

REVELATION

Prep Questions and Study Notes

Central Focus Small Group Studies

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Revelation 1

1. Looking at verses 1-8, what sort of book is Revelation? What can we therefore expect this year as we study it?
2. Write down all the things said about Jesus in verses 5 & 6. How would you summarise what John is saying?
3. What do you think John's situation is when writing Revelation (verse 9)?
4. What impressions do you get about the man described in verses 12-16?
5. What reactions does the text itself prompt us to have after reading this chapter (hint: verse 6, verse 17)?

Revelation 1 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

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

Details

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Application

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

Revelation 2:1-7

1. What is commendable about the Church in Ephesus?

Do we at St Helen's share any of these characteristics? If not, how can they be encouraged?

2. What is not so commendable?

Do we at St. Helen's display any such characteristics? If so, what should we expect?

3. Why does Christ introduce himself with the particular titles in verse 1?

4. Why is the promise of verse 7 of particular relevance to the Ephesians?

5. What is the lesson here for us as individuals (rather than as a church)?

Revelation 2:1-7 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

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

Details

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

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

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

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

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

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

Application

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

Revelation 2:8-11

1. What can we tell about the situation in Smyrna from the text?

2. What is the revelation here? i.e. what does Jesus reveal to them

About their present?

About their future?

3. Upon what does this reversal of their fortunes depend?

4. How does this letter affect the way we pray for those who are suffering as Christians around the world?

5. What other lessons can we learn as a church or individuals from this letter?

Revelation 2:8-11 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

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

Details

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

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

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

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

Reversals revealed in this letter:

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

Application

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

The Martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Revelation 2:12-17

1. What is commendable about the church at Pergamum?
2. What is Christ displeased with about this church at Pergamum?
3. What does it mean for Pergamum to be Satan's *home* and for him to have a *throne* there?
4. What does the sword image or symbol represent in verse 12 and 16?
(see also 1:16; 19:15, 21).
5. What might hidden manna and a white stone with a new name on have to do with the issues in this church?

Revelation 2:12-17 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

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

Details

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

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

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

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

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

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

Application

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

Revelation 2:18-29

1. What is commendable about the church at Thyatira?
2. What is Christ displeased with about this church at Thyatira?
3. What is different about this as compared to the church in Pergamum (2:12-17)?
4. What do we learn about Jesus from the judgment of verses 22-23?
5. What do faithful church members at Thyatira have to do (verses 24-25)?
6. Why are verses 26-28 a particular encouragement to these people?

Revelation 2:18-29 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

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

Details

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

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

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

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

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

Application

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

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

Revelation 3:1-6 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

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

Details

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Application

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

Revelation 3:7-13 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

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

Details

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

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

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

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

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

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

Application

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

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

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

Yes, Jesus loves me...

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

Yes, Jesus loves...

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

Yes, Jesus loves me...

Revelation 3:14-22 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

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

Details

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

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

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

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

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

Application

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

Revelation 4-5

1. What is the picture of God given here in chapters 4-5? Write down any words you can think of to describe him in this vision (with verses).
 - 1b. What is the proper response to this kind of God (from the passage)?
2. What does chapter 4 say to those in Smyrna and Philadelphia who were being persecuted?
3. What is the problem in chapter 5?
5. What does chapter 5 say about Jesus? What is the significance of his titles here?
 - 5b. What is the proper reaction to this vision of the Lamb?
7. How does this help a Christian in Sardis who thinks it was foolish to follow a crucified messiah in the first place?

Revelation 4 & 5 - Study Notes

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

Main Point and Purpose

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

Details

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Application

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

Revelation 6:1 - 8:5

1. What are the 'four horsemen of the apocalypse' symbolic of in 6:1-8?

2. Who are the people in 6:9-11 and what do they want?
 - 2b. How would 6:11 make you feel if you were a Christian in Pergamum (2:12-17)?

3. What is happening in 6:12-17?

4. What is the message of 7:1-12 in the midst of the judgments in 6:12-17?
 - 4b. Are there literally 144,000 people in heaven, and no more?

5. How would 7:13-17 make you feel if you were a Christian in Sardis (3:1-6)?

Revelation 6:1 - 8:5 - Study Notes

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

Main Point and Purpose

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

Details

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Application

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

Revelation 8:6 - 11:19

1. What is different about the judgments of the first four trumpets, compared to the four horsemen in 6:1-8?

2. Who is affected by the “woe” of 9:1-11?
 - 2.b. In what ways could this be a dramatic picture of our contemporary world?

3. Given 9:20-21, what is the purpose of these woes?
 - 3.b. In what ways could this be a dramatic picture of our contemporary world?

4. How would 8:6-9:21 impact a member of one of the churches in Rev 2-3?

5. Summarise what happens in chapter 10 in your own words.

6. Summarise what happens in chapter 11 in your own words.

7. What is the significance of the 7th Trumpet in 11:15-19?

Revelation 8:6 – 11:19 - Study Notes

Main Point and Purpose

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

Details

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

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

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

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

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

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

Application

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

Revelation 12-14

1. Who do you think the woman and the dragon represent in chapter 12?

2. How is the devil conquered in 12:7-12?

3. How would 12:7-17 encourage someone in Smyrna (see Rev 2:8-11)?

4. What institutions are represented by the beasts in 13:1-18? That is, what do they have power to do, what are they like in today's world?
 - 4.b. Verse 18 is very controversial! What do *you* think it means?

5. What is 14:1-5 a picture of?

6. What do the five angels announce in 14:6-20?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.

7. What is the purpose of chapter 12-14 as a whole? (See 13:10 and 14:12).

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

1. What is God praised for in chapter 15?
 - 1.b. Why does John mention who the singers are in verse 2?

2. What happens when the seven bowls of God's wrath are poured out?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.
 - 7.

3. How are the bowls different to the seals (6) and trumpets (8-9)?

4. How is the end of this cycle of judgment different from the end of the cycle of seven seals and the cycle of seven trumpets?

5. How does this vision in chapters 15-16 make you feel?

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

1. Write out the basic plot line for chapter 17.?
2. What emotions does 17:1-6 evoke in you? And what about verse 14?
3. What is wrong with Babylon in chapter 18, that God should judge it?
4. What are we called to do in relation to Babylon? What does it symbolise?
5. Why so many “hallelujahs!” in 19:1-10?
6. Write down the descriptions of the rider in 19:11-16, where they come from (if you can identify a source elsewhere for the titles) and what they mean.

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 enthralling 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

1. After reading Revelation 20:1-3, compare it with Mark 3:22-27. When was Satan bound?
 - 1.b. What is the particular purpose for which he is bound in v 3?
2. Where have we met the people described in verse 4 before?
3. Comparing Ephesians 2:4-6 with Revelation 2:4, when do the saints come to life and reign seated with Christ?
4. Compare references to the “second death” in verse 6, 14, 21:8, and 2:11. What is it? If that is the second death, what is the first?
 - 4.b). And what is the “first resurrection”?
5. What happens when Satan is released for a little while?
6. If we are judged according to our works (verse 13), how can we be saved?

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 (I.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 good 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

1. How many similarities can you see between Revelation 1:1-3 and 22:6-7?

 - 1.b. Why does John allude to the opening verses of his book at this point?
2. Why does John repeat the angel worship incident (see also 19:9-10)?
3. What impact would verses 10-15 have had on members of the seven churches who first heard this prophecy?
4. How does the warning of verses 18-19 apply to us today?
5. What has Revelation revealed to you about God's plan over the last few months?
6. What will you most remember from studying Revelation?

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 <i>me</i> , "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