

351: Dec. 15, 29: Encountering the End of the World (New Testament Weeks 50; 52)

**12/15\***: Rev. 1-11

12/29: Rev. 12-22 (under Bishop's direction)

Focus of 1-11: We can overcome challenges. Learn our struggles and what we need to overcome, then engage. (12/15)

Focus of 12-22: Live well. Daily judgment, daily victory. Right relationship. Right target. Right order. Right work. No matter what happens, we can live a life aligned with God. (12/29)

#### Outline

- Orientation to Revelation

#### Sunday School

- Reading Revelation responsibly
- Learning from the Letters
- What are our "four horsemen"?
- How can we prepare?
- How can we deal with loss and even catastrophe?
  - Loss and catastrophe on the earth
  - Loss and catastrophe in our lives
- Living a worthy life
- Conclusion: We shall wipe away every tear (but also cry them)

#### Outline

Orientation to Revelation (call it a bird's eye view, or angel's eye, or demon locust's eye, whichever)

Most important thing to know about Revelation: It is a symbolic apocalypse  
Symbolic: Means the imagery and language will feel pretty crazy and over the top. Let it be.

Apocalypse actually means revealing, like pulling back a curtain. It is usually a guided tour of deeper reality, either heaven or the future or both. Revelation was written to encourage the saints in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Core message: No matter how bad things get, even if the world ends, God will be there for us. God will overcome and will wipe away our tears.

Our role is to be faithful in the midst of these trials, and choose God.

### Summary of Basic Information

**DATE:** Probably between AD 92 and 96 at the end of the Emperor Domitian's reign.

**TO:** Churches in the western sector of Asia Minor.

**AUTHENTICITY:** Written by a Jewish Christian prophet named John who was neither John son of Zebedee nor the writer of the Johannine Gospel or of the Epistles.

**UNITY:** Only a few scholars contend that two apocalypses (from the same hand or school) have been joined—an attempt to explain the repetitions and seemingly different time perspectives.

**INTEGRITY:** The writer may have included visions and passages that were already part of Christian apocalyptic tradition, but overall the work is entirely his own.

#### DIVISION ACCORDING TO CONTENTS:

- A. Prologue: 1:1–3
- B. Letters to the Seven Churches: 1:4–3:22
  - Opening Formula with attached praise, promise, and divine response (1:4–8)
  - Inaugural Vision (1:9–20)
  - Seven Letters (2:1–3:22)
- C. Part I of the Revelatory Experience: 4:1–11:19
  - Visions of the Heavenly Court: The One Enthroned and the Lamb (4:1–5:14)
  - Seven Seals (6:1–8:1)
  - Seven Trumpets (8:2–11:19)
- D. Part II of the Revelatory Experience: 12:1–22:5
  - Visions of the Dragon, the Beasts, and the Lamb (12:1–14:20)
  - Seven Plagues and Seven Bowls (15:1–16:21)
  - Judgment of Babylon, the Great Harlot (17:1–19:10)
  - Victory of Christ and the End of History (19:11–22:5)
- E. Epilogue (with Concluding Blessing): 22:6–21.

- 1: Revelation is written to “show God’s servants what is about to happen. John receives a visit from Jesus Christ, the “Living One”.
- 2: Letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, Thyatira
- 3: Letters to Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea (all these congregations were in what is now Western and Central Turkey)
- 4: Vision in the throne room of heaven. All creation worships God.
- 5: The Slain Lamb opens the sealed scroll (think of letters with wax seals). Temple imagery is used to describe the Heavenly Court/Temple.

6: Four Horsemen and Day of the Lord/Vision of destruction of creation  
7: The faithful are Sealed/claimed as belonging to God; God comforts the faithful dead

8: Moment of silence. The Seventh Seal and angels 1-4 blowing their trumpets bring about partial destruction, giving creation an opportunity to repent. Note the balance of protection and destruction in Revelation.

9: Fifth and sixth angels blow their trumpets, bringing more destruction. (The “fallen star” seems to be an angel given power to open hell). Humans still don’t repent.

10: A mighty angel gives John the scroll, his prophetic calling

11: Two martyrs (that are described as either Moses and Elijah or Enoch and Elijah), representing the witness of the Church (whatever else they represent). Seventh trumpet blown, representing the complete destruction “of those who destroyed the earth” and the complete victory of God, more temple imagery.

12: Part II of the Revelation. The pregnant woman and the dragon (patterned after Apollo’s birth). Michael fights the dragon; the dragon fights the woman. The woman represents Israel. The child is the Messiah. The dragon is Satan.

13: The first beast represents the Roman empire. The eighth king likely represents Domitian, who persecuted the Christians. The second beast is a False Messiah/parody of Christ. 666 represents “Nero Caesar”. Nero infamously “fiddled while Rome burned” and blamed the Christians and tortured and killed them in creative and terrible ways. (A few manuscripts have 615 instead of 666, which is the numerical value of another way of spelling Nero Caesar).

14: The Lamb and 144,000 are those who remain faithful without turning to idolatry. Three angels declare the gospel shared to all the world, because judgment has come. God promises those who die in the Lord will be blessed. The Son of Man and angels harvest the earth with judgment.

15: Another intermission in the Heavenly Court/Temple. A hymn of God’s victory. Angels prepare to release seven plagues.

16: The seven plagues are released, echoing the plagues on Egypt.  
17: The punishment of the “Great Prostitute” symbolizes the fall of Rome.  
18: Angels declare and celebrate that the forces of evil (symbolized by Rome) have fallen and calls for the righteous to rejoice.

#### Final Celebration/Victory of God

19: Those in heaven worship and praise God. Instead of the four horsemen, we have Jesus on the White Horse. There is a final battle with a final victory. The marriage feast is one of judgment.

20: An angel chains Satan for a thousand years. First resurrection. Satan is released, then conquered forever. The Book of Life is opened and the dead are judged.

21: After the destruction and judgment of creation as it is, there is a new creation, a new Heaven and Earth. 21:5 “Behold, I am making all things new” (one of my favorite scriptures of all time) The New Jerusalem, full of glory, is shown, and God is the temple.

22: The River of Life flows through the heavenly city. God gives life to everything. John concludes his testimony. “May the grace of Lord Jesus be with everyone” (I feel reverent after working through that)

#### Sunday School

Reading Revelation responsibly (Remember that it was written thousands of years ago in a different language and different place in a different culture. Let it be weird, then see how it can apply and inspire)

Learning from the Letters (Optional: invite class to share a takeaway, probably not too much time)

Ephesus: Endure patiently

Smyrna: Be faithful in trials

Pergamum: Be faithful even in challenging contexts

Thyatira: Be careful to follow worthy teachers

Sardis: Wake up and repent

Philadelphia: Righteousness brings rewards that cannot be taken away

Laodicea: Don't be lukewarm (most memorable one). Be dedicated and engaged.

What are our "four horsemen"? (my biggest is distraction, and a subtle form of laziness where I resist following through and finishing things. Avoidance. And doubt, doubt that I am worth investing in. Also some naivete about how reality and people work, despite my very best efforts. So my four horsemen would be: Distraction, Doubt, Avoidance, Naivete.

How can we prepare? (lots of teachings in the Church about this. We need to take very seriously the fact that our current economy runs on debt, distraction, and immediate consumerist gratification. I know that I need to get a budget app going!) We are disincentivized to engage. We have heard the lessons... live within our means, prepare how we can, garden if we can, be responsible, etc. "use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without" (I am grateful to be able to interact with and learn from those of the Depression and WWII era). I think the strongest foundation is at the level of family and local community, which is why wards are such a blessing.

How can we deal with loss and even catastrophe?

Loss and catastrophe on the earth (As I read Revelation, what is actually happening in the world today sounds much like the partial destruction described. We can debate timing and severity, but our actions as humans are changing the world in radical ways that we will need to deal with in the next decades. Race to the death between cataclysm and innovation) This makes me think of Revelation (Oceans running out of oxygen)

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-50690995?fbclid=IwAR075B8S7HyE8iBcRdjy5FyMmGdjd3zk3w12tRsdNpmZMuwf3j7x0964WPA>

We can't know timing, but we are actively creating the apocalypse.

Race to the death between innovation and cataclysm.

Not my focus, but we have to name it.

WE ARE THE WOES OF REVELATION

Mention a few ways that we are causing the death of water and air and land and animal life and human life

<https://www.climate.gov/>

(Our resistance to taking climate change has to do with our psychological and emotional fatigue and fear, not limitations in the science)

- increasing our emissions, which traps heat close to the surface and raises land and water temps. This forces migration/extinction for animals and plants and causes droughts and heat stroke for people

-pollution, water pollution can kill plants, animals, and people with water born diseases or metal toxicity or algal blooms and leach into the ground water and permeate for a long time

-global sea food web collapse. Overfishing is throwing off the balance of the ocean's food web. If it collapses, 1/4th of the undeveloped world will be without their primary protein source

-trash. Nowhere to put it, and it breaks down just enough that we can't see it so it's in our food, water etc.

So what do we do about it?

Do as much good as the system allows. Live responsibly. Strengthen community. Think outside the box. Work within the box. Change the box as possible.

Loss and catastrophe in our lives. Our world does end. Many times in even an ordinary life. (I'll share that this past week has felt like the end of the world to me. And that's just part of being human. Nothing motivates more than pain and loss. Use the opportunity to become a better disciple, a better human. Spending pain, feeling, emotional workout, let it do as much

good as possible) I'm so grateful that I get to help people with these transitions and processes. Dying and imprisoned. Puts my own life in perspective. Finding joy in the midst of challenge. Finding meaning in the process. (Figure out what is most important to you... with my personality, what helps me the most is to know that I am doing what I can to live aligned with what is right and good) I find it most helpful to anchor myself in respect. Treat people as people. Respect the process. Respect systems (at least enough to work within them and take seriously how it all works)

Living a worthy life (with perfect form) We cannot control what will happen to us. A single moment or mistake can change our lives together (Michael, Olivia) Every day is judgment and grace. I find it helpful to focus on each week. Week by week, we should be nurturing our relationships and working toward our goals, and caring for and showing up for ourselves and others.

Conclusion: Apocalypse now. We shall wipe away every tear (but also cry them) we can live every day and every week prepared and loving and ready to wipe away tears. We can wake up each day new. We can check in and anchor ourselves in our body, take the next right step. Each moment is new. We are new in each moment. We can let go of the stories and shame that trap us, we can grieve and give grace. No matter how bad things are, we can choose life.