you marvel?
I will tell you the mystery of the woman,
and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her.
8 The beast that you saw was, and is not,
and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction.
And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life
from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast,
because it was and is not and is to come.
9 This calls for a mind with wisdom:
the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated;
10 they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen,
one is, the other has not yet come,
and when he does come he must remain only a little while.
11 As for the beast that was and is not,
it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven,
and it goes to destruction.

12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.

13 These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast.

14 They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

15 And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.

16 And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute.

They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire,

17 for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

18 And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

3. LEARN - Context: How does this passage connect to what has been said in the preceding passage? How does Chapter 18 help inform your understanding of ‘Babylon the great’?

Wider context: Re-read Isaiah 21:9-10 for God’s perspective of Babylon. Read also 1 John 2:15-17.

4. Structure or shape of the passage.

Outline the structure of the text in a way that represents the author’s organization of the text. (for example: Look for the natural breaks or sections in the author’s thinking). Indicate verse breaks for each unit and provide headings. *Ask yourself what emphasis the structure reveals.*

5. Helpfully we are told in this passage what several of the main characters and their features are actually meant to symbolize. Note them.

6. As we've seen repeatedly in Revelation, in the midst of distressing pictures of destruction we get a statement of great hope. Where is this seen in this passage?

7. INWARDLY DIGEST

The angel asks John, "Why do you marvel?" (v. 6-7) What do you think is behind John's astonishment?

8. Why are we so easily impressed by and marvel at the world and all its glitter? How does the angel's response to John draw us to the true worship of Christ?

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 16 – Revelation 18:1 – 19:10

The narration of Babylon the great’s destruction in chapter 17 is followed here in chapter 18 by a song that expands on the same subject, freeing God’s people to worship in chapter 19.

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

18:1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven,
having great authority,
and the earth was made bright with his glory.

2 And he called out with a mighty voice,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!
She has become a dwelling place for demons,
a haunt for every unclean spirit,
a haunt for every unclean bird,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

3 For all nations have drunk
the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality,
and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

“Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;

5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.

6 Pay her back as she herself has paid back others,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.

7 As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,

‘I sit as a queen,
I am no widow,
and mourning I shall never see.’

8 For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,
death and mourning and famine,
and she will be burned up with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”

9 And the kings of the earth,
who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her,
will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning.

10 They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

“Alas! Alas! You great city,
you mighty city, Babylon!
For in a single hour your judgment has come.”

11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her,
since no one buys their cargo anymore,
12 cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth,
all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory,
all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble,
13 cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat,
cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

14 “The fruit for which your soul longed
has gone from you,
and all your delicacies and your splendors
are lost to you,
never to be found again!”

15 The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her,
will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

16 “Alas, alas, for the great city
that was clothed in fine linen,
in purple and scarlet,
adorned with gold,
with jewels, and with pearls!

17 For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.”

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off

18 and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

“What city was like the great city?”

19 And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out,

“Alas, alas, for the great city
where all who had ships at sea
grew rich by her wealth!

For in a single hour she has been laid waste.

20 Rejoice over her, O heaven,
and you saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has given judgment for you against her!”

21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

“So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence,
and will be found no more;

22 and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,
will be heard in you no more,

and a craftsman of any craft
will be found in you no more,

and the sound of the mill
will be heard in you no more,

23 and the light of a lamp
will shine in you no more,
and the voice of bridegroom and bride
will be heard in you no more,

for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.

24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on earth.”

19:1 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

“Hallelujah!
Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
2 for his judgments are true and just;
for he has judged the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth with her immorality,
and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

3 Once more they cried out,
“Hallelujah!
The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”

4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying,
“Amen. Hallelujah!”

5 And from the throne came a voice saying,
“Praise our God,
all you his servants,
you who fear him,
small and great.”

6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude,
like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.
7 Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
8 it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure” —

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

9 And the angel said to me,
“Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”
And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

10 Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me,
“You must not do that!

I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus.
Worship God.”

For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

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

Book context: Notice the message of the voices from heaven that surround chapters 17-18, (Re-read 16:5-7 and 19:1-3). How does this help inform our understanding?

Wider context: The destruction of Babylon in 539BC was foretold by several OT prophets. Many of her features (pride, arrogance and luxury) are mirrored here in chapter 18. Also, the prophecy against Tyre, the great port and commercial center (Ezek. 27-28) has many resemblances seen in this chapter.

4. Structure or shape of the passage.

Outline the structure of the text in a way that represents the author's organization of the text. (for example: Look for the natural breaks or sections in the author's thinking). Indicate verse breaks for each unit and provide headings. **What does each section symbolize?**

5. Notice the repetition of 'mourning'. Who is doing it and why? (18:7-20)

6. INWARDLY DIGEST

How is the response in heaven contrasted to the response on earth?

Why do you think there is a command to 'Rejoice' in 18:20, and why so many 'Hallelujah's in 19:1-10? How do these two responses expose, challenge and encourage you?

7. Revelation warns against the seductiveness of power and prosperity. Do you think it is possible to live in the affluent west and not compromise your faith through economic exploitation and self-indulgence? If so, how do you intentionally do that?

8. PRAY

Spend time with your group, giving praise and glory to our God whose judgments are true and just. Spend time praying together for help in holding to the testimony of Jesus.

Study 17 – Revelation 19:11 – 20:15

This final judgment scene in Revelation brings the eternal defeat of Satan and his two beasts, first introduced to us in Chapter 13. The triumphant Christ deals with sin for all eternity, making way for the coming of God’s kingdom on earth.

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 several descriptions of the rider in 19:11-16 that identify him as Jesus. Think through how these images support main themes that have been developing so far.** After you have made all your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

19:11 Then I saw heaven opened,
and behold, a white horse!

The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True,
and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

12 His eyes are like a flame of fire,
and on his head are many diadems,
and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.

13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood,
and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

14 And the armies of heaven,
arrayed in fine linen, white and pure,
were following him on white horses.

15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations,
and he will rule them with a rod of iron.

He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written,
King of kings and Lord of lords.

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun,
and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead,
“Come, gather for the great supper of God,

18 to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men,
the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men,
both free and slave, both small and great.”

19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered
to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.

20 And the beast was captured,
and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who
had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image.

These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.

21 And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who
was sitting on the horse,
and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

20:1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven,
holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.

2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent,
who is the devil and Satan,
and bound him for a thousand years,

3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him,
so that he might not deceive the nations any longer,
until the thousand years were ended.

After that he must be released for a little while.

4 Then I saw thrones,

and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed.

Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus
and for the word of God,

and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their
foreheads or their hands.

They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.

This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!

Over such the second death has no power,

but they will be priests of God and of Christ,

and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

7 And when the thousand years are ended,

Satan will be released from his prison

8 and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth,

Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.

9 And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints
and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,

10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur

where the beast and the false prophet were,

and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it.

From his presence earth and sky fled away,

and no place was found for them.

12 And I saw the dead, great and small,

standing before the throne,

and books were opened.

Then another book was opened,

which is the book of life.

And the dead were judged by what was written in the books,

according to what they had done.

13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it,

Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them,

and they were judged, each one of them,

according to what they had done.

14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

This is the second death, the lake of fire.

15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life,

he was thrown into the lake of fire.

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 Ezek. 39:17-21 to shed some understanding on the meal described in 19:17-18. The 'first resurrection' of 20:6 is the same basic gospel truth taught in the NT: see John 5:24, Rom. 8:9-11, Eph. 2:5-6, Col. 2:12-13.

4. Structure or shape of the passage.

Outline the structure of the text in a way that represents the author's organization of the text. (for example: Look for the natural breaks or sections in the author's thinking). Indicate verse breaks for each unit and provide headings. *Ask yourself what emphasis the structure reveals.*

5. Think through Jesus' authority and power over Satan that we see demonstrated repeatedly in the gospels. After reading 20:1-3, compare it with Mark 3:22-27. When was Satan bound?

6. Compare the references to the 'second death' in 20:6, 14; 21:8; 2:11. What is it?

7. INWARDLY DIGEST

The intensity of the judgment scenes in Revelation have made them hard to read, but has forced us to grapple with the reality of the vastness of the problem of sin.

Ask the Lord, by his Spirit, to reveal areas of darkness in your own life that need to be brought into the light.

8. PRAY

Spend time with your group in prayer and thanksgiving that your eternal future is secure in the risen and reigning Lord Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords. Bring before the Lord those you know who don't presently have their names written in the Lamb's book of life.

Study 18 – Revelation 21:1-8

At last! Looking forward to eternity in a renewed creation, with God ‘making all things new’. This is ‘trustworthy and true’!

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 descriptions in this passage and how they relate to what we’ve seen already in Revelation. Who is at the center of it all? Notice verbs tenses also.** After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,
and the sea was no more.

2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem,
coming down out of heaven from God,
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.
He will dwell with them,
and they will be his people,
and God himself will be with them as their God.

4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes,
and death shall be no more,
neither shall there be mourning, nor crying,
nor pain anymore,
for the former things have passed away.”

5 And he who was seated on the throne said,
“Behold, I am making all things new.”

Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

6 And he said to me,
“It is done!

I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the beginning and the end.

To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.

7 The one who conquers will have this heritage,
and I will be his God and he will be my son.

8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable,
as for murderers, the sexually immoral,
sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars,
their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur,
which is the second death.”

3. LEARN - Context: How does this passage connect to what is looked forward to in 19:6-8? How does it connect to the passage that follows it?

Wider context: Read Isaiah 65:17-25, Exodus 29:43-46 and John 1:14 for a deeper understanding of this renewed creation being at the heart of God from the start.

4. Structure or shape of the passage.

Outline the structure of the text in a way that represents the author's organization of the text. (for example: Look for the natural breaks or sections in the author's thinking). Indicate verse breaks for each unit and provide headings. *Ask yourself what emphasis the structure reveals.*

5. From vv. 1-4 list all that is gained in this renewed creation.

6. Recall the original creation in Genesis 1-2 and all that was lost as a result of the Fall in Genesis 3. How does what was lost then compare to what is restored in this passage?

7. INWARDLY DIGEST

Although the future is secure in Christ, the repeated warning of Revelation is that ‘the one who conquers will have this heritage’ v 7. Recall all that we have learned to this point about what it means to conquer. How has the Holy Spirit been compelling you to respond to these truths in your own life?

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 19 – Revelation 21:9 – 22:5

This passage gives us a fuller, more detailed look at what was revealed in 21:1-8.

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.*

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

21:9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying,

“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

11 having the glory of God,

its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

12 It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates,

and at the gates twelve angels,

and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—

13 on the east three gates,

on the north three gates,

on the south three gates,

and on the west three gates.

14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations,

and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls.

16 The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width.

And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia.

Its length and width and height are equal.

17 He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.

18 The wall was built of jasper,

while the city was pure gold, like clear glass.

19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel.

The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald,

20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

22 And I saw no temple in the city,

for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it,

for the glory of God gives it light,

and its lamp is the Lamb.

24 By its light will the nations walk,

and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,

25 and its gates will never be shut by day—

and there will be no night there.

26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

27 But nothing unclean will ever enter it,

nor anyone who does what is detestable or false,

but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal,
flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb
2 through the middle of the street of the city;
also, on either side of the river,
the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit,
yielding its fruit each month.
The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.
3 No longer will there be anything accursed,
but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it,
and his servants will worship him.
4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.
5 And night will be no more.
They will need no light of lamp or sun,
for the Lord God will be their light,
and they will reign forever and ever.

5. Rev. 22:1-5 is sometimes referred to as a description of a new Garden of Eden. Do you think this is accurate? Why or why not?

6. INWARDLY DIGEST

Recall the promises made to those who conquer, in the seven churches that John originally wrote to (2:1-3:21). How would this passage be an encouragement to them specifically and in turn to us?

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 20 – Revelation 22:6-21

This final passage echoes many of the opening statements of Revelation, assuring the reader that this indeed is God’s true word of what ‘must soon take place’, and calling us to eagerly proclaim with all the saints ‘Come, Lord Jesus!’

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.*

**** Re-read 1:1-3. Notice the several similarities in this passage and think through why John repeats these specific points and how they reflect the main themes of the book.** After you have made your observations, think through how these observations impact what John is saying. Share what you have found with your group.

22:6 And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true.

And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets,
has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”

7 “And behold, I am coming soon.

Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things.

And when I heard and saw them,

I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me,

9 but he said to me, “You must not do that!

I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets,

and with those who keep the words of this book.

Worship God.”

10 And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book,
for the time is near.

11 Let the evildoer still do evil,

and the filthy still be filthy,

and the righteous still do right,

and the holy still be holy.”

12 “Behold, I am coming soon,

bringing my recompense with me,

to repay each one for what he has done.

13 I am the Alpha and the Omega,

the first and the last,

the beginning and the end.”

14 Blessed are those who wash their robes,

so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

15 Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16 “I, Jesus,

have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches.

I am the root and the descendant of David,

the bright morning star.”

17 The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.”

And let the one who hears say, “Come.”

And let the one who is thirsty come;

let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book:
if anyone adds to them,
God will add to him the plagues described in this book,
19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy,
God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city,
which are described in this book.
20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon."
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!
21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

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

4. Structure or shape of the passage.

Outline the structure of the text in a way that represents the author's organization of the text. (for example: Look for the natural breaks or sections in the author's thinking). Indicate verse breaks for each unit and provide headings. *Ask yourself what emphasis the structure reveals.*

5. Why do you think John repeats the angel worship incident from 19:9-10 here?

6. How does the warning of verses 18-19 apply to us today?

7. INWARDLY DIGEST

There are seven Beatitude-type ‘Blessed is the one...’ statements in Revelation (1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 14). Summarize them together in your own words in a couple of sentences. Does this challenge you to adjust your priorities? How?

8. What has studying Revelation revealed to you about God’s purposes and plan? How has it impacted you most significantly?

9. PRAY

Spend time together in praise, thanksgiving and prayer.

REVELATION STUDY NOTES

By Lee Gatiss

St. Helen's Bishopsgate
Bible Study Resources

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).

Revelation 15 – 16 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

The purpose of these chapters is to bring to an end the cycles of judgment and encourage the saints to persevere until their prayers for justice are answered in plagues and a final battle as Christ returns.

The prayers of the saints in 6:9-11 went up to God at the start of chapter 8 and now receive their final definitive answer, as the wrath of God is finished (15:1 & 16:17). The cycles of judgment from chapter 6 onwards have intensified - from affecting a quarter of the earth (6:7) to a third (8:7, 9, 11, 12) to now being thoroughly devastating. Christ will return, and calls for perseverance from his people in 16:15.

Details

15:1-8 The “last” plagues are introduced, with which the wrath of God will be finished (see 16:17). The prayers of the saints in 6:9-11, brought before God in 8:2-5, will now be definitively answered. The first vision is of the saints themselves, gathered around God’s throne having conquered the beast (chapter 13), praising God for his mighty works which lead to nations worshipping him (echoes of chapters 4-5). The song of Moses is the song of redemption from Exodus 15 where God is praised as a warrior, fighting against his enemies on behalf of his people. The song of the Lamb must be a song of similar rejoicing over what God has done in judging his enemies and saving his oppressed people. Powerful angels are given the bowls of God’s wrath, the ensuing smoke prevents any entry to the sanctuary until all is finished (see Exodus 40:34-35 for a similar picture of God’s presence filling the tabernacle). Dramatic things are expected to follow...

16:1-7 The angels pour out the bowls of wrath on the earth, which affect all those who worship the beast and receive his mark (verse 2), as well as the sea and waters. As with the seven seals, *people* are affected by the judgments (6:1-8); as with the seven trumpets, *the earth* is also affected (8:6-12). The reason for the judgments (reminiscent again of the Exodus plagues) is then given: God is a just and holy judge, and will repay those who have persecuted his saints and prophets (referring back to that key text again in 6:9-11).

16:8-16 Rather than repenting (see 9:20-21) after the fourth bowl, which brings scorching heat, people curse God who is explicitly said to have control over these judgments. They do not repent or give him glory, as their hearts have been hardened against him and his people. The fifth bowl likewise brings judgment on those who have followed the beast, and they blame God, solidifying their impenitence. The sixth angel’s bowl allows for the entry of the opposition forces, gathering for the final battle “on the great day of God Almighty”: the battle of Armageddon. Aspects of this same conflict have already been described: the kings and all kinds of people gathered in 6:15; the army beyond the Euphrates is summoned in 9:14-19; the Beast wars against the saints in 11:7 and 13:1-10, the war in heaven is described in chapter 12 (see also 17:13-14; 19:11-21; and 20:7-10). The later passages describe the war with increasing detail and precision, but here is a final battle, based on the conflict with Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38-39. Throughout this age there are times of intense confrontation between God and Satan’s forces (cf. 2:10, 13), but the most intense of these will be at the Second Coming (19:11-21). See below for v. 15.

16:17-21 God pronounces that with the seventh bowl, his wrath is ended (see 15:1), and there is a massive earthquake (see Hebrews 12:25-29) which splits and destroys cities. Babylon is particularly singled out: first mentioned back in 14:8 as a doomed city, she made the nations drink the wine of her immorality; now *she* will drink the wine of God’s anger (a deserved fate). There will be more on the fall of this symbolic city (mentioned many times in Scripture) in the next study (esp. chapter 18). Mountains and islands flee (as in 6:14), as huge hailstones fall (as in Exodus 9:23-26). Again people curse God rather than repent in the face of his anger (see 9:20-21, 16:9, 11).

Application

1. The main application is to remember that God rules and Jesus wins, so keep going. More specifically, to remember that God *will* finally bring an end to his enemies who persecute his people – as they deserve (16:5-6). We should be both thankful and awestruck that his judgments will be so powerful, clear, and decisive.
2. The picture of believers in these chapters is reassuring. We are with Christ in heaven, praising his salvation for all nations (15:2-4). Some *will* conquer the trials pictured in the previous chapters and persevere until the end.
3. We are also pictured in 16:15 as waiting for the coming of Christ. A blessing is pronounced on those who are ready for that day. The garments they wear are no doubt the same as in 3:4 (the letter to Sardis, which also mentions Jesus coming as a thief), 3:18 (the letter to Laodicea where they are counselled to buy garments from Christ so as not to be naked) and 7:14 (where the clothes of the saints are washed in Jesus' atoning blood). We are to be ready, wearing righteousness (see 19:8, like the armour in Ephesians 6:10-20), when the great battle comes.
4. Unbelievers are pictured here as having hardened in their attitude to God even more than in previous chapters. From Abaddon in chapter 9 to Armageddon in chapter 16 they see God in action and experience a foretaste of his judgment against sin. Yet they refuse to repent. This is a sobering picture (akin to Romans 1:18-32) of life without God's saving grace, encouraging us to pray for all nations to hear and receive the eternal gospel (14:6). These chapters show us that one day it will be too late.
5. It is not necessarily that history will reveal an intensification of persecution and an intensification of God's response to persecution, stage-by-stage, throughout the many hundreds of years between the first and second coming of Christ. Chapters 6-16 are not a coded history of the past 2000 years revealing events in chronological order if only we can decipher them. Rather, they teach us that there will *always* be persecution (see 2 Tim 3:12), and God will always respond. But he also tells us to wait (as in Revelation 6:9-11) until the very end, for a final definitive response from God. That may mean we die in the meantime (13:10). But the end is still certain.

Revelation 17-19 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

The purpose of these chapters is to warn the saints against becoming entangled in the present world order in view of its impending destruction and the coming wedding feast. In the last few cycles of judgment we have heard about the destruction of the world and of unbelievers, especially persecutors. Now John's vision narrows in on the 'supernatural' forces of evil (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet) and assures us of their destruction too.

Details

17:1-14 The great prostitute is an alluring (v.4), powerful (influencing and entralling kings and many others, v.2), persecuting power (v.6) which exalts itself above God ("blasphemous names", v.3) and demands ultimate allegiance. John is taken aback and bewildered by this vision (not necessary attracted to it: "to marvel" can also mean "to be astonished" at something bad, as in Galatians 1:6). He is transfixed, and also a bit puzzled, so the angel seeks to explain what he is seeing (v. 7). The beast on whom the woman sits is from the abyss (see 9:1-2) and is headed for destruction (v. 8). In between this beginning and end, he will do a disappearing/reappearing trick which will shock and amaze non-Christians (see 13:3 for this same description of the beast). Verses 10-11 sound like a description of Rome and her emperors, and verses 11-14 imply that this beast is like the ruler of a world empire, who has many allies (minor kings in 12-13 - local governors or magistrates?). All of these, like the beast, derive their authority from the dragon – v.12 they "receive" authority (as in 13:2). Together, they go to war against Christ, but the Lamb wins, as king over every earthly king and master over every other master. His chosen people stand by him, faithful to the end, despite suffering at the hands of this fiendish persecution (v.6).

17:15-18 The prostitute rules over people from all over the world (like the beast in 13:7-8) and in fact is a symbol of the great capital city (v.18) of a world empire. From the thrust of the story in Acts, we know that this can certainly be an allusion to one major city: Rome, the centre of the ancient world at the time and the place where Caesar ruled. The history of the time (from outside the Bible) corroborates this of course, and Rome's power extended even as far as Israel. [To see the Roman state's power in the Bible itself, look up Matthew 22:17; Luke 2:1; John 11:48; 19:15. Acts 17:7 implies that Caesar claimed some kind of universal sovereignty which was not allowed to be challenged by Jesus.] The powers of evil, as expressed and epitomised by the Roman state, turn in on themselves however. The horns and the beast hate the prostitute (v.16-17) but all this "civil war" in the realm of evil is according to God's plan (v. 17).

18 The internal destruction of this evil city-state-empire is now described from a different angle. She is now described as Babylon, a name which goes back to the city built by those driven from God's garden (Babel, Genesis 11), and which became a long-standing enemy of God's people (see, e.g., Isaiah). Although this may well be, therefore, a prophecy of the fall of Rome it is - more importantly - a picture of the fall of "human civilisation organised against God." See previous references to Babylon in 14:8 and 16:9. Her desolation is now described in 18:1-3 and 18:21-24 as being a total emptying out of everything good. Her immorality, alliances, and luxury (sex and shopping, or sex and The City) are responsible: judgment comes "for" . . . v.3. The political powers in alliance with this city will weep and wail over her destruction – the "world against God" system she represents seemed as if it would go on forever (v.7), but was quickly brought low by God (v.9-10). The merchants who relied on her markets for their wealth also weep and wail – no more will they and their associates (shipmasters, v.17 – it is a port city) grow rich trading in luxuries at the expense of other people (v.11-20). God's people are to see this coming and do two things: leave Babylon well alone ("don't go there!", v.4-8) by not being drawn into her sins; and rejoice over her destruction (v. 20). God is on the side of his people and will obliterate all who stand opposed to him and them.

19:1-5 This song (the first of two "Hallelujahs" in chapter 19) picks up the theme of 18:20, praising God for his righteous judgment of Babylon. Note that this involves avenging his saints (yet another look back to 6:9-11), and those in God's throne room join in (19:4-5).

19:6-10 Hallelujah! God reigns, and is to be praised, especially now that the special day has come. Judgment Day becomes a wedding day as Christ and his people prepare to come together. This is a poetic vision of what Paul teaches in Ephesians 5:32 that Christ will be the husband of his people. It also picks up the theme of a great party, banquet, supper, feast for God's people when God's kingdom finally comes (v.9, see Matthew 8:11, 25:10; Luke 13:29, 14:15-24 etc). His people are dressed in righteous deeds (v.8) which are both theirs and also somehow "given" to them (see Ephesians 2:10 for that same thought). John is so stunned by this vision he starts to worship the angel who brings the message, but is told not to (see 22:8-9), and is rather encouraged to continue testifying to Jesus, along with others...

19:11-21 The groom then arrives on horseback with his entourage, and is described in phrases taken from all over Revelation and the Bible (see the cross references). In verses 17-21 the birds are called to their own feast – a feast of flesh as they battle against the beast and his allies who would like to spoil the wedding day (see Ezekiel 39:17-20). It's a walkover, as they capture the beast and false prophet (i.e. the second beast of Revelation 13:11-18) who are then thrown into the lake of fire (v.20, see also 20:10) never to trouble anyone again.

Application

1. The main application of chapter 17 is to encourage us that whatever a persecuting state and its officials might do against Christians, Jesus will ultimately win. The established political, social, and economic powers of this world might look glamorous and captivating, but when they overstep the mark and war against Christ to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has truly been given (Matthew 28:18) they are ultimately doomed.
2. Chapter 18 leads us to rejoice over the coming judgment of the evil, self-absorbed, luxury-obsessed, immoral world order, and also to make sure we steer well clear of such things in our own lives. It would be profitable to have a good discussion of the ways in which we are tempted to disobey verse 4 and actually to take part in the sins of the world, the flesh, and the devil since we live in one of the world's richest, most immoral, and powerful cities.
3. The application of chapter 19 is to rejoice in the marriage feast to come, being encouraged to keep going in a life of righteous deeds (v.8), worshipping God alone (v.10). Jesus will come again on that day, and evil will finally be destroyed. This is the same application as chapters 17 and 18 of course, looked at from another angle. These are the true words of God (19:9), the truth of which should outweigh our fears and reluctance in this world.

Revelation 20 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to assure Christians of the guaranteed victory of the gospel and their guaranteed future with Christ, despite the devil's current opposition. It is not John's purpose to tie us up in knots over the interpretation of the 1000 years! We must not get caught up in that such that we lose the encouragements here.

Details

1-3 An angel is given the key to the abyss (see 9:1-2) and a great chain. He seizes the dragon (who is again identified as Satan, the ancient serpent, as in 12:9) and binds him for a thousand years, throwing him into the pit so he cannot deceive the nations during that time. He will, however, get another chance to do so for a short period, and to gather the nations for a final battle, before his final end (20:7-10). Satan tried to bind and disable people (e.g. Luke 13:16) but Jesus binds him in Mark 3:22-27, so that he cannot get in the way of Jesus' work. This is specifically said here in Revelation to be a binding *so that* he cannot deceive the nations any more. This obviously does not mean he is completely inactive (e.g. in Mark 4:15 he can still take away the gospel from some people; in 1 Peter 5:8 he prowls around looking to devour people). But it does mean that he cannot now prevent Jesus' word from conquering the nations (as in Matt 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8). As in chapter 12, he has lost the war and knows "his time is short", but he won't give up completely until he is thrown into the lake of fire.

As Article 20 of the Church of England says, we must not interpret one part of Scripture in such a way as to contradict another part. The Westminster Confession of Faith also says (1.9) "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture... it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly." It is important that we are careful to interpret the relatively difficult Revelation 20 in a way which is consonant with what we hear about the binding of Satan elsewhere in the New Testament. The cross-reference to Mark 3:22-27, where Satan is said to be bound by Jesus, is therefore very helpful and important. Elsewhere in the Bible also we see the forces of evil decisively defeated and restrained by Jesus, especially through his death (e.g. John 12:31 and Colossians 2:15), though their final extinction does not come until the very end.

4-6 In 2:26-27 and 3:21 we heard that those who conquer the temptations of this life will be given authority to judge and rule from thrones. Now John sees such thrones, and the souls of those who stood fast even unto death for the sake of the gospel (see 6:9-11) and those who resist the lure of the beast's mark (see 13:16-18). They come to life and do indeed reign with Christ, as kingly-priests (see Exodus 19:6), for the same time that Satan is bound. This first resurrection, a blessing for all who take part in it, is the bringing to life of people who will never die again or face condemnation (the second death of verse 6 being more than merely death in verse 14). The same basic spiritual truth is taught in John 5:24, Romans 8:10-11, *Ephesians* 2:5-6, and Colossians 2:12-13 – Christians can be said to have been raised with Christ, even before they are physically buried! This indicates that the reign of the saints, as well as the binding of Satan, refers to the period between the first and second comings of Christ, the church age, the period when people are born again/regenerated despite martyrdom, persecution, and temptation. It is likely then that the number 1000 is symbolic (like the other numbers in the book) – symbolic of a long but indeterminate period of time (or perhaps of ultimate, well-established victory). See below for further details on views of the Millennium.

7-10 Satan's post-millennium release means a final gathering of the deceived nations to fight against the people of God. The reference to Gog and Magog is a clear allusion to the battles described in Ezekiel 38-39 (already alluded to in the parallel 19:17-21, see Ezekiel 39:17-20). God wins a decisive but un-dramatically narrated victory – no blood and gore battle scenes here as in *Lord of the Rings*. The devil ends up alongside the beast and the false prophet (see 19:20). Everything which stands against God's people – persecution, heresy, and the temptation to compromise (symbolised by the beast, the false prophet, and Babylon) – is now removed and destroyed.

11-15 The final judgment now arrives, as the old earth passes away (see 6:14). Every one stands before God's throne, and the books (recording, presumably, their every thought, word, and deed) are opened, in order to be the basis of judgment. Another book is also consulted – the book of life (mentioned before in 13:8 and 17:8 as containing names written in there by God himself before the foundation of the earth). Verse 13 refers to the general resurrection as in verse 5, in which even unbelievers are raised from death in order to face judgment (see also Daniel 12:2). Anyone whose name was not found in this second book was thrown into the lake of fire along with the devil, the beast, and the false prophet. Note that 'salvation' depends on being in the book of life; but there is *also* a judgment of our works.

Application

Again, the applications are all variants of "God rules and Jesus wins so keep going."

1. The guarantee of the gospel's victory – Satan can deceive the nations as a whole no more. The gospel will go forth and grow, and all his efforts cannot prevent that. In the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4), though he is active to pluck away the word, the harvest is still plentiful.
2. The guarantee of the devil's defeat – he is under control now (bound and sealed in), will be utterly defeated (at the great last battle), and ends up in the lake of fire. He knows his time is short, and so should we – being aware of his transience should give us confidence in the fight against him.
3. The assurance of our future with Christ – we will reign with him and be a kingdom of priests, no matter what this world throws at us (hardship, or even martyrdom). Praise him for this – since it is down to his sovereign choice of us before the foundation of the world, and not any god in us.
4. If the 1000 years represents a long period of time, to speak of Christ's *imminent* return appears problematic. For us in 2007, a long period *has* gone by, so perhaps Jesus *may* return any moment now. In the year 90AD, however, it might have been hard to see how a long period represented by 1000 years could have elapsed, and there were indeed disagreements about the interpretation of this passage in the early church. It was always clear, however, from passages such as Matthew 25 (e.g. verses 5, 14, and 19) that Christians ought to anticipate *something* of a delay before Jesus came back. It is also clear that Jesus teaches us to be ready, for even he did not know when the end would come, and what matters is how we live while we wait for that day (see Matthew 24:36-51) because we will be judged according to our works (Revelation 20:12 and 13).

The Millennium

The Millennium is the 1000 years described in Revelation 20. There are various different interpretations of this passage, which have implications for one's whole understanding of eschatology. These are the broad streams of thought:

Pre-millennialists – or chiliasts (from the Greek *chilioi* meaning a thousand) believe that Christ will return *before* (pre-) the Millennium and then reign over an earthly kingdom for (perhaps literally) 1000 years before the end of the world, final judgement, new creation etc. Revelation 19:11-21 is therefore seen as the Second Coming, preceding the Millennium in chapter 20. There are variations on details, but this view was held by some early church scholars such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Irenaeus ("Historic Pre-Millennialism"), many Puritans, Wayne Grudem and John Piper, and in a modified and more developed form ("Dispensational Premillennialism") since the 19th Century by followers of J.N. Darby and the *Schofield Reference Bible* (such as many Pentecostal Christians, and Plymouth Brethren).

Premillennialists may also talk about the **Rapture** and the **Tribulation**. The Rapture in this school of thought is the sudden disappearance of all the Christians in the world, leaving non-Christians (and merely nominal Christians) baffled. This is based on a reading of Matthew

24:36-42 and requires a secretive second coming of Christ before the more “official” public one at the end of the world. [Preterists may also see the return of Christ as being more low key than ‘the end of the world’ (he returns, for instance, to destroy Jerusalem in AD 70).] Some of those left behind (see 1 Thess 4:17 for the idea of being “left behind”) later become Christians after pondering these strange events. There is great disagreement about the timing of it, but at some point in this systematic presentation of the end-times, a Great Tribulation (see Matthew 24:21) will occur lasting 3½ or 7 years. The rapture itself will occur either pre-, post-, or mid-tribulation. Eventually, Christ will return and the end will come. This sort of schema is the basis for the recently popular *Left Behind* novels, which also have a distinctly literal “dispensationalist” approach to Biblical interpretation (on which see Wikipedia.org).

Post-millennialists – believe Christ will return at the end of (post-) a Millennium, although the type of Millennium here is a little different from that expected by pre-millennialists. The post-millennialist’s optimistic expectation is that through the preaching of the gospel there will be a gradual “Christianising” of the world over a period of (perhaps literally) 1000 years before Christ returns, although there are wide disagreements over the nature of this. There is gospel success during the Millennium, because Satan is bound (Rev 20:1-3); the final end of evil and the start of the new creation follows this period (*post* the Millennium). Advocates include writers such as Jonathan Edwards, and David Field from Oak Hill (who led our weekend away). This position is sometimes said to be just ‘optimistic amillennialism’ because of its similarity to amillennialism in exegesis of Revelation 20 but more optimistic long-term view.

Amillennialists – believe that Revelation 20 is not about a literal period of 1000 years, but a symbol for the whole “church age” between the first and second comings of Christ, during which the ascended Christ reigns from heaven through his word and the souls of dead believers reign with him until the perfect realisation of God’s kingdom in the new creation. This has been the majority view since St. Augustine, and was shared by Luther and Calvin. Amillennialists are post-millennialists in the sense that judgment day follows the millennium.

Pan-millennialists – are exasperated by the whole business and can’t make up their minds about it, and so conclude merely that “God will make sure it all *pans* out in the end.”

Post-lactarians –like their tea (or coffee) to be poured into the cup *after* (post-) the milk, as opposed to a *Pre-lactarian* who prefers the hot stuff to go in first (*pre*-milk), or an *a-lactarian* who prefers it black (or is a drinker of herbal beverages such as Peppermint or Camomile Tea).

Revelation 21:1-22:5 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to spur us on as Christians in eager anticipation of the new creation where we will be with the Lord forever. The tricky thing is to remember this is a Revelation study, not a Bible Overview one!

Details

1-4 God creates a new heaven and a new earth, a comprehensive renovation (see Isaiah 65:17-25). A transfiguration of the old world is in view, like the way in which our new bodies will be transfigurations of the old, different but similar (1 Cor. 15:35-57). The new Jerusalem descends out of heaven as a bride for Christ: a picture of the church perfected (see 19:6-8). God and humanity are now reconciled in relationship, in fulfilment of all the promises of Scripture as he tabernacles with us (see Revelation 1:13, 2:1; Exodus 29:43-46; John 1:14). We will have no regrets or unsatisfied longings, and nothing will spoil this new world (21:4), no chaos or challenge to God (“no sea”, probably alluding to common threats from there pictured in, e.g., Psalm 42:7, 69:1; Jonah 2:3; Daniel 7:3; Isaiah 27:1, 51:9-10; Revelation 13:1). There will be no more mourning – a comfort to those suffering in Smyrna and Pergamum (see 2:10, 2:13) as well as us.

5-8 God makes all things new (the word implies ‘renewed’, not re-made from scratch), and guarantees this vision is trustworthy and true. The one who is beginning and end (see 1:8) offers the water of life for free (see Isaiah 55:1; John 7:37-38) to all those who conquer (N.B. the repeated promises to those who conquer in chapters 2-3). All sin and evil is, however, excluded from this perfect creation: those whose lives are characterised by sins mentioned in verse 8 (e.g. Jezebel, 2:20 and followers) will be thrown into the lake of fire (19:20; 20:14-15).

9-14 One of the angels shows John the city, the bride, the church from a good vantage point (compare 17:1-3). She has the glory of God, and is radiant like a jewel. She is guarded by angels and her gates are named for the twelve tribes of Israel. Her foundations are named for the twelve apostles, who in Eph 2:19-22 are also the foundation of the church, the dwelling place of God. The new Jerusalem is made up of Old and New Testament believers perfected together (Hebrews 11:40). Philadelphians who conquer are pillars in this temple city (3:12).

15-21 Because of the fluid character of the imagery, it is wise not to distinguish too rigidly between the inhabitants of the city (the saints) and the city itself (saints together with the glorified creation). The process of measuring the city (See Ezekiel 40-41; Revelation 11:1-2) symbolizes God’s commitment to preserve it all. The dimensions have symbolic significance: the city is a cube (like the holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple) of about 1400 miles on each side. This symbolizes the immensity and perfection of God’s purposes now realized in this huge dwelling place. The wall is 144 cubits (v. 17). 144 = 12 X 12. All the dimensions of the city symbolize its associations with the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles (21:12, 14): 12 symbolically designates the people of God. There then follows a list of jewels and precious things, expressing the overwhelming riches and beauty and light-filled splendor of the whole city. This city has thus become in its whole and in every part a reflection of the riches and beauty and splendor of God, as earlier revealed in 4:1-11. The list of jewels corresponds roughly to the twelve precious stones of Aaron’s breastplate (Exodus 28:15-21) representing the people of God.

22-27 There is no need for a special sacred place in this city which is itself one giant holy of holies. God and the Lamb are the temple and the light – the focal point of divine presence and source of all light and illumination for the world. The glory and honour of all the diverse cultures of the world is brought into the city by the kings of the earth (see Isaiah 60:10-14) – everything good from the old creation redeemed and sanctified to be enjoyed again in perpetual daylight without threats (no need to close the gates). Not everything will make it into the new creation, however. Only people written in the Lamb’s book of life will enter: no-one who does what is detestable or false, and nothing which is unclean and therefore inappropriate, will be allowed entrance. This is the third time we have heard of

entrance requirements (cf. 20:15, 21:8) – a reminder that though God rules and Jesus wins, we must stick with the Lamb to benefit from that victory.

21:1-5 The angel (21:9, 15) now shows John a picture of the city which resembles a new improved garden of Eden. The river of living water (see 21:6) which comes from God and the Lamb waters the city (Ezekiel 47:1) and is a picture of the Spirit (see John 7:37-39). The tree of life (see 2:7), which humanity last saw and left behind in Genesis 3:24 is now seen again and its leaves bring healing to the nations (who have been at war since Genesis). God's servants worship God unhindered by any curse or accursed thing, marked by his name (see 7:3). Rather than seeing God only dimly, they now see his face, in fulfilment of 1 Corinthians 13:12, and enjoy a perfect relationship with him. They reign over the new creation forever as God's vice-regents (as originally intended, Psalm 8:6; see Rev 2:27; 3:21 for reigning).

Application

1. Who is at the centre of it all? God and the Lamb feature throughout this chapter as the centre and focus of everything in the new heavens and new earth. This is a place which revolves around them in every way, gaining light and life and every good thing in relationship to them. If this state of glory is devoted to God, how foolish of us to be devoted to anything else, or to be dazzled by the splendour of any other city (e.g. Babylon in chapter 18).
2. Who is in, who is out? 21:6-8 and 21:27 address the issue of who populates the new creation. Nothing unclean is allowed in, including those who are unclean because of their various sins. But those "in" are in not just because they conquer (21:7) but because their names are in the Lamb's book of life (21:7; see 13:8 and 17:8). This is both an encouragement to persevere and a reassurance that God will keep and sustain those who are his.
3. It would be impossible not to see in this passage a fantastic encouragement to keep going because there is a glorious new creation to look forward to. Everything bad about this world will one day disappear, and all that separates us now from God and the Lamb (and each other) will likewise be eliminated. What a terrific thought!
4. God's plan for the world is finally fulfilled. Especially in 22:1-5 we see the plan of the whole Bible coming together at the end in this new creation. And, what's more, it seems to be even better than it was at the start.

Revelation 22:6-21 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

The purpose of this section is to assure us that this trustworthy book comes from God himself and therefore encourage us to be ready and eager for Jesus' return soon. God rules, Jesus is coming, so keep going. This last section sounds disjointed, with different sayings coming one after another, sometimes with seemingly no direct connection to what has come before. There are several ways it could be structured, but we mustn't allow debates about that to distract us from the content of the verses themselves.

Details

6-7 In a direct echo of the opening words of the book in 1:1-3 John indicates that it is now drawing to a close. The main similarities:

Revelation 1:1-3	Revelation 22:6-7
The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place	the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place
He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John	And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true
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	Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book
the time is near	behold, I am coming soon

The angel who shows John the vision of 22:1-5 reiterates the divine origin of his words and therefore assures him of their trustworthiness and usefulness to Jesus' followers. The time is near - Jesus is coming soon (a thought repeated in verses 12 and 20 in the middle and end of this section). A blessing is again pronounced on all who keep the words of the book, a reminder of why we have been studying it!

8-9 John highlights his own role in the writing of the book (as in 1:9) with a reminder of his sinfulness (as in 19:9-10) in misunderstanding who the angel was and worshipping him instead of God. That he is a prophet himself is stressed (compare 19:10 with 22:9) to remind us that John is faithfully passing on what he saw and heard, the main message of which is that we should worship God alone.

10-11 This revelation is not to be kept hidden, but made public (compare 10:4 and Daniel 8:26, 12:4, 9 who is told to seal up his vision because the time has *not* yet arrived). The time is near when all that is written in Revelation will take place as Jesus returns. It is when that time comes that verse 11 will be fulfilled – the righteous and the unrighteous will not be able to change sides then, for it will be too late. This is an implied exhortation to ensure we are doing right and being holy, but also a reminder that ultimately people 'do' what they 'are', as we've seen throughout: we either follow the Lamb or the Beast, which is linked to whether we are in or out of The Book (13:8, 20:15).

12-13 Jesus' soon return is mentioned again (see verses 7 and 20), this time as a warning that judgment is coming too (see 20:12-13). This is good for the saints and bad for the wicked (see 11:18 for the two-pronged nature of judgment day). Jesus takes up the words from 1:8 reminding us that he oversees the whole of history. What he has started on this earth, he will soon finish.

14-15 Before that day comes, there is a blessing (see 22:7; 1:3) for those who wash their robes - an image which sends us back to 7:14 (a picture of the saints as those who have appropriated the atoning blood of Jesus) and to the promise to Sardis (3:5). These may also eat from the tree of life (promised to Ephesians conquerors in 2:7; see also 22:2) and have entry into the city of God, unlike some (see 21:27). Those excluded are characterised by sins like those mentioned in 21:8 – not worshipping the true God and living in a way which displeases him.

16-17 After “I, John” in verse 8, Jesus himself now takes centre stage, and speaks to John. He reminds him that this revelation is from him for the benefit of the churches (which takes us back to chapters 2-3, but also shows that the book is directly relevant to us). Mentioning that he is the root and descendent of David emphasises Jesus’ kingly status as ruler of God’s people. This book is his sceptre and means of ruling. The Spirit and the church (the Bride in 19:7, 21:9) together long for Jesus’ return. Three “let the one who” exhortations follow, reminding us to long for that day too and inviting all who thirst after and desire living water (see 22:1; John 7:37-39) to come too.

18-19 In an echo of Deuteronomy 4:2 where Moses warns against adding or subtracting from the Law given at Sinai, Jesus (the repeated and stressed “I” indicate that he is probably still the speaker) warns everyone who hears Revelation, his kingly declaration, not to add or subtract from it, or face the consequences. This is a solemn declaration that the book is his royal law and promise, and will be fulfilled. It is also an appropriate way to end both Revelation and the canon of Scripture as a whole (which is also God’s word and not to be tampered with!). How one treats the words of Jesus has such a profound effect because it is an indication of one’s spiritual state generally.

20-21 At the end Jesus reminds us again that he is coming soon. John, and the whole church with him, echo “Amen”, let it be so, and exhort him to come (as in verse 17). The letter ends as many epistles end, with grace (see Ephesians, Philipians, 1 & 2 Thess etc).

Application

1. Revelation is trustworthy and true, from God and Christ, and not to be tampered with or selectively applied. How should that impact the way we think about, handle, and read Revelation, and Scripture generally?
2. How does the thought of Jesus coming back soon impact us and make us feel? The chapter itself makes several applications of this truth, which can be dwelt on individually or as a whole.
3. There is a blessing for all who read and keep the words of this book. This last study is a good time to share the ways in which we have been blessed by our study of Revelation. That could be in terms of new truths learned, old truths impressed upon us more powerfully, or in terms of new obedience of Christ inspired by this book