



REVELATION 6-11: LAMB POWER

HOME GROUP NOTES

We're now on our 4th session of a seven-week series through the whole of Revelation.

RECAP

So far, we've explored chapter 1 where Jesus suddenly reveals his glory to John exiled on the island of Patmos, and then chapters 2-3 where Jesus motivates the seven churches that John serves towards faithfulness in hostile times.

Last week, we also read aloud Revelation 4 and 5 and saw John immediately experience the promise Jesus gave to Laodicea, the last church addressed.

John's taken through this open door into a heavenly throne room to revisit his disturbing memories of Caesar's claim to rule the world. Yet, this memory is dramatically rearranged by the true revelation of Jesus reigning with God and as the one found worthy to bring God's kingdom in heaven on earth!

Revelation could just stop at that point; it feels like it's come to its natural conclusion, and some wish it would stop there because what we read for 15 more chapters is mainly what conjures the responses I mentioned a few weeks back of disgust, trepidation, and obsession.

But Revelation keeps moving forward because Jesus has a lot more to say!

MOVING FORWARD

Revelation 4 & 5 shows us our Father hallowed in heaven, and indeed the Father's will finally realised on earth. However, in John's time, as in ours, sadly the Lord's prayer has not yet been fully answered and therefore we keep praying for God's kingdom to come.

Jesus knows that we are still in this time of waiting. And so He comforts and challenges us using, what is for us, the unfamiliar genre of apocalyptic literature to take us on an intense journey through 3 similarly repeating cycles of the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls to see our world clearly and ensure that we aren't overwhelmed or led astray.

A disclaimer: this whole section is long, intense, and dense! Today, we'll cover just two of these cycles, spanning 6 chapters!

(Have a go at reading these chapters – it might take a while, but it'll be worth it!)

I also offer a warning: be prepared to have your way of seeing the world completely rearranged.

Q: What has your impression been of the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls? How have you interpreted them in the past?

REVELATION 6: AS IT IS ON EARTH

In Revelation 6, we see Jesus opening the seven-seals of the scroll mentioned in the previous chapter, a scroll that represents the God's salvation for creation.

Six of these seals, however, symbolise the evil and suffering in the world that Jesus unbinds for the Father's will in heaven to come on earth.

The first four seals are the infamous "Four Horseman", an image drawn from Zechariah 1 and 6, which descend upon a quarter of the earth:

- The first seal is depicted as a horse and rider representing oppressive systems/empires/ideologies bent on conquest and domination.
- The second seal is another horse and rider representing war.
- The third symbolises economic injustice, with the cost of living particularly affecting the poor.
- The fourth is death in particular forms.

Q: What has your impression been of the Four Horseman in the past? Where have you seen them portrayed in our culture or media?

These disturbing Four Horseman serve not to predict unique events to come, but instead **shatter** the illusion that we can find true security in any power, nation, wealth, or health, and they **showcase** a normal day on planet Earth!

As, indeed, do the next two seals:

- The fifth seal is the persecution and martyrdom of God's people, which Chris and Graham White pray against each Tuesday morning in the prayer room.

This hostile response from the world leads the martyred in heaven to cry out for justice, a key theme explored in a few chapters time.

- The sixth seal then appears like a replay of the nightmarish scene of Mount Vesuvius erupting, only ten years earlier. It is a vivid example of ecological disaster that we also experience variously in our day, which all people — even the rich and powerful as we see in this passage— cannot find refuge from.

But its more than that.

The subsequent question: 'Who can stand the wrath of the Father and Son?' is, as Romans 1 explores, the recognition that the chaos in our world is allowed to exist for a time with God sorrowfully giving the world over to its destructive desires in judgement. It is also the cry of the nations to locate who ultimately has security both here in the present and the future.

Q: What do you make of the emphasis here, as in Romans 1:18-32, that God's judgement is played out in our world by sorrowfully allowing it to experience the fruit of its own destructive desires?

Q: What does our society seek to place its security in?

REVELATION 7: THOSE WHO STAND

In Revelation 7, Jesus suddenly presses pause on this cycle (seen in gap of the cycle I've drawn), to provide a reality check: in this case to show that despair and death does not roll on continuously as the final word in this world. For Jesus surprisingly answers the question — 'who can stand?' — to which there appeared no answer.

The answer comes as John *hears* that those who stand — who endure and have true security in this world — are the 144,000.

What follows is a military roll call of the 12 tribes of Israel who each consist of 12,000 members.

The number 12 here signifies God's people and, times 12,000, indicates the immensity of its scale to show that God's people throughout history are ultimately victorious in this life.

This is confirmed when John not only hears but again sees the astounding revelation:

'before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

As we go onto read, God's vast, pure, triumphant, multi-national people throughout history are those who overcome the great tribulation — the present sufferings of a sinful world and the Devil who, as we'll see next week, continually rages at the Lord's people. Because this victorious people have remained faithful, they will ultimately hunger and thirst no more as they reign with the Father and Son forever.

Q: How have you understood the 'great tribulation' in the past?

Q: Where do you see the work of Satan at play in the church today?

This revelation releases the seventh seal is and silence fills heaven momentarily for half an hour, in awe and reverence for God's salvation, as heaven acknowledges the Lord's word in Psalm 46, to 'be still and know that I am God' (Ps 46:10).

Together, these six seals provide a heavenly view of the affliction in this world. But the final word over history, the seventh seal, is joyful and awe-inspired worship for Jesus setting the world set back in order. This vision therefore offers hope to us when deeply troubled by the news in our world and leads us to find our security in Christ alone.

That's quite a lot to take in, isn't it!

Thankfully the silence of heaven provides us just that opportunity to reflect and pray.

For a moment, as Psalm 46 declares, let's be still before God who makes wars cease, breaks the bow, and shatters the spear!

REVELATION 8: JUDGMENT ALONE?

In Revelation 8, Jesus then directs John's attention to another cycle of seven trumpets.

Whereas the seven seals show how the world is, the seven trumpets depict what **could be** if God acts ultimately with Lion power — with judgement alone — in response to the martyr's cry: 'how long O Lord until you avenge our blood.'

This question is a natural and even biblically faithful reaction when experiencing injustice because this plea is addressed to the right place – to God – as we see stated in many Psalms, especially Psalm 13 and 35. And it's possible some of the seven churches, in their suffering, wanted such a response from God.

Q: What do you make of the martyr's crying out for God's vengeance? Is this is faithful response or not?

God promises here in Revelation 6:11 to take up the cause of the oppressed, promising that justice will come in His own time and, as we'll learn later, in His own way.

Revelation 8, however, plays out four trumpets, heralding the terrifying scenario of judgement alone as the prayers of the saints are flung down to earth with cataclysmic results.

This scenario of judgement is characterised as plagues of Egypt, a reversal and degradation of the order of the Genesis creation account, and the Empire's greatest fears blown up to epic proportions.

For example, a third of the earth, sea, and sky is desecrated as hail and fire mixed with blood pounds the world. The water is turned deadly, and darkness fills creation, altering the order of day and night.

REVELATION 9: JUDGMENT ALONE?

It gets worse in chapter 9, with the fifth trumpet, as now even the forces 'under' the earth — the demonic, the very forces the nations worship with their various idols — are released like a horde of locusts from the plagues in Egypt but on a horrific and mutated scale to renegade on the nations.

And then the sixth trumpet replays another enlarged memory of Rome's in releasing their biggest fear of an invasion from the Parthians.

The Roman Empire experienced a massive defeat against this smaller empire who had the canny tactic of fleeing on horses, only to suddenly turn with a sting in their tail by firing arrows to exposed Roman infantry. In this vision, however, a force of 200 million ride horses with snakes for tails and inflict unimaginable suffering.

Q: If it was us who received Jesus' final revelation, what experiences might Jesus revisit to convey the terror of judgment as God's main response to the world?

The point of all this is to symbolically announce, as the end of Revelation 9 depicts, that if God responds to a sinful world through releasing judgement alone – Lion-power - it would not only undo creation more than we experience it now, described here as effecting now a third rather than quarter, it would also drive the nations deeper into fear and godlessness to remain unrepentant.

Thankfully, however, God, responds to a hostile world in a different way: by Lamb power.

REVELATION 10: THE OPEN SCROLL

This is shown in Revelation 10 as Jesus again pauses this awful cycle to provide another reality check. We see an angel giving John a scroll to digest and then prophesy, which is the very scroll the Lamb took from the One on the throne.

It is now open, as the seals have been unbound, and John will reveal in chapter 11 the core message of this salvation scroll regarding how Christ acts in the world, namely, through his people.

REVELATION 11: THE SCROLL REVEALED

Revelation 11 is John's prophecy disclosing the church's faithful witness throughout history. The church is depicted in various ways, including as a persecuted Holy Temple and Two Witnesses (two being the necessary number conveyed in Scripture to affirm a valid testimony). God's people are His holy and prophetic messengers, like Moses and Elijah, declaring His saving word to the world.

Yet, when the church lives ablaze – like Jesus commands in Revelation 2-3 in word and deed, in holiness, prayer, and worship – the church often receives from the world the same fate as Christ through indifference, hostility, suffering, and even death.

We see in this chapter that God *will* judge the world for its evil (justice will come) and He will ultimately preserve and draw His people to His side. But in the end, the effect of the church's witness throughout history results in an utterly different response from the nations to God.

Because we discover the vast majority of civilisation repent - they too *stand* with the church to inherit the kingdom of God.

Q: What are your thoughts and feelings about this? Do you agree?

We observe this in the mention that in the end only 7,000 endeavour to resist Christ and only a tenth of the 'great city' of Sodom and Egypt collapses.

The 7,000 remnant recalls those who were faithful in Elijah's time but here in Revelation 11 it is flipped to claim that in the future the majority are the faithful and the remnant/minority are now those who remain opposed to God.

The minor damage to the great city, which ultimately represents the world, is also a reversal of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Those cities were on the brink of collapse with Abraham pleading that God might relent from judgement if only ten righteous were found.

Here, the vast majority are deemed righteous who survive and only the minority, ten percent, refuse to repent.

This startling vision of God's immense salvation is conveyed variously in Revelation:

- Later in Revelation 14, the 144,000 – symbolising God's international people beyond count - are deemed only the firstfruits, the tithe as it were, of a far greater Harvest to come when this present age ends.
- Also in Revelation 21, when the world is made new and God dwells with His people, suddenly a vast influx of the nations and kings of the earth who previously in Revelation are presented as only ever hostile to the church walk straight into the New Jerusalem and they eat from the tree of life, with its leaves for the healing of the nations.

The secret of the open scroll, within the last book of the Bible, provides this final word that our witness as the salt and light of the world somehow and somewhen affects a dramatic change for the overwhelming majority of those indifferent and hostile to Christ: our children, neighbours, colleagues, community, and even our multi-religious world. Regardless of whether they find themselves as part of His 144,000 possibly even in this lifetime, our witness regardless provides a necessary signpost in the end for them to receive Christ as Lord and enter the Kingdom of God.

Q: Employing your imagination, how do you think our witness makes this dramatic change for the world?

Q: What are some implications for our us Christians?

Q: How might this revelation change how we live our Christian faith?

Like John, we need time to digest this word: Jesus' saving work to this hostile world is brought into being significantly through *our* loving and sacrificial service – Lamb power!

With that revelation, the seventh trumpet ends this vision in worship, and concludes our exploration this morning, to show that the world's fate is not ultimately judgment but salvation. Heaven confirms this when it declares aloud:

“The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah,
and he will reign for ever and ever.”

Amen.

Prayer Time

These chapters show that our prayers, which rise up like incense to God, are thrown down to earth with cataclysmic power. Our prayers for our neighbourhood, nation and the world have a power beyond anything we can imagine. Therefore, with all that's happening in our world, let's pray for it to know God's peace and salvation.

Extra Resources

If you would like to continue your own exploration of Revelation through these weeks or in the future, here are some helpful resources worth looking into.

For an overview of the whole of Revelation check out these fantastic videos from the Bible Project.

Part 1: <https://youtu.be/5nvVVcYD-0w?feature=shared>

Part 2: <https://youtu.be/QpnIrbq2bKo?feature=shared>

The Bible Project have also released a creative video on how to read Apocalyptic Literature:
<https://youtu.be/UNDX4tUdjIY?feature=shared>

If you want to go in a bit deeper, a good place to start is NT Wright's commentary, *Revelation for Everyone*, which explains the meaning of each chapter of Revelation in bitesize portions. A more devotional book, beautifully written, is from a hero of mine, Eugene Peterson, called *Reversed Thunder*.

A little more complex but great nonetheless are the books, *Reading Revelation Responsibly* by Michael J. Gorman which debunks a lot of unhelpful stuff we bring to this book and draws into sharper focus what the book is about. Then *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* by Richard Bauckham is possibly the best book on Revelation I have read. It's a small book covering the major themes of Revelation, it may keep you own your toes as it is quite academic, but it led me to worship more than any other book on the topic I have read! There is also a commentary called *Revelation and the End of All Things* by Craig Koester which is very helpful is exploring the meaning of each chapter in greater depth than say NT Wright's book.

Lastly, if you want to explore the book word-by-word check out *Revelation (Anchor Yale Bible)* by Craig Koester or Ian Paul's *Revelation (TNTC)*.

Revelation 1:3

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it...