



# THE LION AND THE LAMB

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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## *THE LION AND THE LAMB*

The book of Revelation is maybe the most polarising book in the Bible for the modern church; churches either tend to ignore the book, because it's too hard to understand, or else they love it, and they get most of their ideas about God and life from it. But this book, even though it's in an unfamiliar genre, has so much to say and to reveal to us about the glory of Jesus Christ, about the power of his Gospel, and about the world around us.

Whatever we're afraid of when approaching the book, there are two things that it says straight up that can help comfort us. Right out of the gates, the first words of the book: "A revelation of Jesus Christ." Which (I think) means that this whole book is ABOUT Jesus Christ, an unveiling about Jesus, and his Gospel. So even though the book is in a form we aren't used to, this is the same message we get everywhere else in the Bible. That's the big picture of the book, and we can cling to that, even when we're struggling with the details of the book.

Secondly, in chapter 1, verse 3, it says: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it, and keep what is written in it." The book says that if we read it, if we hear it, if we live it, then there are great blessings promised to us for that. So we can remember that, as well, when we feel overwhelmed.

***“ One of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Look, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered so that he is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” Then I saw one like a slaughtered lamb standing in the midst of the throne.”  
Revelation 5:5-6.***

# THREE RULES, TO KEEP YOU (MOSTLY) OUT OF TROUBLE IN READING REVELATION

In order to properly understand any passage in the Bible, it helps to pay attention to three things: the **history** of the original context, the **literature** that it's written in, and the **theology** it's showing us, working with the rest of the Bible. And so, when reading any passage in the Bible, it always helps to think about it something like this:

## TEXT — HISTORY | LITERATURE | THEOLOGY— TODAY.

And it's no different with Revelation. If anything, these three rules are more important to understanding Revelation than almost any other book.

### RULE 1: HISTORY:

If we want to understand Revelation, we need to understand the historical situation it was written in. And we can see this in two ways; the book is working through two historical lenses:

**THE HISTORICAL LENS OF THE CHURCHES:** In chapters 2-3 there are seven messages to the seven churches. In Revelation, seven is a number signifying completion, or perfection. And so, we're supposed to read these messages as a lens through which the book speaks to all churches, over all of history. Their faithfulness, their temptations, the persecutions they're facing. They're meant to give us messages that will encourage and convict every church.

**THE HISTORICAL LENS OF ROME:** Revelation is written to churches in a particular historical context. Much of the imagery of the book is related with the imagery of Rome: of the Roman Empire, Nero, Greek gods and goddesses, etc. Without taking the historical side into account, it's easy to veer off the rails in reading the book, by failing to see how the book is speaking to the powers, religions, and images of the original culture and context. If we ignore this, it can be all too easy to make up our own interpretations of how the images of the book must be speaking right into our culture today.

The author James K. A. Smith has a great quote about apocalyptic literature (which Revelation is written in). He says that the genre is like adjusting the blinds at your window, to see the world at a different angle. "The point of apocalyptic literature is not prediction but unmasking—unveiling the realities around us for what they really are... Apocalyptic literature is like that: the empire (whether Babylon or Rome) has something to hide and so tilts the louvers just slightly to cover what it wants to hide. But apocalyptic is revealing precisely because it gives us this new perspective, just to the left, which lets us see through the blinders... Apocalyptic literature invites us to lean over and get a new perspective that lets us see through the blinders to the monsters behind the screen." Well, that's what Revelation does for first-century Rome. It pulls the blinds and we see the military power and the persecution and the false worship and the seductive culture as it really was, to see the spiritual forces of evil behind them all. But if that's all we saw, it wouldn't be much help to us. *The situation in Rome is used as a lens through which the book understands all cultures in history.* Through helping us see the spiritual realities

operating behind Rome, the book gives us these glasses to help us to see the spiritual realities operating behind the scenes today, in our world.

Every church (and wider community), has different temptations, different false teachings, different Babylons, different workings of Satan. And Revelation attempts to reveal and deconstruct all of these realities, and to call for faithfulness and conquering in light of them.

## **RULE 2: LITERATURE:**

The book is written in this genre called apocalyptic. Now, this genre hasn't been around for a long time, and so we have to make sure that we don't try to read the book in a way we're more comfortable with, as if it was science fiction or some other genre we're used to. One aspect of apocalyptic writing is that it's full of imagery, and the images are **symbolic until proven literal**.

Again, if we don't take genre into consideration, it's easy to go off the rails. A lot of us are used to feeling like we need to take as much as possible in the literal, face-value understanding in order to be faithful readers of the Bible. But Revelation works the opposite way. In order to read it faithfully, we need to understand that almost everything is working in symbols... And it isn't too hard to think of examples of where this can go wrong if we're assuming that we have to take things literally: people thinking the locusts in chapters 9 are John trying to describe helicopters, people predicting when the world is going to end, Trump or Obama or the Pope being the Antichrist, thinking that the final battle is going to take place on a little hill in northern Israel, people thinking that there will only be 144,000 people in heaven, etc, etc, etc.

## **RULE 3: THEOLOGY:**

**The book of Revelation has so much to reveal to us about God and Christ and the Gospel. But in doing this, we have to keep one, very important thing in mind: Scripture interprets Scripture. And if we're in doubt, the answer is from the Old Testament.** Although, again, this happens in a way that's maybe a bit unusual for us. Compared with something like the Gospel of Matthew, where the narrative pauses, and says: "As it is written," and there's a quote. There's only one OT quote, really, in all of Revelation (of the creatures crying out "holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty," from Isaiah 6). The rest of the book isn't working in quotes, but instead, the book is like walking through a mosaic of Old Testament images. It's pretty much impossible to go more than two or three verses without catching a glimpse of an OT image in Revelation. But this mosaic of images from the OT isn't meant to just confuse or overwhelm us. It's meant to show us the richness of God's plans and his fulfilment, particularly in the cross of Christ. Even though the book is like a kaleidoscope of images from ancient Rome and from the Old Testament, it's a kaleidoscope that's meant to strengthen the faith, love and hope of the church.

If we remember that Revelation uses Old Testament images to understand first century realities, as a lens through which to understand all of history, then that can keep us out of a lot of trouble in reading the book. But if we keep all these things in mind, there's a lot of gold for us in the book--of Christ's glory, and the greatness of God's plans in the Gospel, and the beauty of all of the Bible meeting to be fulfilled in this grand vision of hope.

# WEEK 1

## Revelation 1

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### STUDY QUESTIONS



#### DISCOVER

**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

What have been your experiences, whether positive or negative, with the book of Revelation?

What is the five-link chain that brings this message to us today?

Read 1:1–5. What do these verses tell us about the genre/s of Revelation?

In verse 3, John calls his work “prophecy.” Flick ahead to 19:10. What does prophecy mean here?

Many see the opening of Revelation as Trinitarian (featuring God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). Where can you see each of God's persons in the first four verses of the book?

Where is the figure whom John sees (verse 12)? What's the significance of that (verse 20 might help)?

How does John describe the appearance of Christ in his vision?

Read verses 8 and 18. Who are they describing? How are they similar?



## **NURTURE**

**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

A repeated theme in this chapter (and the book) is God being the one "who is and who was and who is to come"; God being the God of all of history. How does this comfort Christians who are facing temptations and persecution in the world around them?

What aspects of John's vision of the risen Christ particularly comfort you? Which of them disturb or challenge you?

Where are the pressure points from our culture for Christians today? Which do you feel is the hardest to resist?



## **ACT**

**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

Sometimes we can imagine that we worship a small Jesus who falls at our feet. What might it look like for you to fall at Jesus' feet, where you're at in life right now?

How will this vision of Jesus encourage you to be bold and to persevere in your struggle against these powers?

How would your life be different if you lived daily with a continual expectancy of Christ's return?

What questions do you hope to have answered as a result of this study?

What will you pray now to the Lord who "walks among the lampstands"?

## WEEK 2

# Revelation 2-3

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

The number “seven” in Revelation refers to completion or perfection. So in these messages to the seven churches, they aren’t just messages to these churches—in a very real sense, these are messages to the complete church, to all churches across history. So in some way, they are meant to open up seven different lenses through which we read the following visions of Revelation, and seven different angles on what it means to conquer as Christ’s faithful witnesses.

While each church receives a message reflecting its own situation, there is one overarching issue: whether or not to compromise.

**D** ISCOVER  
**What’s interesting here? What do you learn? What don’t you understand?**

Have a flick through the seven messages to the churches. What different types of opposition are being faced by the churches?

Two of the churches aren’t criticised by Christ. Which churches are they? What is it that they’ve done right?

What are the key criticisms Jesus has of each of the other churches?

In 3:21, it tells us how Jesus conquered. What, then, is the key to victory?

How are the promises at the end of each message fulfilled in the final chapters of Revelation (see table)?

Promises of chapters 2-3	Fulfilment of chapters 19-22
Eat of the tree of God (2:7)	22:2
Not be hurt by the second death (2:11)	20:6
Give white stone with name that no one knows (2:17)	19:12
Give the morning star (2:28)	22:16
Clothed in white, name never erased from book of life (3:5)	19:14, 21:27.
Write on them the name of God (3:12)	22:4
Sit with God on the throne	20:4



### **NURTURE**

**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

With which of the seven church do you think Village most identifies? Based on the words of Revelation 2–3, what might the risen Christ say to us?

How have you tried to “conquer” sin in your life?

How do you think you might respond if you were put in a situation where you were persecuted for your faith?



### **ACT**

**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

Find the message in these chapters that speaks to you where you're at. Spend a few minutes poring over the words, and writing down a few ways that God's word is speaking to you here.

Spend some time writing a letter to back to Jesus, to confess where you're struggling, and to praise him for conquering for you, and for the great promises that give you hope.

## WEEK 4

# Revelation 4-5

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

After meeting the risen Christ, and hearing his messages to the churches as he walked among them, we are now taken up to see the throne room of God.

When someone says the word “heaven”, what thoughts and images come to your mind?



### DISCOVER

**What’s interesting here? What do you learn? What don’t you understand?**

Have a quick read of all the songs in heaven. What’s the main theme of these songs?

### Read Revelation 5.

We’ve already heard something strange happening between sight and sound in the book: In 1:12 we read that John saw a voice. What does John hear in 5:5? What does he see in 5:6? What’s the significance of this?

Why was Christ worthy to take the scroll in chapter 5?

Read 4:9–11 and 5:13–14. How would you describe the atmosphere in these scenes?

What does worship look like in heaven?



## **NURTURE**

**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

Have you ever seen worship that looks anything like this on earth?

Have you ever wept like John over the sense of hopelessness for the future of the world?

Have you ever wondered "Why doesn't God help me?" or "What's God up to?" How do these visions of heaven answer those questions?

How does the rule of the sacrificed Lamb challenge the culture of our church?



## **ACT**

**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

Look back at your notes for last week. How do these chapters strengthen those churches, and us, to face those challenges?

What would it look like for you to worship Christ whole-heartedly?

This chapter tells us: "Don't be fooled" by the false worship in our culture. It tells us: "Don't give up" when it's painful to be a faithful witness to Christ. It tells us: "Don't weep" when we feel that everything is hopeless.

How can you be reminding yourself of all these great realities that Christ has won for us when you're feeling tempted, hurt, or hopeless?

## WEEK 5

# Revelation 6-11, 15-16

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

From chapter 6 to chapter 16, Revelation unfolds in a series of "sevens." First, the seven seals on the scroll are opened. Then there are seven trumpets. Later, there are seven bowls of God's wrath. All three "sevens" speak about God's judgement. It can be easy to assume that the book works chronologically, but there are good reasons to think that the three sequences of "sevens" are working more like three different camera angles of the same event, of the judgement of God.



### DISCOVER

**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

Compare Revelation 8:5, 11:19 and 16:18. What are the similarities?

Read Revelation 6.

What do the four seals represent? What do their riders and horses represent?

How is the question of 6:10 answered?

Do you find God's judgement a difficult truth to embrace?

At the end of chapter 6, we hear another question. How does chapter 7 answer that question?

Again, we hear something interesting happening between sight and sound. What does John hear in 7:4? What does he see in 7:9?

How did the Lamb win the war in chapter 5? How are the followers of the Lamb meant to fight in the war?



## **NURTURE**

**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

How are the robes of the faithful washed in 7:13–14? What does that mean for your life?

How do these answers comfort you when you think of the suffering of our Gospel partners around the world?

What consolation is there in these chapters when it feels as if history is spinning out of control?



## **ACT**

**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

As you study John's vision of the future and ponder all that is to come, how are you motivated, challenged or convicted to:

Walk with Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

Proclaim God's goodness in Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

Worship God? \_\_\_\_\_

Study the Word? \_\_\_\_\_

Grow deeper in your relationship with God? \_\_\_\_\_

What might it look like for you to follow the lamb (14:4) by resisting the temptations of the world and faithfully witnessing to the power of the Gospel of God?

How do these chapters encourage us to pray for the chaos in our world, and for those we know who don't follow Jesus?

## WEEK 6

# Revelation 11

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

This is one of the more difficult chapters of the book. It's pretty jam-packed with images from the Old Testament that will be expanded on in the coming chapters.

But, as we get into it, just remember that **this chapter is a parable about the nature and result of the church's witness.**



### DISCOVER

**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

**Read Revelation 11:1–14.**

There are four images in the first four verses that refer to the church? What are they?

Can you think of why each might refer to the church?

**Read Zechariah 2:1-5 and 4:1-7.** How might these visions help us understand chapter 11 of Revelation?

What does 11:11 tell us about the power that Christ has given his people over death?

What does 11:13 tell us about the effect that God's faithful witnesses and God's judgement can ideally have over the world?

The messages to the seven churches in chapters 2–3 each ended with a call for Christians to conquer. But in 11:7, we hear about faithful witnesses being conquered by the beast. This is asking a very confronting question of us: When a Christian is killed for their witness of the Gospel, who ultimately wins?



### **NURTURE**

**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

How do you feel about this reality?

Have you ever felt like you're making sacrifices for God's kingdom for nothing?

How does 11:17 give us hope for now and for the future?



### **ACT**

**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

What's one way that you can be taking a step forward in witnessing to the power of the Gospel this week?

What's one way that you can be taking a step forward in supporting missionaries who are witnessing overseas for the sake of the Gospel?

## WEEK 7

# Revelation 12-14

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

Many movies and TV shows have focused on Satan and the Antichrist, and developed the images and mythology of each character in their own way. Why do you think this is such a popular theme in popular culture?

We've already met the Triune God in the first verses of the book. But now, we meet the counterfeit, satanic trinity: the dragon or serpent (the source of all opposition to God), the beast or sea-monster (representing the power of Rome), and the second beast or earth-monster (the propaganda machine leading people in false worship).

**D** ISCOVER **What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

**Read Revelation 12.**

The main characters described by John in chapter 12 are a woman, a male child, and a dragon. Who do you think the child represents?

It's easy to think that the woman must be Mary. But if you have time, have a closer look. Compare her description with Genesis 37:9–11, and see how this image of the woman develops in Revelation 21:2, 9, and 22:17. How do these passages help us understand the picture of the woman?

This figure behind all evil is given four titles in 12:9: Ancient serpent (Genesis?), Satan (which means "adversary" in a courtroom), and devil (which means slanderer, false accuser). What picture do we get of how this dragon does his work?

What does 12:11 teach us about how Christians conquer?

How is the first beast described in 13:2? This beast gets its description from four different beasts in Daniel 7. Read Daniel 7:17–18. What does this tell us about this beast of Revelation 13:2?

Read 13:3 and 13:13–14. How does each beast mock the resurrection of Christ?

Read 13:4 and Exodus 15:11. How are they mocking the power of God here?



### **NURTURE**

**How does this passage speak to your heart? How can we see God's character here?**

How does 14:1–7 remind us about the only way to true worship of God?

Where today do we see the power of the first beast (military power and oppression)?

Where today do we see the power of the second beast (seduction to believe lies and false worship)?



### **ACT**

**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

*"The propaganda of chapters 12-13 functions to make evil look good, the demonic divine, violence like peacemaking, tyranny and oppression like liberation. It makes blind, unquestioning allegiance appear to be freely chosen."* Michael Gorman.

People often talk about God's plan for your life. Well, here we hear about Satan's plan for your life. How does this passage tell us that we can resist his plan?

Given the fact that Satan is a sworn enemy of God, his servants, and his plan, how can you be supporting your pastors and church this week?

## WEEK 8

# Revelation 17-19



### DISCOVER

**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

**Read Revelation 17:1-6.**

In verses 1–6 John sees a woman dressed like a prostitute, and Babylon described the same. What do you think these images are representing?

**Read Genesis 11:1–9.**

"Babel" is the same Hebrew word as "Babylon." How does this inform our understanding of Babylon in Revelation? (Particularly 18:5)

Read 18:4. Who is this warning for?

Revelation's long, detailed visions of judgement are not intended primarily for Babylon, but for the church. Some of the churches have people "living in Babylon." Which is why 18:4 presupposes "Come out!" This a strong warning to the church against the subtle messages and temptations of false worship. John is projecting high-definition images, with the volume fully turned up, proclaiming, "Babylon is doomed! Nothing is more certain!"

**URTURE**

**How does this passage speak to your heart? How can we see God's character here?**

How would you describe the Australian dream, an Australian's vision of the good life?

This goes back to the quote from the introduction of this series, talking about how apocalyptic literature is supposed to help us see:

"Apocalyptic literature is a genre of Scripture that tries to get us to see (or see through) the empires that constitute our environment, in order to see them for what they really are... Apocalyptic literature is revealing precisely because it gives us this new perspective ... inviting us to lean over and get a new perspective that lets us see through the blinders to the monsters behind the screen." James K. A. Smith.

How do you think Satan is at work to steal people's worship today?

Where do we see the dark side of consumerism today?

How are your aspirations in life shaped by Babylon's vision of the good life?

**CT**

**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**



What might it mean for you to "come out of Babylon"? Take some time to think of three very practical things that you can do to make this a reality in your everyday life.

How can we encourage one another to stick to following Jesus?

## WEEK 9

# Revelation 20



### DISCOVER

**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

What do you think is the most significant historical event in your lifetime? Why?

What views of "the millennium" have you encountered?

**Read Revelation 20:1–6.**

How is the thousand years described?

Read the following Bible passages.

**Mark 3:26–27**

**John 12:31**

**1 John 3:8**

**Colossians 2:14–15**

How might they inform our understanding of Revelation 20?

Christians can only be victorious because of the cross of Christ. And we see this in the image of 19:13.

*"Christ comes to the battle with his robes dipped in blood. It is his own blood, with which he wins the war, before it even starts. Therefore, there is no literal war of the Lamb for those present at the second coming of Christ to participate in. Christ's only weapon in Revelation 19 is the sword of his mouth: his word." Michael Gorman.*

What does this tell us about how God works in the world?

**URTURE**

**How does this passage speak to your heart? How can we see God's character here?**

What should our attitude to Satan be as we await Jesus' return?

We saw in the messages to the seven churches in chapters 2-3, that those who "overcome" by continuing to trust Jesus can be confident that...

They will eat from \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ (2:7)

They will not be hurt by \_\_\_\_\_ (2:11)

They will be dressed in \_\_\_\_\_ and their names are in \_\_\_\_\_ (3:5)

They will \_\_\_\_\_ (3:21)

Because of Jesus, we can know that it's possible to face the judgment of God without fear.

See if you can find all of these promises brought up again as you read Revelation 20.

**CT**

**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

Are there forces that oppose Christ, his church, or the Gospel message that make you fearful?

How does this part of Revelation encourage you to feel differently about them?

WEEK 10  
Revelation 21-22

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## STUDY QUESTIONS



### DISCOVER

**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

What representations of heaven have you seen or read about in books, movies, or TV shows? How accurate do you think they were?

These visions are not meant to give us a roadmap of heaven, but to work as a kind of generator, to give us hope.

What "new" things does John see in the first five verses?

We are told many things about the new creation, but we are also told that many things are absent. What are some of them?

What does John say the inhabitants of heaven will be doing?

Read Genesis 3:1–24. In what specific ways are all the consequences of the fall reversed in Revelation 21–22?



### NURTURE

**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

If someone asked you to describe the hope you have, what would you say?

Do you want Jesus to return soon, as he promises in 22:20? Do you pray, "Come, Lord Jesus", as John does?

Is it possible to be so comfortable in this life that our desire for the new creation is diminished?



CT

**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

What in these chapters captures your imagination and speaks to your current challenges?

When are you in danger of losing sight of who Jesus truly is?

How does your life reflect a belief in Christ's promise of 22:12? How would your church be different if every member took this verse to heart?

How has God spoken to you through the words of Revelation? What specific steps are you going to take in response?



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