

CAMPAIGN PLAN BOOK
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The Seven

Reactions to Jesus in Revelation

MARS HILL CHURCH

Table of Contents

Campaigns Overview	3
The Seven Campaign Summary	4
Sermon Schedule	7
Docent Research Introduction and Overview of Revelation 1-3	8
Commentaries and Bible Studies	8
Revelation Sermon Links	10
Author	10
Date of writing	16
Original Audience and Purpose	17
Geography and History of the Seven Churches	19
Jesus in Revelation	25
Seven Reactions in Revelation 2-3	34
Theological Overview of the Book of Revelation	39
Methods of Interpreting the Apocalypse	49
Docent Research Docent Research Homiletical Tips on Revelation	53
Revelation 1:1-8	54
Revelation 1:9-20	58
Revelation 2:1-7	63
Revelation 2:8-11	67
Revelation 2:12-17	70
Revelation 2:18-29	74
Revelation 3:1-6	77
Revelation 3:7-13	81
Revelation 3:14-22	85
The Throne of Jesus Christ in Revelation	89
Commentaries on the Book of Revelation	95
Community Group Guide	97
Worship Guide	103
Review Questionnaire	113
Closing Thoughts	113

Campaigns Overview

Sermon Research Brief

Access to hundreds of pages of top-level research from Docent Research Group.

Sermon Downloads

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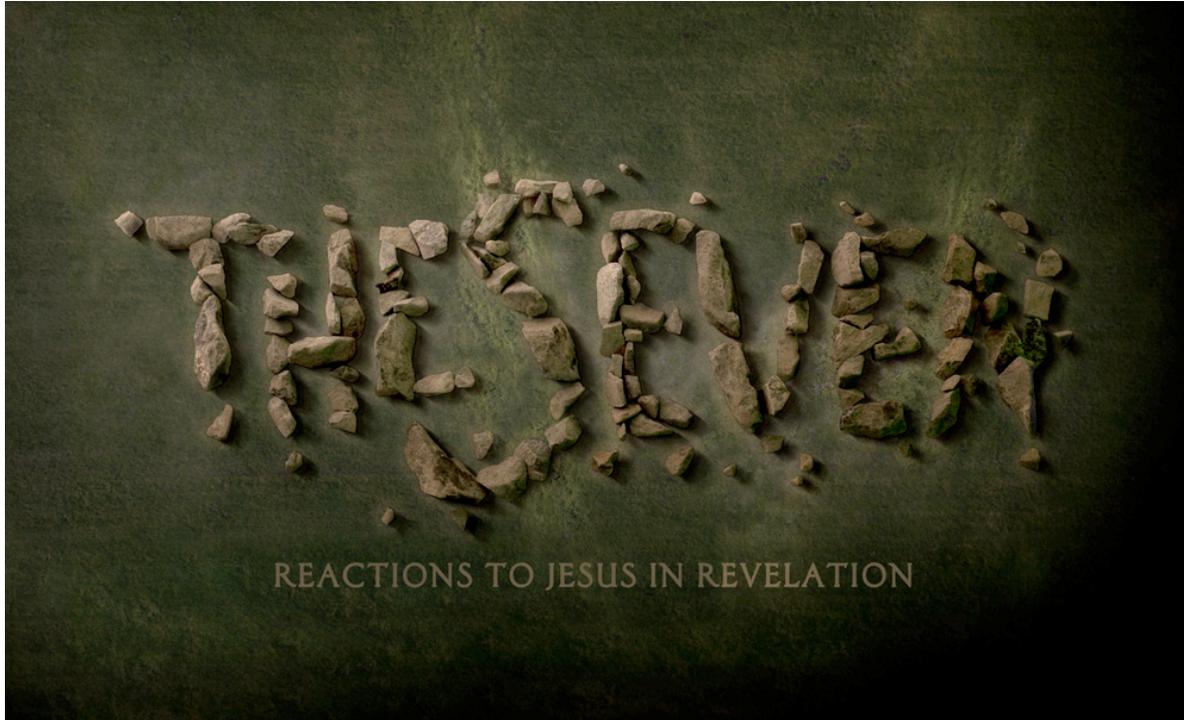
Branding, and marketing materials that you can use at your local church.*

Worship Guide

Suggestions and tips on how to prepare every aspect of your worship service to compliment—not compete—with the sermons.

* Sermon downloads and creative materials can be found at www.PastorMark.tv/campaigns.

Campaign Summary



Introduction

“Blessed are those who hear, and keep what is written.”

In the history of the world, there has never been a more important, influential, and polarizing person than Jesus Christ. He stands at the center of creation and history, rules over all, and works all things for his purposes.

And everybody has a reaction to Jesus. The question is, “What’s yours?”

In *The Seven*, we’ll explore the seven reactions of seven ancient churches that sit in ruins today—and discover what we as the church today can learn from Jesus’ words to those churches in the book of Revelation.

Exploring the ruins

In *The Seven*, Pastor Mark Driscoll takes you to the ancient sites of seven churches, preaching many of his sermons in beautiful but desolate locations to explore Jesus’ words and examine the reactions of these seven churches.

In the process we’ll discover how we err in our reactions to Jesus and how we can rise from the ruins of these ancient churches to be faithful witnesses of Jesus in our communities and beyond.

Reaction #1: Fundamentalism

Ephesus was a city awash in wealth and decadence, filled with temples to pagan gods and goddesses where prostitution was incorporated into ritualistic worship.

In the face of this, the church in Ephesus took pride in their knowledge and defense of the gospel. Jesus has much to commend them for. They work hard, contend for the faith, test their teacher's doctrine, and endure suffering. But one thing they lack: Love.

In their zeal for right doctrine, the Church in Ephesus forgot the greatest command of all: to love the Lord God with all their heart, soul, and mind, and to love their neighbor as themselves.

Reaction #2: Persecution

Smyrna was a rich city with paved streets, a library, a gymnasium, and a shrine to Homer, who was believed to be born in the city. Highly religious, the harbor city was home to a renowned temple to the Mother Goddess Athena, imperial cult temples, and had a strong Jewish presence.

In the midst of this, the Church in Smyrna was poor and heavily persecuted. Jesus commends them for their faith in the midst of persecution, calling them spiritually rich—and warning of coming persecution “unto death.”

Reaction #3: Apostate

Like Church of Ephesus, the Church of Pergamum was immersed in a culture of pagan worship in a city where Jesus says, “Satan dwells,” with temples dedicated to Augustus, the goddess Roma, and a large altar dedicated to Zeus. Like the Church of Smyrna, they also faced persecution. But while they stood strong in the face of persecution, they did not contend well for the faith, condoning those who practiced sexual sin and participated in pagan festivals.

Jesus calls the Church of Pergamum to stand firm in the truth of the gospel, to reject false teaching, and to be a light in a city that was very dark.

Reaction #4: Progressive

The city of Thyatira had no political or cultural clout—but they enjoyed economic prosperity with guilds that dealt in metals and fabrics and celebrated patron deities in festivals involving sexual sin and food sacrifices to idols.

A “prophetess” in the Church of Thyatira advocated participation in such festivals for Christians. The church's response? None existent. Commended by Jesus for serving their city with good works, Jesus rebukes the church for not standing up for the gospel and allowing false teachers to lead Christians astray.

The Church of Thyatira's sin was the opposite of the Church of Ephesus, which loved doctrine but not the city. Jesus makes clear that the solution is not to serve the city and shun doctrine but rather to do both.

Reaction #5: Dead

Sardis was most likely the butt of many ancient jokes, having been conquered twice while watchmen neglected their duty to protect the city. Mirroring the mistakes of the city, the Church in Sardis fell asleep at the wheel and is called “dead” by Jesus.

Nevertheless, Jesus identifies a few in the church who are still faithful. He calls the church repent of being spiritually dead and to strengthen what remains alive in their church—or die completely.

Reaction #6: Missional

In a city filled with temples to Zeus, Hestia, and imperial rulers, the Church in Philadelphia held fast to the faith and worked for the good of the city. Having little power or wealth, these Christians were persecuted yet persevered.

Jesus commends the church and promises that he will return to vindicate their suffering and transform the city.

Reaction #7: Lukewarm

In 60 A.D. an earthquake devastated the city of Laodicea. The city, a wealthy commercial center and site of a thriving medical and textile industry, prided itself on its self-sufficiency and declined disaster relief from the Roman Empire.

Jesus finds the Church of Laodicea guilty of the same pride as the city in which it resided. Thinking themselves rich and needing nothing, Jesus reminds them they are really in need of his riches, as they are in reality “poor, blind, and naked.”

Having nothing for which to commend the Church in Laodicea, Jesus calls them lukewarm, promising to spit them out of his mouth if they don’t repent and purchase spiritual riches of gold refined by him.

Sermon Schedule

Introduction Part 1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ
Revelation 1:1-8

Introduction Part 2

A Message to Seven Churches
Revelation 1:9-20

Reaction #1

Fundamentalist in Ephesus: All Head, No Heart
Revelation 2:1-7 * Recorded live in Ephesus

Reaction #2

Persecuted in Smyrna: Faithful No Matter What
Revelation 2:8-11 * Recorded live in Smyrna

Reaction #3

Apostate in Pergamum: Good Deeds, Bad Doctrine
Revelation 2:12-17 * Recorded live in Pergamum

Reaction #4

Progressive in Thyatira: More Tolerant than God
Revelation 2:18-29

Reaction #5

Dead in Sardis: Stopped Caring or Trying
Revelation 3:1-6 * Recorded live in Sardis

Reaction #6

Missional in Philadelphia: Didn't Give Up or Give In
Revelation 3:7-13

Reaction #7

Lukewarm in Laodicea: Comfort and Convenience before Christ
Revelation 3:14-22 * Recorded live in Laodicea

Docent Research Group Introduction and Overview of Revelation 1-3

I. Commentaries and Bible Studies

According to D.A. Carson, the best commentaries on the book of Revelation are as follows:

Technical Commentaries

The best technical commentary on the book of Revelation is by G.K. Beale.

G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. (1245 pages)
ISBN: 080282174X

Carson writes: “The commentary that best combines comprehensiveness with biblical fidelity is that of G.K. Beale (NIGTC). The prose is sometimes dense, and, inevitably, readers will want to disagree with him from time to time-- but there are few significant things that Beale has not thought deeply about. He is especially good in untangling how the Apocalypse incorporates Old Testament passages and themes.”¹

Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT). Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002. (896 pages)
ISBN: 0801022991

According to Carson, Osborne “is especially good at laying out what the options are.”²

Non-technical Commentaries

Carson notes: “Perhaps the best single volume at a highly accessible level is that of Robert H. Mounce (NICNT), a learned and well-written work that not only explains the text satisfactorily in most instances but also introduces the student to the best of the secondary literature.”³

Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. (439 pages)
ISBN: 0802825370

Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001. (384 pages)
ISBN: 0875522009

¹ D.A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986/2007), 146.

² D.A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986/2007), 146.

³ D.A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986/2007), 145.

Devotional Commentaries

William Hendricksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962. (216 pages)
ISBN: 0801057922

Leon Morris, *Revelation* (TNTC). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987/1996. (256 pages)
ISBN: 0830842500

Simple Bible Study Guides

Revelation: A NavPress Bible Study. The LifeChange Series (168 pages)
ISBN: 0891092730

Woodrow Kroll, *Revelation: The Glorified Christ*. Back to the Bible Study Guides. Wheaton: Crossway, 2006. (120 pages)
ISBN: 1581348509

Historical Background

Two commentaries that are particularly helpful in dealing with the Greco-Roman background of the book of Revelation are:

Craig Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000. (576 pages)
ISBN: 0310231922

David E. Eune, *Revelation 1-5* (WBC). Dallas: Word, 1997. (374 pages)
ISBN: 0849902517

The best short treatment on the geography and historical background of the seven churches in Revelation 1-3 is a work by Colin Hemer:

Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989. (338 pages)

Theology

One of the premier evangelical scholars on the book of Revelation is Richard Bauckham. He has written a helpful primer on the theology of the Apocalypse.

Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, (NTT). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. (186 pages)
ISBN: 0521356911

Revelation is replete with allusions and echoes of Old Testament passages. The recent volume by Beale and Carson helps one to more deeply interpret and understand these passages.

Eds. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. (1158 pages)

ISBN: 9780801026935

II. Revelation Sermon Links

- [Sinclair Ferguson](#)
- [Tim Keller](#)
- [Matt Chandler](#)
- [John Piper](#)
- [Chuck Smith](#)
- [James MacDonald](#)
- [Wayne Cordero](#)
- [Tony Evans](#)
- [Chuck Swindoll](#)
- [John Stott](#)
- [D.A. Carson](#)
- [G.K. Beale](#)
- [Alistair Begg](#)
- [Thomas Schreiner](#)
- [Simon Kistemaker](#)
- [Rick Warren](#)
- [Jack Hayford](#)
- [J.I. Packer](#)
- [John MacArthur](#)
- [Charles Spurgeon](#)

III. Author

Internal Evidence

The author of Revelation is John. Bible commentator Leon Morris notes: “The writer of Revelation tells us that his name is John (1:4). He calls himself a ‘servant’ (1:1), ‘your brother’ (1:9), and apparently one of ‘the prophets’ (22:9). The use of the name John without qualification may point to the apostle as author. No-one else, it is argued, would call himself

simply John. Only one John was great enough among the Christians to need no description.”⁴ D.A. Carson points out that “the author’s assumption that what he relates will be accepted by the readers simply on the basis of his name alone points more naturally to an apostle than to someone else.”⁵

According to Bible scholar George R. Beasley-Murray, “The author announces himself in the opening sentence of the book as ‘his [God’s] servant John’. He frequently refers to himself in the work, most commonly as a prophet (1:2–3, 9–11; 10:11; 19:10; 22:8–9) but never as an apostle. In this respect he differs markedly from Paul (*cf. e.g.* Rom. 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1). From the latter part of the second century it was assumed that the fourth gospel, the letters of John and Revelation were written by one man, John the son of Zebedee. There are, however, difficulties in this assumption, which were recognized from early times. Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria in the third century, was especially impressed by the differences in style and language between Revelation and the other works attributed to John. It has been suggested that these differences may be accounted for by the differences in subject matter and nature of Revelation and the fourth gospel; or by the possibility that Revelation was written a generation before the gospel (at the end of Nero’s reign), so giving time for the writer to have improved his style. More plausibly, John may have written the book in his own language (Aramaic), and someone else translated it into very literal Greek out of reverence for its content. If that were the case, the linguistic differences would fall to the ground. On the other hand, if, as some think, John the prophet *thought* in Aramaic and *wrote* in Greek, the differences would be insuperable, for that was not so with the author of the gospel and the letters.”⁶

External Evidence

Bible scholar George E. Ladd notes: “The author was well known by the churches of Asia, calling himself their brother, who shared with them the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance (1:9). The question arises: Who was this John? It is clear from the style of the book that he was a Hebrew Christian, saturated in the Old Testament. The early church generally accepted him as the apostle of Jesus Christ, the author of the Fourth Gospel. This was clearly attested as early as A.D. 150 by Justin Martyr and around A.D. 220 by Irenaeus, who had lived at one time in Asia. This apostolic authorship was widely accepted by the ancient fathers.”⁷

⁴ Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 27.

⁵ D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992/2005), 702.

⁶ George R. Beasley-Murray, “Revelation,” in *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. Ed. D.A. Carson, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), electronic ed.

⁷ George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 7.

In the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr (A.D. 165) writes of “John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation that was made to him.”⁸ Irenaeus (A.D. 180) quotes Revelation extensively in his writings and ascribes the book to “John, the Lord’s disciple.”⁹ The dissemination and circulation of the book of Revelation was both early and widespread. Irenaeus refers to “most approved and ancient copies” of the Revelation.¹⁰ According to Hippolytus (A.D. 235), the author of Revelation was the “blessed John, apostle and disciple of the Lord.”¹¹

Bible scholar William Weinrich writes: “Revelation was early and steadfastly recognized and used by Western Christian writers. In Africa, Tertullian (A.D. 220) makes significant use of Revelation, as does Cyprian (A.D. 258). In Rome, the *Sherpherd of Hermas* (A.D. 140), makes use of Revelation, and Hippolytus (A.D. 230) quotes extensively from Revelation and perhaps even wrote a commentary on the book. The Revelation is listed in the Muratorian Canon, which may reflect the Scriptures in use in Rome in the early third century... Although Revelation received its greatest support in the West, testimony to it is by no means lacking in the East.”¹²

According to Eusebius, Theophilus, bishop of Antioch (A.D. 180), wrote a treatise “which he has made use of testimonies drawn from the Apocalypse of John.”¹³ In the East, Origen (A.D. 254) attributes Revelation to John the apostle. While commenting on the Gospel according to John, Origen writes that “the apostle and evangelist—but now also a prophet in addition through the Apocalypse—says correctly... that he saw the Word of God riding on a white horse in the opened heavens.”¹⁴ Isbon Beckwith notes that “so much external testimony to the personality of

⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 81. Justin writes: “There was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place.” See *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:178, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.viii.iv.lxxxi.html>.

⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.20.11. Irenaeus writes: “John also, the Lord’s disciple, when beholding the sacerdotal and glorious advent of His kingdom, says in the Apocalypse...” See *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:491, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.vi.xxi.html>.

¹⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.30.1. See *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:558, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.vii.xxxi.html>.

¹¹ Hippolytus, *On the Antichrist*, 36. Hippolytus writes: “For he sees, when in the isle Patmos, a revelation of awful mysteries, which he recounts freely, and makes known to others. Tell me, blessed John, apostle and disciple of the Lord, what didst thou see and hear concerning Babylon? Arise, and speak; for it sent thee also into banishment.” See *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5:211, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05.iii.iv.ii.i.html>.

¹² William Weinrich, “Introduction to Revelation,” in *Revelation*, ed. William Weinrich, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 12: ixx-xx.

¹³ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.24.1. As cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.ix.xxiv.html>.

¹⁴ Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2:4. The reference is to Rev. 19:13. Origen writes: “In his description in the Apocalypse of the Logos of God, the Apostle and Evangelist, says he saw the Word of God in the opened heaven, and that He was riding on a white horse.” As cited on <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txua/origenjn.htm#2>.

the author, traceable back to almost contemporaneous sources, is found in the case of almost no other book of the New Testament.”¹⁵

Mounce notes the early and widespread recognition of Revelation: “Perhaps more than any other NT book, the Apocalypse enjoyed wide distribution and early recognition. Addressed to seven specific churches in Asia Minor, each of which may have served as a circulation center for the surrounding area, it would within a brief period of time have been read throughout the entire province. Since its message centered on that difficult period into which the church universal was about to enter, it would quickly spread beyond the borders of proconsular Asia and be read by believers in every part of the empire.”¹⁶

Bible scholar Grant Osborne writes: “There are good reasons for upholding the viability of Revelation as penned by the apostle John and for downplaying the differences between it and the Fourth Gospel. First, there is sufficient evidence of acceptance from the early church fathers (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria) to support apostolic authorship. Second, the similarities between the Gospel and the Apocalypse are sufficient to support that decision. The only two books in the NT to argue for the deity of Christ on the basis of the ‘oneness motif’ between God and Jesus are John and the Apocalypse. Also, there is a similar mission theme between them, as God seeks to bring the world to repentance.”¹⁷

In sum, Bible scholar William Weinrich writes: “The view that the Revelation was from John the apostle became the universal opinion of the broad catholic tradition.”¹⁸

From where was John writing the book of Revelation? D.A. Carson describes the provenance of the Apocalypse: “John writes from Patmos, a rocky and rugged island about six miles wide and ten miles long, some forty miles southwest of Ephesus in the Aegean Sea. The island was used by Roman authorities as a place of exile, and John indicates that this was his reason for being there: ‘because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’ (1:9). Early tradition (e.g. Origen) says that the emperor himself condemned John to exile to Patmos, but it is more likely, considering John’s extensive ministry in Asia Minor, that it was a local Roman official from this region who sent John to Patmos in order to get him out of the way.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Isbon Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: Macmillian, 1919; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1979), 351.

¹⁶ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 21.

¹⁷ Osborne, Grant R.: *Revelation*. Grand Rapids, Mich. : Baker Academic, 2002 (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament), S. 5

¹⁸ William Weinrich, “Introduction to Revelation,” in *Revelation*, ed. William Weinrich, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 12: xix.

¹⁹ D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992/2005), 707.

Osborne notes: “Most likely John was temporarily banished at Patmos for proclaiming the gospel. Ancient writers (e.g., Tacitus, Pliny) tell us that Patmos, a volcanic and rocky island, was one of three among the Sporades chain in the Aegean Sea. It was about ten miles long and six wide and was located thirty-seven miles southwest of Miletus, a harbor city near Ephesus. Therefore it is likely that Eusebius was correct when he said John was banished there, according to him, in the fourteenth year, A.D. 95, of Domitian’s reign. Life there was not too harsh, as indicated by its decent-size population and two gymnasia as well as a temple of Artemis. Thus John would have lived a fairly normal life as an exile on that island. He was likely there only a short time and was allowed to go to Ephesus in a general amnesty for exiles by the emperor Nerva in A.D. 96 after Domitian died.”²⁰

Having established that John the Apostle was the author of Revelation: Who was John the Apostle? Our information about John comes from two sources: the New Testament and Patristic texts.

“John in the Gospels

John was the son of Zebedee, probably the younger son, for except in Luke-Acts he is mentioned after his brother James. Luke gives the order Peter, John and James, probably because in the early days of the church John was closely associated with Peter (Lk. 8:51; 9:28; Acts 1:13). That John’s mother’s name was Salome is an inference from Mk. 16:1 and Mt. 27:56; for the third woman who is said to have accompanied the two Marys to the tomb is designated Salome by Mark, and ‘the mother of Zebedee’s children’ by Matthew. Salome is usually regarded as the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, because in Jn. 19:25 four women are said to have stood near the cross, the two Marys mentioned in Mark and Matthew, the mother of Jesus, and his mother’s sister. If this identification is correct, John was a cousin of Jesus on his mother’s side. His parents would appear to have been well-to-do, for his father, a fisherman, had ‘hired servants’ (Mk. 1:20); and Salome was one of the women who ‘provided for Jesus out of their means’ (Lk. 8:3; Mk. 15:40). John has often been identified with the unnamed disciple of John the Baptist, who with Andrew was directed by the Baptist to Jesus as the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:35-37); and if *prōtos* is read in Jn. 1:41, it is possible that Andrew was the first of these two disciples to bring his brother Simon to Jesus, and that the unnamed disciple (John) subsequently brought his own brother James. This is not certain, however, as there are textual variants. After their subsequent call by Jesus to leave their father and their fishing (Mk. 1:19-20), James and John were nicknamed by him *Boanērges*, ‘sons of thunder’ (Mk. 3:17), probably because they were high-spirited, impetuous Galileans, whose zeal was undisciplined and sometimes misdirected (Lk. 9:49). This aspect of their character is shown by their outburst after a Samaritan village had refused their Master entrance (Lk. 9:54). Moreover, their personal ambition was, it would seem, untempered by a true insight into the nature of his kingship; and this lingering trait of selfishness, together with their readiness to suffer for Jesus regardless of self, is illustrated in the request they made to him (a request encouraged by their mother [Mt. 20:20]) that they should be allowed to sit in places of special privilege when Jesus entered into his kingdom (Mk. 10:37).

²⁰Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 81.

On three important occasions in the earthly ministry of Jesus, John is mentioned in company with his brother James and Simon Peter, to the exclusion of the other apostles: at the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mk. 5:37), at the transfiguration (Mk. 9:2) and in the garden of Gethsemane (Mk. 14:33); and, according to Luke, Peter and John were the two disciples sent by Jesus to make preparations for the final Passover meal (Lk. 22:8). John is not mentioned by name in the Fourth Gospel (though the sons of Zebedee are referred to in 21:2), but he is almost certainly the disciple called 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', who lay close to the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper (13:23); who was entrusted with the care of his mother at the time of his death (19:26-27); who ran with Peter to the tomb on the first Easter morning and was the first to see the full significance of the undisturbed grave-clothes with no body inside them (20:2, 8); and who was present when the risen Christ revealed himself to seven of his disciples by the sea of Tiberias. In the account of that last incident in chapter 21, support is given to the later tradition that John lived on to a great age (21:23). The evidence of Jn. 21:24 for the Johannine authorship of this Gospel is capable of different interpretations.

John in Acts

According to the early narratives of Acts, John, together with Peter, with whom he remained closely associated, had to bear the main brunt of Jewish hostility to the early Christian church (Acts 4:13; 5:33, 40). Both men showed a boldness of speech and action which astounded the Jewish authorities, who regarded them as 'uneducated, common men' (Acts 4:13). John, it would seem, continued for some years to play a leading part in the church at Jerusalem. On behalf of the other apostles he and Peter laid hands on the Samaritans who had been converted through the ministry of Philip (Acts 8:14); and he could be described as a reputed 'pillar' of the Jerusalem church at the time when Paul visited the city some 14 years after his conversion (Gal. 2:9). We do not know when John left Jerusalem, nor where he went after his departure. Assuming that he is the seer of the book of Revelation, he was presumably at Ephesus when he was banished to Patmos 'on account of the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus' (Rev. 1:9), though the date of this exile is uncertain. There is no other mention of John in the NT, though some think that he refers to himself as 'the elder' in 2 Jn. 1; 3 Jn. 1.

Patristic evidence

There is a certain amount of late but probably unreliable evidence, that John the apostle died as a martyr early in his career, perhaps at the time his brother James was slain by Herod (Acts 12:2). Against this partial and weakly attested tradition must be set the much stronger tradition reflected in the statement of Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus (AD 190), that John 'who reclined on the Lord's breast', after being 'a witness and a teacher fell asleep at Ephesus'. According to Irenaeus, it was at Ephesus that John 'gave out' the Gospel, and confuted the heretics, refusing to remain under the same roof as Cerinthus, 'the enemy of truth'; at Ephesus that he lingered on 'till the days of Trajan', who reigned AD 98-117. Jerome also repeats the tradition that John tarried at Ephesus to extreme old age, and records that, when John had to be carried to the Christian meetings, he used to repeat again and again 'Little children, love one another'. The only evidence that might seemingly conflict with this tradition of John the apostle's residence at Ephesus is negative in character. It is alleged that if, as the writers at the end of the 2nd century assert, John resided long

at Ephesus and exercised such influence, it is remarkable that there should be an entire absence of any reference to John in the extant Christian literature which emanated from Asia during the first half of the century, particularly in the letters of Ignatius and the Epistle of Polycarp. But, even if the absence of allusions to John in these documents is significant, it may merely be an indication that ‘there was a difference between his reputation and influence at the beginning and at the close of the century. On any score the objection, it would seem, is insufficient to overthrow the tradition which later became so firmly established. Westcott concluded that ‘nothing is better attested in early church history than the residence and work of St John at Ephesus’.”²¹

IV. Date of writing

Andreas Kostenberger writes: “Scholarly opinion concerning the date of Revelation’s composition is divided between an early date (64-69) and a late date (95-96). In addition, some opt for a middle ground conjecturing that composition began in the 60s and was completed in the late 90s. Although certainty continues to be elusive, the late date, during the reign of Domitian, has considerably stronger support.”²²

G.K. Beale provides a helpful summary of the dating of the Apocalypse: “The consensus among twentieth-century scholars is that the Apocalypse was written during the reign of Domitian around 95 A.D. A minority of commentators have dated it immediately prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The difference of dating could alter the interpretation of the book, since the occasion prompting John to write might be different in each case. The early date is especially important for those viewing the main intention of the book as prophecy of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem: interpreters who hold to the early date generally understand the book primarily as a polemic against apostate Jewish faith. And the early date places many of the book’s descriptions of persecution against the background of Nero’s oppression of Christians in 65.

But if the book was written in the nineties, then it was occasioned by the situation of Christians living under the reign of Domitian, a situation that itself is an issue of debate. The majority maintain a late date have viewed Domitian as a persecutor of Christians, though a few others recently have viewed his reign in more benevolent terms.

One can in fact affirm the early date or the late date without the main interpretive approach being affected. Under either dating position the book could be understood as a polemic against Rome and especially against compromise with ungodly Roman culture. The early date allows for an

²¹R.V.G. Tasker, “John the Apostle,” in D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 592.

²² Andreas J. Kostenberger, with L. Scott Kellum and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 814-815.

anti-Jerusalem focus but does not demand it. There are no single arguments that point clearly to the early or the late date. The early date could be right, but the cumulative weight of evidence points to the late date.”²³

Osborne comments on the evidence of persecution within the book and how that impacts the dating of the book: “Revelation speaks of a certain stability in the situation of the churches but yet a fair amount of persecution (so 1:9; 2:2–3, 9–10, 13; 3:8, 10). Most of the persecution was Jewish (2:9; 3:9), however, and the martyrdom of Antipas (2:13) was in the past. There is little evidence in the book for official Roman persecution at the time of writing, and only two of the letters mention affliction (Smyrna and Thyatira), although the letter to Philadelphia presupposes it. The perspective of the book is that most of the oppression is yet to come (6:9–11; 12:11; 13:7, 10, 15; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2; 20:4).

The Neronian persecution was limited to Rome as far as the data tell us, and there is no evidence for it extending to the province of Asia at that time. Also, 11:1–2 is symbolic and does not demand a literal temple. Moreover, the data does not show that there was no persecution, only that it was not as yet instigated officially from Rome. While no evidence of widespread persecution exists, the relation between the state and Roman religious life put tremendous pressure on all citizens to participate in the official religion. Every aspect of civic life, from the guilds to commerce itself, was affected. Also, Asia Minor was known for its pro-Roman zeal, especially in terms of the imperial cult. Therefore, the relationship of Christians to the imperial cult there was a decisive test, and local persecution was likely. This is not systematic persecution under Domitian but the daily oppression and social ostracism that resulted from Christians refusing to participate in the life of the Roman cult.

While the primary emphasis in the seven letters is on internal problems, three passages deal with the external difficulties (2:8–11, 13; 3:8–10) and all center on persecution. This can also be demonstrated in the great NT emphasis on the problem of persecution (Acts 24:5; 28:22; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Thess. 2:14–16; 1 Pet. 2:20; 4:12–5:11) and the emphasis on suffering in Revelation itself. Finally, Roman authors like Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny show how despised Christians were. In short, persecution is a major aspect of the book; while the emphasis on persecution can fit either Nero or Domitian, and while there are problems with both views, the Domitianic date provides a slightly better fit for the data.”²⁴

V. Original Audience and Purpose

²³ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 4. For a detailed analysis of the dating of the Apocalypse see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 5-27.

²⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 7.

According to Morris, in these seven letters, “John has addressed himself to the needs of the little churches, but has dealt with topics which have relevance to God’s people at all times and in all places. He is writing to the churches, but he is also addressing the church as a whole.”²⁵

G.K. Beale writes: “John’s purpose in writing is to encourage those not compromising with idolatry to continue in that stance and to jolt those who are compromising out of their spiritual anesthesia so that they will perceive the spiritual danger they are in and repent and become witnesses to the risen Christ as Lord. For those who never respond, only judgment will ensue. John’s warnings about judgment are primarily addressed to those within the church community who turn out to be apostates and false believers, those who ultimately identify with the ungodly world system. The pagans outside the church who persecute the saints are also the focus of judgment. But the book is not addressed mainly to such outsiders to encourage them to believe or to warn them about coming judgment if they do not believe, though the author would certainly affirm that pagans need to believe the gospel to experience salvation and are likewise liable to judgment if they do not believe (e.g. 14:6-11; chs. 17-18). Therefore, the focus of the book is exhortation to the church community to witness to Christ in the midst of a compromising, idolatrous church and world.”

The purpose of Revelation, according to George R. Beasley-Murray, is to grow its readers in their faith: “Revelation is a trumpet call to faith. The book was written to strengthen the faith and courage of John’s fellow-believers in Christ, to nerve them for battle with antichristian forces in the world, and to help them bear witness to the one true Lord and Saviour of the world. This end was achieved by emphasizing the following themes:

1. The sovereignty of God in Christ, in that time as in all times. Just as Jesus made known the advent of the kingdom of God in his ministry, death, resurrection and coming again (Mk. 1:14–15; 8:31; 10:45; 14:62), so that theme is central to Revelation from beginning to end (1:8; 5:5–14; 12:10–12; 19:11–21:5). No wonder, for the book is none other than ‘the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ’ (1:2)!
2. The satanic nature of the contemporary adulation of the Roman emperor. In Rome itself the claim of the emperor to be ‘Lord and God’ was something of a joke—privately, of course! In the area of the churches to which Revelation was addressed it was taken with deadly seriousness. For Caesar to demand what belonged to God alone indicated that ‘the secret power of lawlessness’ was ‘already at work’ (2 Thes. 2:7), and it was to reach its climax in the manifestation of the final antichrist. Even so, God is never more sovereign than in the frantic reign of antichrist (13:5).

²⁵ Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 58.

3. The inescapable judgments of the Lord upon those who submit to the pseudo-Christ rather than God's Christ. It is significant that the second and third series of the Messianic judgments of this book are reminiscent of the plagues on Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who resisted the word of God through Moses. Revelation bids us 'consider the kindness and sternness of God' (Rom. 11:22).

4. The sure issue of the conflict between the church and the oppressive powers in the world in the manifestation of Christ and the glory of his kingdom. The victory is 'sure', for the devil is a defeated foe already in the death and resurrection of Jesus (Jn. 12:31–32 with Rev. 12:9–12), which anticipates the ultimate completion of God's purpose of good for the world he has made and redeemed (21:9–22:5).²⁶

VI. Geography and History of the Seven Churches

Why did John write to *these* seven churches? "All seven were within one hundred miles of Ephesus in the Roman proconsular province of Asia and might have formed an established circular route for itinerant Christian prophets and teachers, perhaps since Paul's day... Under the Roman empire, Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamon were the three greatest cities in the Roman province of Asia."²⁷

Ephesus (2:1-7)

Ephesus was an important center for early Christianity and is mentioned frequently in the NT (Acts 18:19-28; 19:1; 20:16-17; 1 Cor 15:32; 16:8; 1 Tim 1:3; 2 Tim 1:18; 4:12). According to Robert Mounce: "It is appropriate that the first letter should be sent to Ephesus. It was the most important city of proconsular Asia. Situated at the mouth of the Cayster River on a gulf of the Aegean Sea, it flourished as an important commercial and export center for Asia. The traveler from Rome landing at Ephesus would proceed up a magnificent avenue thirty-five feet wide and lined with columns that led from the harbor to the center of the city. Ephesus was part of the kingdom of Pergamum, which Attalus III bequeathed to Rome in 133 B.C. By NT times it had grown to more than a quarter of a million in population. Its commercial importance was heightened by the fact that three great trade routes converged at the city (from the Euphrates by way of Colossae, from Galatia through Sardis, and from the Maeander valley to the south and east.) Although Ephesus was not the titular capital of Asia (Pergamum retained this honor), it was a city of great political importance. As a free city it had been granted by Rome the right of

²⁶George R. Beasley-Murray, "Revelation," in *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. Ed. D.A. Carson, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), electronic ed.

²⁷ David E. Eune, *Revelation 1-5*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1997), 1:131, 136.

self-government... It boasted a major stadium, marketplace, and theater. The latter was built on the west slope of Mt. Pion overlooking the harbor, and seated some 25,000 persons...

The major religious attraction was the Temple of Artemis (Diana in Latin), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. About four times the size of the Parthenon, it was adorned by the works of many great artists. After a devastating fire in 356 B.C. that destroyed the first temple, it was rebuilt, with Dinocrates as architect. Pliny the elder gives the dimensions of the temple as 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, and sixty feet high. He also notes that the 127 pillars were of Parian marble, with thirty-six of them overlaid with gold and jewels. Artemis herself was originally an Anatolian fertility goddess, but under the influence of Greek culture she had become the focus of an extensive religious cult.

The Christian faith came to Ephesus perhaps with Aquila and Priscilla about 52 A.D. when Paul left them there en route from Corinth to Antioch (see Acts 18:18-22). On his next missionary journey the apostle remained in Ephesus more than two years (Acts 19:8, 10), and some time later Timothy ministered there (1 Timothy 1:3). It was the apostle John, however, who is most closely associated with the city.”²⁸

Bimson and Kane write: “Ephesus was the most important city in the province but is now uninhabited. It was situated at the mouth of the Cayster River between the mountain range of Coressus and the sea. A magnificent road 11 m (c. 36 ft) wide and lined with columns ran down through the city to the fine harbour, which served both as a great export centre at the end of the Asiatic caravan-route and also as a natural landing-point from Rome. The city has been undergoing excavation for many years and is probably the most extensive and impressive ruined site of Asia Minor. This site was originally sacred to the worship of the Anatolian fertility goddess, later identified with Greek Artemis and Latin Diana. The church in Ephesus is addressed first of the seven (Rev. 2:1-7), as being the most important church in the *de facto* capital, and as being the landing-place for a messenger from Patmos and standing at the head of a circular road joining the seven cities in order. This church is flourishing, but is troubled by false teachers, and has lost its ‘first love’. The false apostles (2:2) are most probably like the Nicolaitans, who seem to have advocated compromise with the power of paganism for the Christian under pressure. The Ephesians were steadfast, but deficient in love.”²⁹

George R. Beasley-Murray writes: “Ephesus was one of the great cities of the ancient world and by far the largest in Asia Minor. It was proud of its title ‘Temple Warden’, which originally referred to the temple of Artemis (Diana) but later included two temples devoted to the worship of the Roman emperors. The temple of Artemis was a famous place of refuge for fugitives, but its vaunted ‘salvation’ was greatly abused, and the surrounding area gave the criminal a sanctuary beyond the reach of the law, becoming the headquarters of organized crime. The interest of the

²⁸ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 66-67.

²⁹John J. Bimson and J.P. Kane, “Asia Minor: The Seven Churches” in *New Bible Atlas*, (Wheaton, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 82-83.

populace in magic and superstition is illustrated in Acts 19:13–20. Paul founded the church in Ephesus and made it the centre for evangelizing the province (Acts 19:1–10). According to later tradition the apostle John and Mary, the mother of Jesus, settled there.”³⁰

Smyrna (2:8-11)

Mounce writes: “The second letter is addressed to the church in Smyrna (modern Izmir), the only one of the seven cities still in existence, although the small town of Bergama still stands on the plain below the acropolis of Pergamum... Smyrna lay about thirty-five miles north of Ephesus on the east shore of the Aegean Sea. Its excellent harbor was sufficiently narrow at the mouth that it could be closed for protection in time of war. An important road extended eastward from Smyrna over which the produce of the rich valley of the Hermus moved. In exports, Smyrna was second only to Ephesus.

Smyrna was a proud and beautiful city. Three to four hundred years after it had been destroyed by Alyattes, king of Lydia, it was rebuilt in 290 B.C. by Lysimachus and Antionus as a model city. It boasted a famous stadium, library, and public theater (the largest in Asia). It claimed to be the birthplace of the great epic poet Homer. A famous thoroughfare called the Street of Gold curved around Mt. Pagus (which rose over 500 feet from the harbor) like a necklace on the statue of a goddess. At either end was a temple, one to a local variety of Cybele, known as Sipyrene Mother (a patron divinity), and the other to Zeus. The acropolis on Mt. Pagus was called the crown of garland of Smyrna. In NT times the population may have been about 200,000. Coins describe the city as ‘First of Asia in beauty and size.’”³¹

Bimson and Kane write: “Smyrna is modern Izmir, the second largest city in Asiatic Turkey. The gospel probably reached Smyrna at an early date, presumably from Ephesus (Acts 19:10). The ‘angel of the church in Smyrna’ is the recipient of the second of the letters of the ‘seven churches ... in Asia’ (Rev. 2:8-11). As in other commercial cities, the church encountered opposition from the Jews (Rev. 2:9; cf. 3:9). The description of the Christ as the one who was dead and lived again (v.8) may allude to the resurgence of the city to new prosperity after a long period in obscurity. The ‘crown’ (v.10) was rich in associations at Smyrna. It may suggest the victor’s wreath at the games, or current forms of eulogy which used the image of the beauty and glory of the city and its buildings. Cf. also James 1:12. The call to faithfulness (v.10) is a call to the church to fulfil in the deepest way the historic reputation of the city.”³²

George R. Beasley-Murray writes: “Smyrna was a seaport, and its prosperity on account of its position was well established before Christian times and continues (as Izmir) to this day. The first city on the site was destroyed in 600 BC, and it was rebuilt by the successor of Alexander the

³⁰ George R. Beasley-Murray, “Revelation,” in *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. Ed. D.A. Carson, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), electronic ed.

³¹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 73.

³²John J. Bimson and J.P. Kane, “Asia Minor: The Seven Churches” in *New Bible Atlas*, (Wheaton, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 82-83.

Great. The image of the phoenix, the legendary bird that rises from the ashes of its destruction, was applied to Smyrna. This is not the only instance of a church reflecting the history of the city in which it is set. For one theme dominates this short letter, that of suffering persecution. Hence the greeting from the Lord in the opening sentence: *These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.* The church is reminded that its Lord is the conqueror of death and has conquered it for their sakes. It so happens that one of the best known Christians in the early church was probably sitting in the congregation when this letter was read. This was Polycarp, who later became Smyrna's bishop and was martyred about 160 AD. When at his trial he was commanded to curse Christ, he stated that he had served the Lord for eighty-six years and had received only good from him, how could he forswear his king?"³³

Pergamum (2:12-17)

Bimson and Kane write: "Pergamum is listed third of the 'seven churches' (Rev. 2:12-17); the order suits its position in geographical sequence. This was the place 'where Satan's throne is' (Rev. 2:13). The phrase has been referred to the complex of pagan cults, of Zeus, Athena, Dionysus and Asclepius, established by the Attalid kings, that of Asclepius Soter (the 'saviour', 'healer') being of special importance. These cults are illustrative of the religious history of Pergamum, but the main allusion is probably to emperor worship. This was where the worship of the divine emperor had been made the touch-stone of civic loyalty under Domitian. It marked a crisis for the church in Asia. Antipas (v.13) is probably cited as a representative (perhaps the first) of those who were brought to judgment and execution here for their faith."³⁴

George R. Beasley-Murray writes: "For many years there was rivalry between Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum as to which was the first city of Asia. Of one thing there was no doubt: Pergamum was the centre of the religious life of the province. The city was dominated by a huge hill that rose to 1000 ft above sea level and had many temples. The most famous was the temple of Asclepius, the god of healing, closely associated with the snake, which gave Pergamum a reputation like Lourdes today. There was also a huge altar of Zeus, built to commemorate a notable victory. Most important of all, Pergamum had the first temple in the area dedicated to Augustus and Rome, hence it became the centre for the worship of the emperor in the province. As this was as much a political as a religious affiliation it created peculiar problems for Christians. The titles of Lord, Saviour and God were constantly applied to the emperor, which Christians could do no other than resist in the light of their sole rightful ascription to Jesus."³⁵

Thyatira (2:18-29)

³³ George R. Beasley-Murray, "Revelation," in *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. Ed. D.A. Carson, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), electronic ed.

³⁴ John J. Bimson and J.P. Kane, "Asia Minor: The Seven Churches" in *New Bible Atlas*, (Wheaton, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 82-83.

³⁵ George R. Beasley-Murray, "Revelation," in *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. Ed. D.A. Carson, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), electronic ed.

Bimson and Kane write: “The Thyatiran church was the fourth of the ‘seven churches’ that are in Asia’ (Rev. 1:11). Some of the symbols in the letter to the church (Rev.2:18-29) seem to allude to the circumstances of the city. The description of the Christ (v.18) is appropriate for a city renowned for its brass-working (*chalkolibanos*, translated ‘fine brass’, may be a technical term for some local type of brassware). The terms of the promise (vv.26-27) may reflect the long military history of the city. ‘Jezebel’ (the name is probably symbolic) was evidently a woman who was accepted within the fellowship of the church (v.20). Her teaching is nowhere recorded but probably advocated a measure of compromise with some activity which was implicitly pagan.”³⁶

George R. Beasley-Murray writes: “Thyatira was a city of craftsmen and merchants. We recall that the first convert in Macedonia was Lydia of Thyatira, a seller of purple cloth (Acts 16:14). The major problem for the church was posed by the many trade guilds in the city. This was unusual, in that Roman administration discouraged such; but it is thought that Thyatira was useful to the Romans as a supplier for their garrison in nearby Pergamum, so they could overlook the guilds. The Christians, however, could not. Guilds had a patron god; the local god of Thyatira, a representation of Apollo, probably served that purpose. The feasts of the guilds were held in a temple and were viewed as religious occasions; the meat was offered to the god, so that participators shared it with him, and the occasions not infrequently ended in debauchery.”³⁷

Sardis (3:1-6)

Bimson and Kane write: “Sardis was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia and was renowned for its wealth, especially under Croesus. The letter to ‘the angel of the church in Sardis’ (Rev. 3:1-6) suggests that the early Christian community there was imbued with the same spirit as the city, resting on its past reputation and without any present achievement, and failing, as the city had twice failed, to learn from its past and be vigilant. The symbol of ‘white garments’ (vv.4-5) was rich in meaning in a city noted for its luxury clothing trade; the faithful few who are vigilant shall be arrayed to share in the triumphal coming of their Lord.”³⁸

George R. Beasley-Murray writes: “Sardis was a city with an illustrious past of which it was proud, but it had less to be proud of in John’s time. The capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, it reached the peak of its wealth about 700 BC under Gyges, known to the Assyrians as Gugu. The Jews called this king Gog, and he was thought of as symbolic of the evil powers to arise at the end of the age. He was slain in a surprise attack by the Cimmerians. The city sank into oblivion after the Persian conquest, but it recovered something of its prestige when, through the help of Tiberius, it was rebuilt following an earthquake in AD 17. The church in Sardis reflected the history of the city; once it had had a name for spiritual achievement, but now it was lifeless (1).

³⁶John J. Bimson and J.P. Kane, “Asia Minor: The Seven Churches” in *New Bible Atlas*, (Wheaton, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 82-83.

³⁷ George R. Beasley-Murray, “Revelation,” in *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. Ed. D.A. Carson, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), electronic ed.

³⁸John J. Bimson and J.P. Kane, “Asia Minor: The Seven Churches” in *New Bible Atlas*, (Wheaton, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 82-83.

Two other elements in the city's life are echoed in the letter. Sardis was built on a mountain and had an acropolis which was viewed as impregnable. 'To capture the acropolis of Sardis' was proverbial in Greek to do the impossible. But no less than five times the acropolis was conquered, twice through lack of vigilance. The parallel with the church's lack of wakefulness and its dire situation is striking (2–3). Sardis was also a centre for woollen goods and claimed to be first in the business of dyeing wool; this, too, seems to be reflected in 3:4–5.”³⁹

Philadelphia (3:7-13)

Bimson and Kane write: “The letter to ‘the angel of the church in Philadelphia’ (Rev. 3:7-13) probably alludes to some of the circumstances of the city. As Philadelphus was renowned for his loyalty to his brother, so the church, the true Philadelphia, inherits and fulfils his character by its steadfast loyalty to Christ (vv.8, 10). As the city stands by the ‘open door’ of a region from which its wealth derives, so the church is given an ‘open door’ of opportunity to exploit (v.8; cf. 2 Cor. 2:12). The symbols of the ‘crown’ and the ‘temple’ (vv. 11-12) point to a contrast between the games and religious festivals of the city. In contrast with the impermanence of life in a city prone to earthquake, those who ‘overcome’ are promised the ultimate stability of being built into the temple of God.”⁴⁰

George R. Beasley-Murray writes: “Philadelphia, like the neighbouring town of Sardis, suffered grievously from earthquakes and, while not so badly affected as the latter in the catastrophic earthquake of AD 17, it experienced them more frequently. Of this aspect of the city's life Strabo wrote, ‘The walls never cease being cracked, and different parts of the city are constantly suffering damage. That is why the actual town has few inhabitants, but the majority live as farmers in the countryside, as they have fertile land’. The insecurity of life in Philadelphia is contrasted in v 12 with the promise of a permanent place in the city of God, and they who live in it will not have to find a safer place outside its walls! The whole letter is dominated by the sure and certain prospect of life in the kingdom of God.⁷ The risen Lord is *holy and true*, like the Father (6:10), and so may be trusted to keep his word. He *holds the key of David*. In 1:18, as the resurrected one, Jesus has ‘the keys of death and Hades’, and so can unlock the gates of death and lead into eternal life; here the phrase recalls Is. 22:22, where it signifies authority over David's house and means the Messiah's undisputed authority over entrance into, or exclusion from, the kingdom of God.”⁴¹

Laodicea (3:14-22)

Bimson and Kane write: “Laodicea was a city of SW Phrygia. It was founded by the Seleucid Antiochus II in the third century BC and called after his wife Laodice. It was a prosperous

³⁹ George R. Beasley-Murray, “Revelation,” in *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. Ed. D.A. Carson, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), electronic ed.

⁴⁰ John J. Bimson and J.P. Kane, “Asia Minor: The Seven Churches” in *New Bible Atlas*, (Wheaton, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 82-83.

⁴¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, “Revelation,” in *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. Ed. D.A. Carson, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), electronic ed.

commercial centre, lying near Hierapolis and Colossae in the valley of the Lycus, a tributary of the Maeander. The last of the letters to ‘the seven churches ... in Asia’ was addressed to Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22). Its imagery owes relatively little to the OT, but contains pointed allusions to the character and circumstances of the city. For all its wealth, it could produce neither the healing power of hot water, like its neighbour Hierapolis, nor the refreshing power of cold water to be found at Colossae, but merely lukewarm water, useful only as an emetic. The church was charged with a similar uselessness: it was self-sufficient rather than half-hearted. Like the city, it thought it had ‘need of nothing’. In fact it was spiritually poor, naked and blind, and needed ‘gold’, ‘white garments’ and ‘eyesalve’ more effective than its bankers, clothiers and doctors could supply (v. 18). Like citizens inhospitable to a traveller who offers them priceless goods, the Laodiceans had closed their doors and left their real Provider outside. Christ turns in loving appeal to the individual (v.20).⁴²

George R. Beasley-Murray writes: “Laodicea was situated on the bank of the River Lycus. Its position at the junction of three imperial roads traversing Asia Minor favoured its development as a wealthy commercial and administrative centre. Three facts known throughout the Roman world about the city throw light on this letter: it was a banking centre, whose banks even Cicero recommended for exchanging money; it manufactured clothing and woollen carpets, made especially from the glossy black wool of sheep reared locally; and it had a medical school and produced medicines, notably an eye ointment made from a pulverized rock in the area. The stern characterization of the church’s spiritual life (17) and the call for its repentance (18) are both couched in terms of these three activities of the city.”⁴³

VII. Jesus in Revelation

The Christology of Revelation is “astonishingly explicit and high. Indeed, the Christology is analogous to that in the Gospel of John. Jesus as the Lamb is on the same plane as God and is worshiped as a divine being. He is the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God. He is the glorious Son of Man and the ruler of the kings of the earth. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Just as God is praised, so too Jesus is praised. Just as God is the Alpha and Omega and the first and the last, so too Jesus is the Alpha and Omega and the first and the last. And it is this Jesus whose death frees believers from their sins and who makes their robes white by his blood.”⁴⁴

⁴²John J. Bimson and J.P. Kane, *New Bible Atlas*, Includes index., electronic ed., 82 (Wheaton, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, c1985).

⁴³ George R. Beasley-Murray, “Revelation,” in *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. Ed. D.A. Carson, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), electronic ed.

⁴⁴Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 430.

The vision of the exalted and reigning Jesus Christ in Revelation 1 is steeped with Old Testament imagery and language. G.K. Beale notes how much of the Apocalypse is rooted in the Old Testament: “No other book of the NT is as permeated by the OT as is Revelation. Although its author seldom quotes the OT directly, allusions and echoes are found in almost every verse of the book.”⁴⁵ Gordon Fee agrees: “John sees everything in terms of the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He has over 250 specific echoes of or allusions to the Old Testament so that every significant moment in his story is imaged almost exclusively in Old Testament language. This begins with the picture of Christ (1:12-18) with its extraordinary collage from Daniel 7:9, 10:6, and Ezekiel 43:2.”⁴⁶

Dennis Johnson, in his commentary on Revelation, notes the strategy for understanding Revelation ought to be repetitive and careful reading of the text: “You cannot understand any individual passage in Revelation unless you understand the book as a whole, but you cannot understand the book as a whole unless you understand its individual passages.”⁴⁷

In other words, in order to understand fully what John’s descriptions of Jesus in Revelation 1 mean, one must examine what John says about this same Jesus in other parts of the Apocalypse. For example, Richard Bauckham writes: “John’s vision begins with a Christophany. The risen Christ appears as a glorious heavenly being (1:12-16), and declares his identity thus: ‘I am the first and the last and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’ (1:17-18) The self-declaration, ‘I am the first and the last’, corresponds to the divine self-declaration, ‘I am the Alpha and Omega’ (1:8), and that in Revelation as a whole there is the following pattern of two self-declarations by God and two by Christ:

God: I am the Alpha and the Omega. (1:8)

Christ: I am the first and the last. (1:17)

God: I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. (21:6)

Christ: I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. (22:13)

⁴⁵ G.K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, “Revelation,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 1081.

⁴⁶ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 429.

⁴⁷ Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001), 3.

A close study of this pattern reveals the remarkable extent to which Revelation identifies Jesus Christ with God.”⁴⁸

Thomas Schreiner provides a helpful extensive summary on the Christology of Revelation 1 as well as the centrality of Jesus Christ in the theology of the book of Revelation. Schreiner also analyzes the titles, the worship of Christ, and his atoning work in Revelation 1 and the remainder of the book:

“Centrality of Christ

One of the most astonishing, though often neglected, Christologies in the New Testament is in the book of Revelation. The book commences with the words ‘The revelation of Jesus Christ’ (Rev. 1:1). The Greek genitive behind ‘of Jesus Christ’ probably is both subjective and objective. The book is given by Jesus Christ and is about Jesus Christ. Revelation discloses and unveils the truth about Jesus Christ, and hence the first verse captures one of the central themes of the book. Similarly, the phrase ‘the testimony of Jesus’ (Rev. 1:2) and ‘testimony of Jesus’ (Rev. 1:9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4) fix our attention on Jesus Christ. So too the martyrs are put to death for their testimony of Jesus (Rev. 20:4). The testimony of and about Jesus can be described as the proclamation of God’s word, is that the word heralded centers on Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:2, 9). The centrality of Jesus is evident also in the mysterious and quite difficult sentence ‘The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’ (Rev. 10:10). I suggest that the verse is teaching that testimony about Jesus is what constitutes Spirit-inspired prophecy. If prophecy is not Christ-centered, then it has veered away from the gospel.

Titles

Even clearer are some of the titles used for Jesus Christ. On three occasions in Revelation he declares, ‘I am the first and the last’ (Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 22:13), emphasizing especially his sovereignty over death. What stands out, however, is that the same expression is used of Yahweh in the OT (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). Nor would John be ignorant of the OT background, since Revelation is stocked with allusions to and echoes of the OT. We see the same phenomenon with the phrases ‘Alpha and Omega’ and ‘the beginning and the end.’ God himself announces that he is ‘the Alpha and Omega’ at the commencement (Rev. 1:8) and conclusion (Rev. 21:6) of Revelation. Similarly, he affirms that he is ‘the beginning and the end’ (Rev. 21:6). Both ‘Alpha and Omega’ and ‘beginning and end’ point to God’s sovereignty over history. Since history commences and concludes with him, no part of history spins out of his control. He rules over the entire expanse of history so that his purposes will not be frustrated. The sovereignty over history exercised by God belongs also to Jesus Christ. The functions of deity are carried out by him. Jesus is ‘the beginning of God’s creation’ (Rev. 3:14). This does not mean that Jesus is part of the created order, for that would blatantly contradict his being the Alpha and the Omega. It means all things have their origin in Christ.

⁴⁸ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 54-55.

Worship of Christ

Another set of remarkable texts should be noted in which God and Jesus Christ receive the same honor and glory. For instance, Rev. 4 is programmatic for the entire book. John has a vision of God reigning on his throne as creator, and the angelic hosts bow down and worship him as Lord of all. The focus shifts in Rev. 5 from God as creator to Jesus Christ as redeemer, the one who is both the lion who rules and the lamb who was slain. In Rev. 4:11 the angels worship God, confessing that he is worthy to be worshiped as creator. In Rev. 5:9-10 the angels ascribe worthiness to the Lamb, acknowledging that he deserves worship as redeemer. On the one hand, God is 'worthy' of deserves worship as redeemer. On the one hand, God is 'worthy' of 'glory and honor and power' (Rev. 4:11); on the other hand, Christ is 'worthy' of 'power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing' (Rev. 5:12). Obviously, Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God deserves the same honor and glory that belongs to God. Indeed, God and Jesus Christ are worshiped together at the conclusion of Rev. 5: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!' (Rev. 5:13). The twenty-four elders and four living beings then bow down and worship (Rev. 5:14).

The worship of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, along with God cannot be ascribed to a dilution of monotheism. Twice John is so overcome by the glory of the angelic messenger that he bows down to worship the angel (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). In both instances the angel admonishes John that only God should be worshiped, and he forbids John from worshipping an angel. By way of contrast, we notice the oft-repeated collocation of God and Christ in Revelation, so that they receive equal esteem. When judgment is inflicted on the disobedient, they cry out in terror, asking that mountains and rocks would fall on them to conceal them 'from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb' (Rev. 6:16). This Lamb is not merely the suffering one who atones for sin; he also judges in anger those who resist his rule. Hence, John can speak of the anger of God and the Lamb: 'the great day of *their* wrath has come' (Rev. 6:17).

By way of contrast, the redeemed from every cultural and ethnic background stand before God and praise him. They do not merely stand, however, in God's presence; they stand 'before the throne and before the Lamb' (Rev. 7:9), suggesting again the Lamb's equality with God. Indeed, they praise God for the salvation that they have received, and yet they place the Lamb on the same plane with God: 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' (Rev. 7:10). The kingdom belongs to the 'Lord and... his Christ' (Rev. 12:10). Elsewhere those who have been redeemed are described as 'firstfruits for God and the Lamb' (Rev. 14:4). They have both the name of the Lamb and the Father's name on their foreheads (Rev. 14:1). Those who conquer the second death and reign forever are not merely priests of God; they serve as 'priests of God and Christ' (Rev. 20:6). The temple in the new heavens and new earth is not longer a building. The earthly temple always pointed to something, or we should say 'someone,' greater, so that the 'temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb' (Rev. 21:22).

Nor does the heavenly city need created light, whether of the sun, moon, or stars, 'for the glory of God gives it light' (Rev. 21:23). Characteristically, John does not leave out Jesus Christ, for he immediately adds 'and its lamp is the Lamb' (Rev. 21:23). Finally, God's throne, symbolizing his

sovereignty and rule, is erected in the new Jerusalem. And yet Rev. 22:3 clarifies that the throne does not belong to God alone: it is ‘the throne of God and of the Lamb’ (Rev. 22:3; cf. 22:1). The Lamb reigns equally with the Father. This astonishing and frequent collocation of God and Christ indicates that Jesus was considered to be divine in John’s theology, that both God and the Lamb are to be worshiped and adored. The language and symbolism of Revelation differs from the Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles, but the Christology is the same. Jesus is divine. He is to be worshiped as God is to be worshiped. Those who fail to worship the Lamb do not truly worship God. The sovereignty of God speaks also of the universal rule of the Lamb, the one who ordains all of history.

Son of God and Word of God

John uses other titles to feature the glory of Jesus. He is ‘the Son of God’ (Rev. 2:18). In contrast to its regular appearance in the Gospel of John, the title is used just this once in Revelation. When we consider the high Christology of the remainder of Revelation, we have good grounds for concluding that ‘Son of God’ bears the same meaning as in the Gospel. Jesus is the unique Son of the Father, having a special relationship with God. When Jesus masses his armies and prepares to come to judge the world, he is identified as the ‘Word of God’ (Rev. 19:13) who carries out the divine judgment. Elsewhere in Revelation the ‘word of God’ refers to the message that John proclaims (Rev. 1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4). We noted earlier that the message proclaimed in the word is inseparable from the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 1:2, 9; 20:4). Interestingly, the claim that ‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’ (Rev. 19:10) immediately follows the admonition to worship God. We could say that genuine prophecy exalts Jesus, and only those who exalt Jesus truly worship God. The reference to the ‘Word of God’ (Rev. 19:13) suggests again that John draws on both the Gospel of John (John 1:1, 14) and 1 John (1 John 1:2), where Jesus is identified as the Word. He is God’s message to human beings—the fulfillment of all prophecy and preaching.

Son of Man

Revelation features Jesus as the Son of Man. References to Jesus as the Son of Man are scarce outside the Gospels. An allusion to the ‘son of man’ of Dan. 7:13 crops up early in Revelation 1: ‘Behold, he is coming with the clouds’ (Rev. 1:7). In Dan. 7 the son of man comes with the clouds and appears before God himself, ‘the Ancient of Days’ (Dan. 7:13). John follows NT tradition and applies this to Jesus’ coming to the earth when he returns to consummate the kingdom. Perhaps we are justified in inferring that every reference to Jesus’ future coming alludes indirectly to the prophecy in Dan. 7 (cf. Rev. 1:3; 2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11, 20; 16:15; 22:7, 10, 12, 20). In any case, it is instructive to see that God himself can also be described as the coming one (Rev. 1:4, 8; 4:8). Again we see the overlap between God and Jesus.

Jesus is explicitly recognized as the Son of Man in John’s vision in Rev. 1:13–16. In the vision John sees not the historical Jesus but rather the exalted Christ. The robe that reaches to Christ’s feet probably signifies his priestly authority (Rev. 1:13). Remarkably, his hair is like white wool and is ‘white as snow’ (Rev. 1:14). The description is remarkable because in Dan. 7 Yahweh’s clothing is ‘white as snow’ and his hair is ‘like pure wool’ (Dan. 7:9). John has not erred in his

memory of the biblical account. He modifies the OT account to teach that the Son of Man deserves the same honor and glory as the Ancient of Days. He is to be venerated and worshiped in the same way God is. Like God, his eyes flame with fire, searching all things so that nothing is hidden from his gaze (Rev. 1:14; 2:18, 23; 19:12). Those who secretly practice evil cannot avoid his penetrating gaze, and they will face judgment.

The Son of Man has feet of bronze refined in a furnace (Rev. 1:15). In the ancient world warfare conducted without good footwear for soldiers spelled disaster. Armies that engaged in long marches could lose battles because the soldiers were incapacitated by damage done to their feet by the long journey. Jesus as the divine warrior does not suffer from the same malady. His bronze feet overcome any obstacles with ease (Rev. 2:18). He is prepared to crush any who oppose him (Rev. 2:26–27). As the divine warrior on a white horse, he is prepared to lead the armies of heaven into the last battle (Rev. 19:11–21). He wields a sharp, two-edged sword in his mouth (Rev. 1:16). The double-edged sword symbolizes Jesus' word (Rev. 2:12, 16; 19:15), by which he defeats his enemies without any assistance from his army.

The voice of the Son of Man resounds like a cataract of waters (Rev. 1:15; cf. 14:2; 19:6). Ezekiel compares the sound of many waters to 'the sound of the Almighty' (Ezek. 1:24). The glory and brilliance of God's arrival is compared to the cascading of many waters (Ezek. 43:2). The Son of Man's face shines with a brilliance like the brightness of the sun (Rev. 1:16). Such glory on one's face is not necessarily a sign of deity, for mighty angels shine like the sun as well (Rev. 10:1). The glow from Jesus' face reminds one of the transfiguration (Matt. 17:2). John faints in the presence of such glory (Rev. 1:17), just as Ezekiel was cast to the ground when he saw the glory of Yahweh (Ezek. 1:26–28). Falling to the ground in weakness and awe does not necessarily indicate that Jesus is divine. Daniel fainted in the presence of a glorious angel (Dan. 8:18). But when Jesus says, 'I am the first and the last,' it is evident that he is not merely an angel.

Whether the 'one like a son of man' in Rev. 14:14 refers to Jesus is debated, and resolving the identity of the one mentioned here is not crucial for constructing the Christology of Revelation. Most likely, however, the title refers to Jesus as the Son of Man, for the one spoken of here reaps the earth in judgment (Rev. 14:14–16). The main objection to identifying the 'one like a son of man' as Jesus here is that this figure obeys a command issued by an angel. The subjection of the Son of Man to an angel would be odd, so we cannot be certain that Jesus himself is in view. Perhaps the best answer is that in the apocalyptic genre the angel's command simply mediates the will of God.

Sovereign and Living One

Revelation is addressed to churches in Asia Minor suffering from discrimination and persecution. In response, John highlights Jesus' sovereignty over all. As the Lamb, Jesus is 'King of kings' (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). The same verses affirm that he is 'Lord of lords.' Paul applies both titles to God in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 6:15), and in the OT Yahweh is hailed as 'Lord of lords' (Deut. 10:17; Ps. 136:3), and in Second Temple literature as 'King of kings' (2 Macc. 13:4;

3 Macc. 5:35). Jesus rules over the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5); it may appear that the political leaders of this world exercise control, but they serve under the authority of Jesus himself. Further, in Rev. 1:5–6 there is a doxology to Jesus, but doxologies belong to God alone. Jesus is crowned with diadems symbolizing his rule over all, and the fact that no one knows his name demonstrates that no one exercises control over him (Rev. 19:12). In Hebrew culture naming signifies authority over what is named, just as Adam exercises his authority in naming the animals in the garden (Gen. 2:19).

Jesus is ‘the faithful witness’ (Rev. 1:5; cf. 3:14; 19:11), thereby summoning suffering believers to imitate their Lord. Jesus’ faithfulness is not the end of the story. He is also ‘the firstborn of the dead’ (Rev. 1:5). The promised resurrection of the age to come (i.e., the new creation) has dawned in Christ’s resurrection. His resurrection is the first in history and also signals his sovereignty over death, so that the word ‘firstborn’ indicates both temporal priority and sovereignty. He once was dead, but he has conquered death and is now ‘the living one’ who has triumphed over death forever (Rev. 1:18). Designating Jesus as the living one is significant, for in the OT the Lord is regularly called ‘the living God.’ Jesus has not merely conquered death personally; he also holds ‘the keys of Death and Hades’ (Rev. 1:18). Death has not prevailed over Jesus, but rather Jesus has overcome death, so that it is now subjugated to him. Believers can face death with confidence, even if Rome itself stands against them, for Jesus is sovereign over death.

In a striking image, Jesus as God’s Lamb is also the shepherd of God’s people (Rev. 7:17). We again have an echo of John’s Gospel, where Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd (John 10:11, 14). Jesus’ role as the shepherd points to his deity, for in the OT the Lord shepherds his people (Ps. 23:1; 28:9; 80:1; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:12, 15; Mic. 7:14) and leads them to watering places (Ps. 23:2). Of course, in some texts the shepherd is a messianic figure (Ezek. 34:23; 37:24; Mic. 5:4).

Since Jesus is the living one, as the risen Christ he continues to speak to churches (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). The state of the churches is not hidden from him. He knows intimately the spiritual state of each one (Rev. 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15), and he authoritatively gives commands to the various churches. He holds the seven stars in his hand, representing the angels of the churches, and he knows the condition of the churches because he walks among the lampstands (Rev. 1:20; 2:1). Jesus’ authority as the risen one is indicated by the verbs used to designate his activity (or potential activity) in the letters to the churches: he will ‘come’ (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3; cf. 3:10); ‘remove’ (Rev. 2:5); ‘grant’ (Rev. 2:7; 3:21); ‘give’ (Rev. 2:17, 23, 26, 28); ‘throw’ (Rev. 2:22); ‘strike’ (Rev. 2:23); ‘never blot’ (Rev. 3:5); ‘confess’ (Rev. 3:5); ‘make’ (Rev. 3:9, 12); ‘keep’ (Rev. 3:10); ‘write’ (Rev. 3:12); ‘spit’ (Rev. 3:16); ‘come in’ (Rev. 3:20); ‘eat’ (Rev. 3:20). Some present-tense verbs with Jesus as the subject include: ‘I am he who searches’ (Rev. 2:23); ‘I do not lay on’ (Rev. 2:24); ‘I am coming’ (Rev. 3:11); ‘I counsel’ (Rev. 3:18); ‘I love’ (Rev. 3:19); ‘I reprove’ (Rev. 3:19); ‘I discipline’ (Rev. 3:19); ‘I stand’ (Rev. 3:20). These verbs represent Jesus’ authority, power, and stature.

Messiah

Revelation clearly portrays Jesus as divine, but John also teaches that Jesus is the Messiah (Rev. 1:1–2, 5; 11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6). The kingdom belongs not merely to God but also to ‘his Christ’ (Rev. 11:15). As the Christ, Jesus has authority over all (Rev. 12:10). Those who conquer will reign with him for one thousand years (Rev. 20:4–6). He has made believers to be priests and a kingdom (Rev. 1:6; cf. 20:6). The covenant pledge that David’s dynasty would persist forever is fulfilled in Jesus, for he holds ‘the key of David’ (Rev. 3:7). Jesus is ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David’ (Rev. 5:5). At the conclusion of the book Jesus declares, ‘I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star’ (Rev. 22:16). Jesus as Lion of Judah echoes Gen. 49:9, and possibly even Num. 23:24; 24:9. The lion symbolizes the strength, dignity, and royalty of Jesus. The term ‘root’ (*rhiza*) hearkens back to Isa. 11, where a root from Jesse is promised (Isa. 11:1, 10). He will be endowed with the Spirit, judge righteously, destroy the wicked, and inaugurate peace and righteousness.

Jesus is the descendant of the people of God (Rev. 12:1–5), whom Satan desired to destroy. He has been exalted to the right hand of God, and the messianic promise of Ps. 2, that he would rule the nations with an iron rod (Ps. 2:8–9), belongs to Jesus (Rev. 12:5). The rulers of this world gather in an attempt to defeat Jesus and free themselves forever from his dominion (Rev. 19:19; cf. Ps. 2:2–3). Jesus, however, will rule them with an iron rod and destroy them (Rev. 2:26–27; 19:15). He will arrive on a white horse with the armies of heaven and vanquish his enemies by the word of his mouth (Rev. 19:11–21). Those who wage war with the Lamb will not triumph, for he is sovereign over all as ‘Lord of lords and King of kings’ (Rev. 17:14). Those who overcome will sit with Jesus on his throne forever (Rev. 3:21), whereas those who throw their lot in with the beast and yield to economic pressure to survive will face torment before the Lamb and angels (Rev. 14:10). True disciples, on the other hand, are committed to Jesus. They endure for the sake of his name (Rev. 2:3), following ‘the Lamb wherever he goes’ (Rev. 14:4). They are willing to become martyrs because of their allegiance to Jesus (Rev. 17:6). Those who persevere under and through suffering will enjoy the marriage of the Lamb and the supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7, 9). Dwelling in the new Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb, they will rejoice in his presence forever (Rev. 21:9).

Jesus’ Death

Even though Revelation emphasizes the sovereignty and glory of Christ, his death is the fulcrum of all history. He demonstrated his love to believers by freeing them from their sins by his death on the cross (Rev. 1:5). Despite the threat from the Roman Empire, the fundamental need of believers is freedom from the guilt of sin. Revelation 5 is perhaps the most important chapter in the entire book, for no one is worthy to open the scroll bound with seven seals—no one, that is, except for one. John is informed that ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David’ can open the sealed book (Rev. 5:5). And yet when John actually looks to see the conqueror, he sees not a mighty lion but rather a slain lamb (Rev. 5:6). The key to all history and the outworking of God’s promises is the death of the Lamb. Victory over evil comes not through a military triumph but rather through the suffering of the Lamb. However, the slain Lamb is also the one who achieves victory and conquers, and so here John merges the Jewish traditions of the slain lamb and the

conquering lamb. The juxtaposition of the images of the lion and the lamb signifies that Jesus as the Messiah conquers through his death. By his blood he ransomed people from every ethnic and linguistic background (Rev. 5:9). Clean white robes signify access into God's presence, and robes are whitened only 'in the blood of the Lamb' (Rev. 7:14).

Those whose names are written in the book of life are enrolled because the Lamb has been slain on their behalf (Rev. 13:8; 21:27). The 144,000 are sealed (Rev. 7:1–8) only because they belong to the Lamb. His death is the source of their life. They sing a new song of salvation and have the name of the Father and the Lamb on their foreheads because they have been redeemed by the Lamb (Rev. 14:1–5). Similarly, believers conquer evil through Christ's blood and their willingness to face death (Rev. 12:11). The healing of the nations comes from the tree of life (Rev. 22:2). However, only those who wash their robes have access to that tree (Rev. 22:14), and we noted in Rev. 7:14 that the robes are washed and whitened only in the Lamb's blood. On the basis of Christ's death, then, all are invited to take freely of the water of life (Rev. 22:17). Even though the death of Christ is noted in only a few texts in Revelation, the placement of such is fundamental for the entire book. Believers must overcome and persevere to receive a reward, but the foundation for access to the tree of life is the blood of the Lamb."⁴⁹

N.T. Wright offers some helpful remarks concerning the glorious vision of Jesus in Revelation 1 and how this portrait of Christ fits with the remainder of the book: "Revelation begins with a vision of the risen Jesus (1:12-16). Snow-white hair, eyes of fire, feet of polished bronze, voice like a waterfall, and his face like the sun itself—no wonder John fell at his feet as though he was dead. This is where terror and joy meet: this is the Easter Jesus. 'Don't be afraid,' he says; 'I am the first and the last, and the living one. *I died, and look, I am alive forevermore.*' 'And'—and this sounds almost conspiratorial—'*I've got the keys—the keys of Death and Hades*' (1:17-18). Whatever you've lost; whoever you've lost; whatever bits of your life are locked away for sorrow or shame, I've got the keys... Tyrants base their power on their ability to kill. Whether it's the invisible tyrant of sin or the visible tyrants that stalk our world still, their power lies in the threat of death. They claim to have the keys of death and hell, but they're lying. Where the tyrants' power runs out, God's power begins. He raises the dead.

This vision of the risen Jesus serves as the magnificent gilded portico into the book. It then has a sort of second introduction, in the form of seven short letters to the seven leading churches in Turkey—Ephesus, Smyrna, and the rest. As John knew, they were facing the tyranny of sin within and the tyranny of Rome without, and they were to hold firm to the risen Christ. These letters serve as a corridor, leading us from the portico towards the throne room, which we reach in chapter 4. John saw a door standing open in heaven; he went through it, in the Spirit, and he saw the living God, with all creation paying him homage."⁵⁰

⁴⁹Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 420-430.

⁵⁰N.T. Wright, "A World Reborn: Revelation," in *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 55-56.

VIII. Seven Reactions in Revelation 2-3

Robert Mounce observes: ‘The letters to the seven churches of Asia form a distinct unit in the book of Revelation. That they are integrally related to the vision in chapter 1 is indicated by the fact that in the introduction to each letter the writer (Christ) identifies himself by means of a descriptive phrase taken from the vision and appropriate for the specific church.’⁵¹

The description of Jesus in Revelation 1 is central to the next two chapters because each of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 reacts differently to these aspects of Jesus’ appearance, power, and authority. Bible commentator Simon Kistemaker notes this in the following chart:⁵²

Church	Appearance of Jesus
Ephesus (2:1)	Seven stars in his right hand; the golden lampstands (1:16, 13)
Smyrna (2:8)	First and Last, who died and came to life again (1:17-18)
Pergamum (2:12)	The double-edged sword (1:16)
Thyatira (2:18)	Eyes as blazing fire; feet as burnished bronze (1:14-15)
Sardis (3:1)	Seven spirits and seven stars (1:4, 16)
Philadelphia (3:7)	Holding the key (1:18)
Laodicea (3:14)	Faithful witness (1:5)

Mounce writes: ‘The messages are a vital part of the Apocalypse as a whole and are intended for the exhortation and edification of the church universal. Each oracle contains the challenge, ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’ (the plural is significant!).’⁵³

David Aune describes how the phrase “Thus says” or “The words of...” indicate that Jesus is issuing powerful regal commands to his churches: “John has used this form to create prophetic proclamations issued by the King of kings and Lord of lords to his subjects. John has consciously employed the form of the royal or imperial edict as part of his strategy to emphasize the fact that Christ is the true king in contrast to the Roman emperor who is both a clone and a tool of Satan.”⁵⁴

According to Morris, “there is a general pattern to the letters which we may set out as follows:

⁵¹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 64.

⁵² Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 107.

⁵³ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 65.

⁵⁴ David E. Aune, “The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3),” *NTS* 36 (1990): 204.

1. A greeting: ‘To the angel of the church in...’
2. A title of the risen Christ, usually taken from the description in chapter 1.
3. A section headed ‘I know’, introducing praise for what is good in the church’s record (not in the case of Laodicea).
4. A criticism of the church (not in the case of Smyrna nor Philadelphia).
5. A warning.
6. An exhortation beginning, ‘He who has an ear...’
7. A promise beginning with something like ‘To him who overcomes I will give...’ In the last four letters the order of 6 and seven is reversed.

A further pattern is to be discerned in the sevenfold arrangement. Churches 1 and 7 are in grave danger, churches 2 and 6 are in excellent shape, churches 3, 4 and 5 are middling, neither very good nor very bad.”⁵⁵

G.K. Beale points out several links between the imperfect reactions of the seven churches in the old creation (Rev. 2-3) and the corresponding perfections of the new creation (21:9-22:5).⁵⁶

False prophets (2:2)	Twelve true apostles (21:14)
False Jews (2:9; 3:9)	The names of the tribes of true Israel (21:12)
Christians dwell where Satan’s throne is (2:13)	Christians dwell where God’s throne is (22:1)
Some in the church are dead (3:1)	All in the new Jerusalem are written in the Lamb’s book of life (21:27)
The church is a faltering, temporal lampstand (1:20; 2:5)	God and the Lamb are the eternal lamps (21:23-24; 22:5)
The church is filled with idolatrous impurities (2:14-15, 20), and liars (2:9; 3:9)	There will be only purity and truth in the new creation (21:8, 27)
Christians face persecution, hoping in God’s promises to overcomers (2:8-10, 13)	In the new creation they reign, having inherited these promises (2:7 = 22:2; 2:17 = 22:4; 3:5 = 21:27; 3:12 = 21:10 and 22:4; 3:21 = 22:1 and 22:5).

Beale also provides a helpful flow of thought for the pattern of the reactions of the churches in Revelation 2-3:

“Christ presents himself with certain attributes particularly suitable to the situation of each church, faith in which provides the basis for overcoming the specific problem that the church faces; the situation and the particular problem are reviewed (introduced by ‘I know’); on the

⁵⁵ Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 58.

⁵⁶ This chart is from G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 134.

basis of the situation and the problem, Christ gives either encouragement to persevere in the face of conflict (to faithful churches) or exhortation to repent in order to avoid judgment (to unfaithful churches); the situation and the problem and the corresponding encouragement or exhortation form the ground for Christ issuing a call for the churches to respond by heeding ('hearing') the encouragement or exhortation; on the basis of a positive response ('hearing' followed by 'overcoming'), Christ promises the inheritance of eternal life with him, which uniquely corresponds to his attributes or to the churches' situation (the hearing formula still functions as a ground clause even when placed after the promise in the last four letters.)⁵⁷

Beale summarizes the reactions of the seven churches to Jesus as follows:

“Christ commends the Ephesian church for its orthodoxy, condemns it for its lack of witness, and exhorts it to overcome this lack in order to inherit eternal life...

Christ commends the church at Smyrna for enduring tribulation and encourages it to continue to be faithful in anticipation of imminent, more severe persecution, in order to inherit eternal life and heavenly kingship...

Christ commends the church in Pergamum for its persevering witness in the midst of persecution, condemns it for its permissive spirit of idolatrous compromise, and exhorts it to overcome this in order not to be judged but to inherit end-time fellowship and identification with Christ...

Christ commends the church of Thyatira for its Christian works of witness, condemns it for its permissive spirit of idolatrous compromise, and exhorts it to overcome this in order not to be judged but to inherit end-time rule together with Christ...

Christ condemns the church in Sardis for its lack of witness and its compromise and exhorts it to overcome this in order to inherit the blessings of salvation life...

Christ commends the church in Philadelphia for its persevering witness, in which he will empower its members further, and encourages them to continue to persevere so as to inherit end-time fellowship and identification with him...

Christ condemns the church in Laodicea for its ineffective witness and deplorable spiritual condition and exhorts its members to persevere by becoming faithful witnesses and renewing their fellowship with him so as to reign with him...⁵⁸

IX. Church Fathers, other major theologians, and pastors on Revelation

⁵⁷ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 225.

⁵⁸ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 228, 239, 245, 259, 272, 283, 296.

Victorinus of Petovium: ‘John mentions seven churches by the explicit use of their own names to which he has sent letters. He does this not because they are the only churches, or even the most important of the churches, but because what he says to one, he says to all. For it makes no difference whether one speaks to a cohort, in number only a few soldiers, or whether one speaks through it to the entire army... In these seven churches, therefore, we are to think of the one church.’⁵⁹

Irenaeus, commenting on 1:5, explains the significance of Jesus having the title the “firstborn of the dead”: “Great, then, was the mercy of God the Father. He sent the creative Word, who, when He came to save us, put Himself in our position, and in the same situation in which we lost life. He loosed the prison bonds, and His light appeared and dispelled the darkness in the prison, and He sanctified our birth and abolished death, loosing those same bonds by which we were held. He showed forth the resurrection, becoming Himself the firstborn from the dead, and raised in Himself prostrate man, being lifted up to the heights of heaven, at the right hand of the glory of the Father.”⁶⁰

In his commentary, Bible scholar William Hendriksen writes: “In form, symbolism, purpose and meaning the book of Revelation is beautiful beyond description. Where in all literature do we find anything that excels the majestic description of the Son of man walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (Rev. 1:12-20), or the vivid portrayal of the Christ, Faithful and True, going forth unto victory, seated upon a white horse, arrayed with a garment sprinkled with blood, followed by the armies of heaven (19:11-16)? Where, again, do we find a sharper contrast than that between the doom of Babylon on the one hand, and the joy of Jerusalem the Golden on the other (18:19; 21:22)? And where are the throne set in heaven and the blessedness of heavenly life depicting in a manner more serenely simple, yet beautiful in its very simplicity (4:2-5:14; 7:13-17)? What a wealth of comfort; what an insight into the future; above all, what an unveiling of the love of God are contained in the words of the prophecy of this book!”⁶¹

G.K. Beale writes about how Revelation can encourage the church today: “The church universal is called to maintain a faithful witness in the midst of persecution, following in the footsteps of the Lamb, who died to free them from their sins. Having conquered through faith, they are promised the blessing of eternal life in the presence of God in the new heaven and new earth, all with the purpose that they worship him and that he receive the glory forever.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Victorinus of Petovium, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* 1.7. As quoted in *Revelation*, ed. William Weinrich, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 10.

⁶⁰ Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 38-39, as quoted in *Revelation*, ed. William Weinrich, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 5.

⁶¹ William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1940/2007), 7.

⁶² G.K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, “Revelation,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 1081.

Bible scholar Richard Bauckham writes: ‘The Apocalypse of John is a work of immense learning, astonishingly meticulous literary artistry, remarkable creative imagination, radical political critique, and profound theology.’⁶³

Bible commentator Simon J. Kistemaker writes: “People regard the book as Scripture, but they often fail to make use of it as such. For many readers, Revelation is not revelation but rather a prophetic mystery that surpasses human understanding. Yet in this last book of the Bible, God permits us to see something of Christ and the church in heaven and on earth—and what we see is awesome indeed.”⁶⁴

According to Kistemaker: “The Book of Revelation throughout directs attention to its primary composer, God. He is the divine artist, the chief architect. It is a divinely constructed volume in which God shows his handiwork.”⁶⁵

Bible commentator and translator J.B. Phillips writes: “Translating this book is in the true sense of that threadbare word, thrilling. For in this book the translator is carried into another dimension—he has put the slightest foot-hold in the Time-and-space world with which he is familiar. He is carried, not into some never-never land of fancy, but into the Ever-ever land of God’s eternal Values and Judgments.”⁶⁶

Ralph P. Martin writes: ‘No other New Testament book proclaims the sovereignty and rule of God in so eloquent, if so bewildering, a way. Yet divine power is conditioned by love: the lion is also the lamb.’⁶⁷

A.M. Hunter writes of the Apocalypse: “Revelation, beyond all other books, had made people feel that heaven is real and in the strength of that blessed conviction go forth anew to do battle with the world and all its evils.”⁶⁸

Commenting on Luther’s 1530 preface to the book of Revelation, historian Irena Backus notes that “Luther confirmed the eschatological value of the book and also used it as a programmatic

⁶³ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), ix.

⁶⁴ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 3.

⁶⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 3.

⁶⁶ J.B. Phillips, *The Book of Revelation* (London: Collins, 1960), 9.

⁶⁷ Ralph P. Martin, *New Testament Foundations* (London: Paternoster, 1978), 379.

⁶⁸ A.M. Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament*, (London: SCM, 1945), 113.

work for the development of his conception of church history.”⁶⁹ A perceived lack of clarity contributed to Luther’s view of Revelation. Luther wrote: “Those who listen and go by what is written there are supposed to be blessed, but as no one can understand it, let alone go by it, this amounts to the same thing as the book not existing.”⁷⁰ While Luther lamented the lack of clear teaching on Christ in Revelation, he insisted that the book certainly taught Antichrist, who he identified with the Pope.

Theodore Beza, a disciple of John Calvin in Geneva, wrote concerning Revelation: “The Holy Spirit wanted to assemble in this most precious book those things which the previous prophets had predicted would come to pass after the advent of Christ, and to those John added some that he knew would concern us.”⁷¹

X. Theological Overview of the Book of Revelation

G.K. Beale provides a helpful introduction and theological overview to the Apocalypse:

Introduction

“Revelation, which comes at the very end of the biblical canon, combines three distinctive literary types to form a most remarkable book. As its opening sentences reveal it is, at the same time, an ‘apocalypse’ or ‘revelation’, a ‘prophecy’ and a ‘letter’. The first of these terms has now become a technical term for a body of literature, mainly Jewish, which developed in the two centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ, although the style is probably best exemplified in the much earlier book of Daniel. These apocalyptic writings were viewed as revealing heavenly secrets, normally inaccessible to human beings, sometimes focusing on God’s judgment of the wicked and his deliverance of the righteous. As a prophecy Revelation claims to be a message from God which invites a response of trust and obedience from John’s contemporaries. Finally, the book is presented in the form of a letter, sent from John to those churches ‘in the province of Asia’ for whom he had a special concern. The distinctive nature of the book of Revelation must always be borne in mind when reading it, especially as John develops a number of significant theological themes by utilizing OT scripture, Jewish interpretative traditions on the OT and early Christian tradition.

Suffering and Victory

⁶⁹ As quoted in Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 11.

⁷⁰ As quoted in Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

⁷¹ As quoted in Irena Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28.

As in John's Gospel, so in John's Revelation, the death and defeat of Christ is, in reality, his victory over Satan (see *e.g.* 5:5–6). The Lamb's followers are to recapitulate the model of his ironic victory in their own lives; by means of *enduring* through *tribulation* they reign in the invisible kingdom of the Messiah (see 1:6, 9). They exercise kingship in the midst of their suffering just as Christ did from the cross; Christians are called to be conquerors by emulating in their own lives the archetypal messianic triumph of Jesus. Though the Christian's outer body is vulnerable to persecution and suffering, God has promised to protect the regenerated inner spirit of true saints (see 11:1–7). And at the end of the sojourn of Christ's body (the church) on earth, its presence, like his, will be completely removed, and then it will be resurrected (see 11:7–12 and *cf.* 20:11–22:5).

Conversely, the church's opponents defeat themselves spiritually when they persecute God's people in the same manner as Satan (see Spiritual powers) was defeated at the cross, though it appeared that he had won a physical victory over Christ (*cf.* Col. 2:14–15). Acts of oppression against the saints, when not repented of, lay an increasing foundation for the oppressors' final judgment, and even become expressions of a judgment of hardening by God upon permanently recalcitrant people.

The main goal of the argument of John's Revelation is to exhort God's people to remain faithful to the calling of following the Lamb's paradoxical example and not to compromise, in order that they may inherit final salvation. The major theological theme of the book is that God receives glory, as a result of accomplishing full salvation and final judgment (see 1:6; 4:11; 5:11–13; 19:1, 5, 7; *cf.* 11:17). Even the notion of Christ and the church reigning ironically in the midst of their suffering and the idea of unbelieving persecutors experiencing spiritual defeat in the midst of their physical victories demonstrate the wisdom of God, and point accordingly to his glory (see 5:12 for the link between the slain Lamb, wisdom and divine glory, which is not found in the hymns of praise at the end of ch. 4).

Revelation 4–5 form the introduction to the remainder of the book's visions up to 22:5; this introduction overshadows everything in 6:1–22:5. Therefore a clear understanding of the main point of Revelation 4–5 is essential; God and Christ are *glorified* because Christ's resurrection demonstrates that they are sovereign over creation to judge and to redeem. The focus of this primary point in chapters 4–5 is upon the glory of God and the Lamb. The clear deduction from these two chapters is that the Lamb is in the same divine position as God, a point reiterated throughout the remainder of the book, and intimated earlier (*cf.* *e.g.* 1:13–14).

The Theological Significance of the Image Of the Throne

The vision of Revelation 4–5 portrays a heavenly world in which God and the Lamb's throne are the centre and everything else is configured in a series of outer circles around the throne apparently in the following order: 1. a rainbow aura; 2. the 'living creatures' who guard the throne; 3. the twenty-four elders sitting on twenty-four thrones in a second outer circle; 4. all other creatures in the universe. Seventeen of the thirty-four references in the book to God's

‘throne’ occur in chapters 4–5, a fact which underlines the centrality of God’s sovereignty (see Providence) for which he is given glory climactically in 4:9–11 and 5:12–13.

All the following visions flow out of this introductory vision and are to be seen as the historical consequences of divine sovereignty. For example, the visions of the seals and trumpets, the unnumbered visions (chs. 12–14) and the visions of the bowls (together with the appended visions of chs. 17–19) show the results in past, present and future history of divine sovereignty in its redemption and judgment. Therefore God and Christ are in ultimate control of all the woes of both believers and unbelievers. Their absolute sovereignty over such unpleasant events poses a theological problem: how can the righteousness, goodness and holiness of Christ and God be maintained if they are so directly linked, as the ultimate cause, to *all* the judgments, and to their associated demonic agents who actually carry out many of the destructive judgments under ultimate divine supervision?

Some commentators do not think that there is a theological problem, since they do not view Christ and God as the ultimate cause of the judgments. Some scholars use theological presuppositions about God’s holiness and love in order to deny the direct link, and consequently assert that Christ only ‘permits’ or ‘tolerates’ such characters as the four horsemen to execute their woes. However, not only does Revelation see the divine throne as ultimately behind the trials of believers and woes of unbelievers, but the major OT passages formative for the visions of the seals, trumpets and bowls, without exception, portray God as the ultimate cause of the ordeals (so Zech. 6:1–8; Ezek. 14:21; Lev. 26:18–28 and their use in 6:2–8).

The answer to the theological difficulty lies in the ultimate purpose of the woes being that of refining the faith of believers and punishing unbelievers. For example, the four horsemen’s woes of 6:1–8 are an effect of Christ’s death and resurrection (chs. 4–5). He transformed the suffering of the cross into a triumph, gained sovereignty over the powers of evil who crucified him (*cf.* Rev. 1:18; Col. 2:15), and subsequently uses them to achieve his purposes of refining his people and punishing those recalcitrant in their wickedness.

As at the end of chapters 4 and 5, so also towards the end of the visionary segment in Revelation 19:7–8, the author affirms that saints are to glorify God. This glorification occurs at the conclusion of history *because* of the consummation of the marriage of the Lamb with his bride, who will be perfectly adorned for the occasion; focus on the adorned bride is intended to lead the saints to glorify God. This notion of divine glory is central also to Revelation 21:1–22:5, since the new Jerusalem (God’s people) can be defined only in relation to its luminescent reflection of God’s glory. Indeed, the central feature of the city is God and the Lamb who shine as a lamp upon the city (*cf.* 21:22–23; 22:5), so that the more complete definition of the new Jerusalem includes God’s people in full fellowship with God and Christ, the former reflecting the glory of the latter.

The New Creation as the Goal of Redemption and History

The portrayal of the new covenant, new temple, new Israel and new Jerusalem affirms the future fulfilment of the main prophetic themes of the OT and NT, which all find their ultimate climax in the new creation. The new creation itself is the most overarching of these themes, of which the other four are but facets. John's repeated allusions to the OT historical form of these five concepts expresses a typological interpretation of history which views OT institutions and other realities as prophetic foreshadowings of escalated and equivalent NT realities: *e.g.* Genesis 1 creation, the Exodus as fulfilment of the divine covenant and as new creation, the tabernacle, Solomonic temple, old Jerusalem, *etc.* These typological and prophetic themes suggest a belief in God as the sovereign designer of all history, which is planned to result in his glory. All five of the central biblical ideas of new covenant, new temple, new Israel, new Jerusalem and new creation are metaphorical ideas which refer to the same reality, God's intimate, glorious presence with his people.

These same five themes together culminate in 21:1–22:5 and form the climax and major goal of the entire book up to Revelation 22:5. In particular, the central notion of God's glorious presence is introduced in Revelation 4–5 and developed throughout the book, and finally culminates in the last visions of Revelation 21:1–22:5. These concluding visions of Revelation, however, do not express the main point of the whole book. 21:1–22:5 is placed at the conclusion of John's work to underline John's ultimate purpose in writing: to encourage and admonish Christians to remain faithful. This is why the book concludes with a non-visionary, auditory epilogue of repeated promises, exhortations and affirmations of Christ's imminent coming, and warnings to the saints in 22:6–21. The vision of the future, perfected people of God in unending fellowship with his glorious presence is intended to encourage and motivate them to persevere through temptations to compromise. The prospect of final victory should provide impetus to win partial victory now by not compromising.

The main reason that the bride is contrasted with the prostitute in 17:1–22:5 is to encourage and admonish the faltering churches, troubled by compromise with the whore, to stop compromising and reflect in greater measure the features of their coming, consummated excellence in anticipation of it. This point is suggested by the antithetical correspondence between the imperfections of the churches in chapters 2–3 and the perfections found in 21:1–22:5.

Furthermore, an exegetical analysis of 21:1–22:5 reveals that a number of the OT prophecies which are viewed as reaching fulfilment at the conclusion of history are viewed elsewhere in the NT as having already begun to be fulfilled in Christ and the church: *e.g.* new creation, new temple, apostles as a foundation of the temple, new Jerusalem, the promise of God's tabernacling presence in 21:3, and the kingship of the saints. Even elsewhere in Revelation it is apparent that these prophecies have already begun to be fulfilled in the latter part of the 1st century: *e.g.* new creation (3:14), new temple (*cf.* lampstands of 1:12–13, 20, exalted saints in the heavenly temple in 6:9–11), and kingship (1:5b–6, 9, 13; 2:27; 3:21; 5:10). New creation, as the broad redemptive-historical theme, subsumes the promissory ideas of new temple, new covenant, new Israel and new Jerusalem.

The new temple

The paradisaical city-temple of Revelation 21:1–22:5 encompasses the entirety of the newly created earth: 1. Isaiah 54:2–3, together with several Jewish references, supports the notion of a new Jerusalem or end-time temple greater than the former Jerusalem and temple. 2. John says in Revelation 21:1 that he saw ‘a new heaven and new earth’, and then in 21:2 and 21:9–22:5 he, in fact, sees only a paradisaical city-temple. It is possible that he first saw the whole heavens and earth in 21:1 and then subsequently the city-temple which is part of that new cosmos. It is, however, more likely that the ‘new heaven and new earth’ of 21:1 is defined by and equated with the paradisaical city-temple of 21:2 and 21:9–22:5. The allusion to Isaiah 65:17 in Revelation 21:1 supports this view.

The rationale for the world-encompassing nature of the paradisaical temple lies in the ancient notion that the OT temple was a microcosmic model of the entire heaven and earth. Josephus and Philo discuss various ways in which the tabernacle or temple or parts of it symbolically reflect the cosmos. While it is true that Philo and Josephus had different interpretations of the symbolism, it is probable that they both testify to a general cosmological understanding of the temple held in mainstream contemporary Jewish thought. Ancient Near Eastern literature also reflects the notion that temples of the gods were microcosmic models of heavenly temples or of the universe.

This cosmic understanding of the temple implicitly suggested that its purpose was to point to a future time when it would encompass the whole world (much like an architect’s model of a newly planned building is but a small replica of what is to be built on a much larger scale). Since the OT temple was the localized dwelling of God’s presence on earth, the temple’s correspondence with the cosmos pointed to the eschatological goal of God’s presence tabernacling throughout the earth, an eschatological goal which Revelation 21:1–22:5 appears to describe (*cf.* 21:3).

Revelation 22:1–5 suggests that the author is aware of an earlier cultic interpretation of Eden. The Garden of Eden was the archetypal temple in which the first human worshipped God. Israel’s temple was the place where the priest experienced God’s unique presence, and Eden was the place where Adam walked and talked with God. Genesis 2:15 says that God placed Adam in the Garden ‘to cultivate (work) it and keep it’. The two Hebrew words for ‘cultivate and keep’ are usually translated ‘serve and guard’ elsewhere in the OT, often in association with priestly service in the tabernacle/temple. The writer of Genesis 2 possibly suggests that Adam was the archetypal priest who served in and guarded God’s first temple. When Adam failed to guard the temple by sinning and letting in an unclean serpent to defile the sanctuary, Adam lost his priestly role and the two cherubim took over the responsibility of ‘guarding’ the Garden temple: God ‘stationed the cherubim ... *to guard* the way to the tree of life’ (so Gen. 3:24). Probably their role was recalled in Israel’s later temple in the two cherubim stationed on either side of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. The ‘tree of life’ itself was probably the model for the lampstand placed directly outside the Holy of Holies. That the Garden of Eden was the first temple is also suggested by the fact that Israel’s later temple had wooden carvings which gave it a garden-like atmosphere (1 Kgs. 6:18, 29, 32, 35; 7:18–20). The entrance to Eden was from the east (Gen.

3:24), which was also the direction from which one entered the tabernacle and later temples of Israel.

According to Genesis 1:28, not only was Adam to 'guard' this sanctuary, but he was also to subdue the earth. It seems that he was to extend the geographical boundaries of the Garden until Eden extended throughout and covered the whole earth. What Adam failed to do, Revelation pictures Christ as finally having done. The Edenic imagery beginning in Revelation 22:1 shows that the building of the temple which began in Genesis 2 will be completed in Christ and his people and will encompass the whole new creation.

The new covenant

The affirmation in Revelation 21:3–4 that God's dwelling is now with human beings and that 'they will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God' (NIV) indicates that the new creation, towards which history is moving, will bring to fulfilment the new covenant promised in the book of Jeremiah and inaugurated by Jesus Christ. In essence, like the Sinai covenant which foreshadows it, the new covenant binds together in a special relationship God and his people. However, while the Sinai covenant made it possible for God to come and dwell uniquely in the midst of the Israelites, access into the very presence of God was limited to the high priest and then only briefly on one occasion during the year, the Day of Atonement. These limits will not exist in the new creation, for through the new covenant all those 'whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life' will see God's face and take delight in being in his presence.

The new Israel

The new creation unveiled in Revelation 21–22 is presented in images which clearly indicate that its inhabitants are to be viewed as a new Israel. This picture is created by an interesting 'fusion of tribal and apostolic imagery'. Thus on the gates of the holy city are 'the names of the twelve tribes of Israel' (12:12), and 'the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb' (21:14).

The continuity between tribal 'Israel' and apostolic 'Israel' builds on God's desire to create for himself a special people. In Exodus 19:6 God offers to those whom he has just delivered from slavery in Egypt the prospect of becoming 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'. While this conditional promise is never fully realized by OT Israel, the same opportunity is extended to those who believe in Christ. Thus the apostle Peter, writing to God's elect in Asia Minor, states, 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Pet. 2:9). While God's people will include individuals 'from every tribe and language and people and nation', this inclusion is based on the understanding that they are the spiritual seed of Abraham (e.g. Gal. 3:29). For this reason they may legitimately be considered to be the new Israel. Furthermore, the idea of a new Israel is reinforced by the designation 'new Jerusalem' given to the city at the heart of the new creation (Rev. 21:2).

The new Jerusalem

John's vision of 'a new heaven and a new earth' centres on the descent from heaven of the 'Holy City, the new Jerusalem'. The new city, radiant with God's glory and constructed from the most precious of minerals, dominates the landscape. Indeed, such is the light emanating from it that there is no need for sun or moon. To this new Jerusalem the nations will bring their glory and honour in worship of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.

The image of the city at the heart of the new earth clearly draws upon OT passages which highlight the special significance of Jerusalem/Zion in the purposes of God. A close relationship exists between the divine appointment of David as king over Israel, the choice of Jerusalem as the capital of the new kingdom, and the construction of a temple in the city. This relationship between king, city and temple continues to be important even after the destruction of the temple and the removal of the Davidic monarchy at the time of the Babylonian exile. The hope remained that there would yet be a restoration involving all three. In the light of this the Gospels give special attention to the relationship between Jesus, Jerusalem and the temple. However, just as Jesus is much more than a son of David, so too the NT writers develop a new understanding of Jerusalem/Zion and the temple. While the earthly Jerusalem is doomed to destruction, believers are encouraged to come 'to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God' (Heb. 12:22).

The Main Idea of Revelation

In the light of the above discussion and of an exegetical analysis of the entire book, the main idea of Revelation can be roughly formulated as follows: the sovereignty of God and Christ in redeeming and judging brings them glory, which is intended to motivate saints to worship God and reflect his glorious attributes through obedience to his word. It is not coincidental that the passages in which the most significant expressions of worship are recorded occur just at the points where God's glory is highlighted (*cf.* Rev. 4–5; 7:9–12; 11:15–19; 15:2–8; 19:1–8; where words for 'worship' are also found). Idolatry in Revelation is not merely worshipping other false gods, but the failure to worship the one who is Lord of all. People may claim that they are religiously neutral and worship no god, but in John's mind this is still idolatry.

The book portrays an end-time new creation which has irrupted into the present old world through the death and resurrection of Christ, as well as through the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost. John's vision communicates values that run counter to the values of the old world and which provide 'a structure of meaning that grounds' the lives of Christians in the new world. The symbols which describe the new world spell out the eternal significance and consequences of Christ's life, death and resurrection, and of the present choices and behaviour of the readers. Part of John's purpose is to motivate the readers not to compromise with the world but to align their thoughts and behaviour with the God-centered standards of the new creation. They are to see their own situation in this world in the eternal perspective of the new world which is now their true home.

So the churches are to read and re-read the book in their assemblies in order that they may continually be reminded of God's real, new world which stands in opposition to the old, fallen system in which they presently live. Such a continual reminder will cause them to realize that their home is not in this old world but in the new world portrayed parabolically in the heavenly visions of Revelation. Continual reading of the book will encourage genuine saints to realize that what they believe is not strange, but truly normal from God's perspective. They will be prevented from being discouraged by worldliness, including that which has crept into the churches, which always makes godly standards appear odd and sinful values seem normal. John refers to true unbelievers in the book as 'earth-dwellers' because their ultimate home is on this transient earth. They cannot trust in anything except what their eyes see and their physical senses perceive; they are permanently earthbound, trusting only in earthly security, and will perish with this old order at the end of time when the corrupted cosmos is finally judged and passes away.

On the other hand, Christians are like pilgrims passing through this world. As such they are to commit themselves to the revelation of God in the new order, so as progressively to reflect his image and increasingly to live according to the values of the new world, not being conformed to the fallen system, its idolatrous images and associated values (similarly *cf.* Rom. 12:2).

In this connection it may be profitable to ask why Christ addresses the churches in the letters of chapters 2 and 3 through their angelic representatives, especially since it does not seem logical to blame and reproach angels for the sins of the churches. One answer to this question is that essential to the idea of corporate representation is the accountability of the representative for the group and the accountability of the group for the actions of the representative. So there is a sense in which the angels are responsible for the churches; yet the churches also benefit from the position of the angels.

Thus the existence of the churches in heaven is represented and embodied in their representative angels. In fact, one of the reasons for the presence of so many angels throughout the visions of Revelation, and especially for God addressing the churches through their representative angels, is to remind true Christians that a dimension of their existence is already in the heavenly realm, that their real home is not with the unbelieving 'earth-dwellers', and that they have heavenly help and protection in their struggle not to be conformed to the pagan environment. And the purpose of the weekly gatherings of the church on earth (as in 1:3, 9–10), in addition to the purposes noted above, is to be reminded of its heavenly identity by the modelling of its worship on that of the angels' and heavenly church's worship of the exalted Lamb. This is why scenes of heavenly liturgy are woven throughout Revelation, especially as part of concluding sections which serve as interpretations of preceding visionary narratives. It is from these passages that the churches are to learn how to worship in their gathered meetings and to be given a zeal for worship of the true God. The intended consequence is that believers in the churches should develop an attitude of worshipful reverence for God, not only in their assemblies, but in their bowing to divine sovereignty in every aspect of their lives and in every area of its outworking.

The Theological Meaning of the Use of Symbols

John's method of symbolizing the heavenly world and other invisible forces, such as demonic powers, is theologically significant. The literary form of symbolic parable appears whenever ordinary warnings are no longer heeded, and no warning will ever be heeded by people who are spiritually callous and intent on continuing in disobedience. The parabolic aspect of OT prophets' messages is closely linked to the hardening commission of Isaiah 6:9–10 and, therefore, may be considered one of the means by which people are to be blinded. Yet the parables are also intended to have a jolting effect on the remnant who have become complacent among the compromising majority; in addition, a remnant of pseudo-believers are woken up and genuinely converted. Parables function in the same manner in Ezekiel and in Jesus' ministry. Therefore the appearance of parables in redemptive history signals judgment on the majority of the covenant community.

John's repeated use of the hearing formula is thus not novel but in line with the prior prophetic pattern. John's use of the phrase 'the one having ears, let him hear' is linked to Isaiah 6:9–10, as well as to Ezekiel 3:27 (*cf.* Ezek. 12:2), and is a development of the Gospels' use of the phrase (*e.g.* Matt. 13:9–17, 43), which itself builds upon Isaiah 6:9–10. As also in the case of the OT prophets and Jesus, the expression about hearing indicates that parabolic communication has the dual purpose of opening the eyes of the true remnant but blinding counterfeit members of the covenant community.

There is a consensus that this repeated formula 'the one who has an ear, let him hear' in Revelation 2–3 is an allusion to the Synoptic formula. Therefore, as in Isaiah 6, Ezekiel and the Synoptics, the formula refers to the fact that Christ's message in Revelation will reveal truth to some but conceal it from others. John addresses the formula to the church, which is the continuation of the true Israel and the genuine covenant community. But, the church, like Israel, has become spiritually dull and has begun to compromise by associating with idolatry. The parabolic method of revelation is instituted in Revelation because many among the churches have become intractable in their compromising stance. The symbols in Revelation have both a hardening effect on the unbelieving and a shock effect upon genuine saints caught up in the church's compromising complacency. For example, the symbols reveal the terrible, satanic essence of the idolatrous institutions with which God's true people are beginning to associate, in order that they may realize the horrific nature of these institutions and immediately break off their association with them.

The hearing formulas at the end of each of the letters anticipate the visionary parables of chapters 4–21. A very similar formula in 13:9, 'if anyone has ears, let him hear', is a further hint that John intends the symbolic visions of Revelation 4–21 to have the dual revelatory function mentioned above. This means that the symbolic visions of chapters 4–21 are parabolic portrayals of the more abstractly expressed material in chapters 2–3. Therefore the letters broadly interpret the symbolic visions and *vice versa*. The twofold spiritual function of the symbols is further indicated by the parallel between the series of trumpets and bowls and the Exodus plague signs, which functioned originally to harden the Egyptians but to give insight and redemption to Israel. Yet it needs to be recalled that a remnant among the Egyptians responded positively to the

plagues and left Egypt with Israel; it should also be remembered that the majority of Israelites who left Egypt were characterized by unbelief and hard hearts (see Psalm 95). Consequently, as probably in the case of the OT prophets and Jesus, the symbols used by John not only harden the reprobate, but also both jolt genuine believers out of their spiritual anaesthesia and shock a remnant among the unbelieving mass so that they truly believe. John applies the Exodus model to the church and the world. Consequently, the large amount of symbolic material in Revelation is due primarily to John's theological intention, of identifying his relationship to the situation of the Asia Minor churches with the relationship of the OT prophets and Jesus to the plight of Israel.

Conclusion

Many consider Revelation (esp. chs. 4–22) to be primarily a map of future events which have yet to happen. While there are significant sections which look to the future, there are also many which refer to the past and the present. This is to say, in view of the preceding discussion, that the book of Revelation is not merely a futurology but also a redemptive-historical and theological psychology for the church's thinking throughout the age before Christ's final coming."⁷²

⁷² G.K. Beale, "Revelation," in T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 356-363.

APPENDIX: Methods of Interpreting the Apocalypse

Grant Osborne provides a helpful and brief summary of the various methods of interpretation concerning the book of Revelation:

“Perhaps more than for any other book, our understanding of the meaning of Revelation depends on the hermeneutical perspective we bring to bear on it. For instance, does the beast of chapters 11 and 13 refer to Nero, world empires, the pope (the view of the Protestant Reformers), Hitler, or a future Antichrist? Is the three and a half years of 11:2–3; 12:6, 14; and 13:9 the destruction of Jerusalem, the church age, or a final period of ‘tribulation’ at the end of history? These and other issues depend on which method of interpretation one chooses. But how does one choose among the interpretive options? There is a twofold answer: study ancient apocalyptic literature and see which best fits the genre as a whole, but especially let the details of Revelation itself guide you to the proper method. There are, of course, many different ways to define the interpretive schools. However, most scholars summarize the options under four headings.

Historicist

This approach began with Joachim of Fiore in the twelfth century. He claimed that a vision had told him the 1,260 days of the Apocalypse prophesied the events of Western history from the time of the apostles until the present. The Franciscans followed Joachim and like him interpreted the book as relating to pagan Rome and the papacy (due to corruption in the church). Later the Reformers (e.g., Luther and Calvin) also favored this method, with the pope as the Antichrist. Classical dispensational thinking took this approach with regard to the letters to the seven churches, believing that the letters prophesied the seven periods of the church age. Also, the so-called prophecy movement, those preachers who see every detail in OT as well as NT apocalyptic symbolism as fulfilled in current events (the ‘newspaper approach’ to prophecy), would be aligned with this school. Proponents of this method have tended to take Rev. 2–19, including the seals, trumpets, and bowls as well as the interludes, as prophetic of salvation history, that is, the development of church history within world history. Thus the beast/Antichrist has been variously identified with the pope, Napoleon, Mussolini, or Hitler. Because of its inherent weaknesses (its identification only with Western church history, the inherent speculation involved in the parallels with world history, the fact that it must be reworked with each new period in world history, the total absence of any relevance for John or his original readers), few scholars today take this approach.

Preterist

This approach argues that the details of the book relate to the present situation in which John lived rather than to a future period. Thus the symbols refer to events in the first-century world as experienced by the original readers, and John is telling them how God would deliver them from their oppressors. There are three basic approaches to the book from within this school of thought.

The two most popular relate the book to the situation of the church in the Roman Empire. The first views the book as written about Roman oppression and the fall of the Roman Empire. Due to the development of the imperial cult, pressure to conform and the resultant persecution have become serious threats to the church. The beast thus would be the Roman Empire or the Roman emperor, and the seals, trumpets, and bowls are contemporary judgments God is pouring (or soon will pour) upon Rome itself. Thus the book describes the conflict between church and state, between faithfulness to God and compromise with the pagan world.

The second is taken by many modern critics who argue that there was little persecution and a perceived crisis rather than a real one. The church is still called out from the 'world' to follow God, but it is an internal spiritual crisis rather than external persecution. Osiek says the eschatology of the book is not a timetable for the future but a reinterpretation of the present. It provides a spatial interaction between the earthly and the heavenly so as to give new meaning to the present situation. In this case the symbols provide alternative worlds that the readers have to choose between, the transcendent realm of God and the church or the alternative secular world of Rome. The problem of the book then is compromise, as seen in the Nicolaitan cult, and the solution is true worship of Christ.

A third option is to take the book as written before A.D. 70 and prophesying the fall of Jerusalem as God's judgment upon apostate Israel for rejecting the Messiah and persecuting the church. The beast is Rome, the kings from the east are the Roman generals who brought the Roman army from the eastern boundary of the empire to destroy Jerusalem, and Armageddon is the siege of Jerusalem itself. For Kraybill the white horse of 6:1–2 is Rome and the red horse of 6:3–4 is the Jewish War of A.D. 66–70. This third approach is least viable, not only because it necessitates an early date of writing but because it limits the universal language of the book (all 'peoples, languages, tribes, and nations') to the Jewish people. Nevertheless, the first two are also problematic because they would involve an error of prophecy (which many critical scholars state openly) since final judgment and the end of the world did not come with the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century.

Idealist

This popular approach argues that the symbols do not relate to historical events but rather to timeless spiritual truths (so Hendriksen, Hoekema, P. Hughes). As such it relates primarily to the church between the advents, that is, between Christ's first and second comings. Thus it concerns the battle between God and evil and between the church and the world at all times in church history. The seals, trumpets, and bowls depict God's judgments on sinners at all times, and the beast refers to all the anti-Christian empires and rulers in history. Thus the book describes the victory of Christ and his people down through history. The millennium in this approach is not a future event but the final cycle of the book (so Hendriksen) describing the church age. There are certain strengths in this view: the centrality of theology for the book, the relevance for the church at all times, the symbolic nature of the book. But it has certain weaknesses as well: the absence of historical connections, the failure to see the future nature of many of the prophecies or to connect them in any way with history (as it seems the text does in several instances).

Futurist

This was the method employed by some of the earliest fathers (e.g., Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus), but with the triumph of the allegorical method (taking a spiritual approach to the book) after Origen and of the amillennial view after Augustine and Ticonius, the futurist method (and chiliasm) was not seen again for over a thousand years. The first to develop once more a literal view of the book was Franciscus Ribeira, a Spanish Jesuit who wrote in the late sixteenth century to counter the Reformation antipapal interpretation. While he was not truly a futurist, he turned the attention back to the early fathers, and after him that view returned to prominence and stands alongside the others as equally viable.

Futurism believes that chapters 4–22 refer primarily to events that will take place at the end of history and usher in the eschaton. There are two forms of this approach, dispensationalism and what has been called ‘classical premillennialism.’ Dispensationalists believe that God has brought about his plan of salvation in a series of dispensations or stages centering on his election of Israel to be his covenant people. Therefore, the church age is a parenthesis in this plan, as God turned to the Gentiles until the Jewish people find national revival (Rom. 11:25–32). At the end of that period, the church will be raptured, inaugurating a seven-year tribulation period in the middle of which the Antichrist will make himself known (Rev. 13) and instigate the ‘great tribulation’ or great persecution of the 144,000 and others among Israel who have become Christians. At the end of that period will come the parousia as Christ returns in judgment, followed by a literal millennium (20:1–10), great white throne judgment (20:11–15), and the beginning of eternity in heavenly bliss (21:1–22:5). Classical premillennialism is similar but does not hold to dispensations. Thus there is only one return of Christ, after the tribulation period (Matt. 24:29–31; cf. Rev. 19:11–21), and it is the whole church, not just the nation of Israel, that passes through the tribulation period. Also, dispensationalists view themselves as literalists on the symbols, while the second school would take many of them to be symbolic. There are some weaknesses of this school as well: it can develop a perspective that would remove its applicability to first-century Christians (see above on the ‘prophecy’ movement), and it can often deteriorate to mere speculation cut off from first-century backgrounds. If all we have are events without symbolic/theological significance, much of the power of the book can be lost.

Eclectic

Many scholars in the last few decades (Morris, Johnson, Mounce, Beale) prefer to combine more than one of the views above. While the historical approach has very limited (if any) value, the other three can be profitably combined to capture how John probably intended his book to be understood. All of the approaches can be dangerous when taken to the extreme.

The solution is to allow the preterist, idealist, and futurist methods to interact in such a way that the strengths are maximized and the weaknesses minimized. Beale, for instance, calls his method ‘a redemptive-historical form of modified idealism’. He takes the symbols in an inaugurated sense as describing the church age from the present to the future. For instance, the beast of 13:1–8 refers both to the ‘many antichrists’ throughout church history and to the final Antichrist at the

end of history. The approach of this commentary is similar, but the futurist rather than the idealist position is primary. My study of ancient apocalyptic and of the Book of Revelation has led me to believe that John's visions (esp. chaps. 4–22) were primarily intended to describe the events that will end world history. The saints in these chapters are believers alive in that final period, and the beast is the Antichrist who will lead the 'earth-dwellers'/unbelievers in a final pogrom against all the people of God. The seals, trumpets, and bowls symbolize a final series of judgments by which God will turn the evil deeds of the nations back upon their heads (the Roman legal principle of *lex talionis*, the law of retribution) to prove his sovereignty once and for all and to give them a final chance to repent (9:20–21; 11:13; 14:6–7; 16:9, 11). But the preterist school is also correct, because the visions use the events of the future to address John and his readers in the present. Most of the imagery used to describe the beast and Babylon the Great comes from actual first-century parallels. The beast is a final Nero-like figure, and Babylon is the final unholy Roman Empire. One of my definitions for apocalyptic is 'the present addressed through parallels with the future.' John's readers were being asked to identify with the people at the end of history and gain perspective for their present suffering through the future trials of God's people. This leads us to the idealist position, also intended in the text, for these final events are also timeless symbols meant to challenge the church in every era. The three-and-a-half-year great tribulation provides models for the similar tribulations of the saints down through history. Therefore, this commentary is quite similar to Beale's except for the centrality of the futurist approach (also similar to Ladd, Beasley-Murray, Michaels, and Mounce).⁷³

⁷³Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 18-22.

Docent Research Homiletical Tips on Revelation

1. Revelation 1:1-8
2. Revelation 1:9-20
3. Revelation 2:1-7
4. Revelation 2:8-11
5. Revelation 2:12-17
6. Revelation 2:18-29
7. Revelation 3:1-6
8. Revelation 3:7-13
9. Revelation 3:14-22
10. The Throne of Jesus Christ in Revelation
11. Commentaries on the Book of Revelation

Revelation 1:1-8

Big Idea: The Revelation of Jesus Christ to John

- “One of the most astonishing, though often neglected, Christologies in the NT is in the book of Revelation. The book commences with the words ‘The revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:1). The Greek genitive behind ‘of Jesus Christ’ ...probably is both subjective and objective. The book is given by Jesus Christ and is about Jesus Christ. Revelation discloses and unveils the truth about Jesus Christ, and hence the first verse captures one of the central themes of the book.”⁷⁴

Word Studies:

- “*testimony of Jesus Christ*” (1:2)
 - “[The book of Revelation] is **the testimony of Jesus Christ** (v. 2). Because of the imminence of persecution threatening to suppress Christian witness (17:6), Revelation is full of the theme of witness. Jesus Christ is the preeminent witness (1:5; 3:14; 19:11). Imitation of him may include martyrdom (12:11). Revelation itself is a witness, a testimony. It intends in turn to strengthen the testimony of its readers. Its message carries full divine authority and authenticity (22:20, 6, 16; 19:10).”⁷⁵
 - “The whole Bible is so; for all revelation comes through Christ and all centres in him;”⁷⁶
- “*to his servant John*” (1:1)
 - “The revelation was not made directly by God to John. God ‘sent’ it through his angel...Revelation is the record of what God has said to John through his angel and of what Jesus Christ has said him.”⁷⁷
- “*Blessed*” (1:3)
 - “There are seven beatitudes in the book: 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:5; 20:6; 22:7, 14. Here, a beatitude is pronounced upon those Christian congregations where John’s revelation was to be read aloud. That this is the meaning is proved, by the words, **those who hear.**”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Thomas Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 420.

⁷⁵ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000). Accessed online: http://www.frame-poythress.org/Poythress_books/Returning_King/BRvCom1.htm (October 14, 2010).

⁷⁶ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible - Volume VI*, (1706), Accessed online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc6.Rev.ii.html> (October 26, 2010).

⁷⁷ Leon Morris, *Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: 1987), 47.

⁷⁸ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 23.

- “As used by Jesus and the prophets, [the beatitude] was not an expression of commonsense conventional wisdom (cf. e.g., Prov. 3:13; Sir. 25:8) but a declaration of the way things really are in the face of empirical evidence. A beatitude is performative language, in the indicative mood. As indicative language, it declares something to be a fact, rather than exhorting. As performative language (like ‘I do’ in a wedding ceremony, or “I forgive you” in personal relations), it does not merely describe something that happens—it makes it happen. The saying of it makes it happen; the pronouncement of blessing conveys the blessing. In this text the blessing pronounced on the lector and the hearers of this book should not become a homily along the lines of ‘we really should read the Bible.’ Rather, this text assumes that there will be Christian congregations that assemble to worship and that within their worship services this book will be read forth as a message from the risen Christ, and it therefore pronounces such congregations blessed.”⁷⁹
- “*seven spirits*” (1:4)
 - “...the seven Spirits are the presence and power of God on earth, bringing about God’s kingdom by implementing the Lamb’s victory throughout the world.”⁸⁰
- “*firstborn of the dead*” (1:5)
 - “Christ has gained such a sovereign position over the cosmos, not in the sense that he is recognized as the first-created being of all creation or as the origin of creation, but in the sense that he is the inaugurator of the *new* creation by means of his resurrection, as 3:14 explains”.⁸¹
- “*ruler of the kings of the earth*” (1:5)
 - “...does not yet indicate at this point his rule over his redeemed people but over his defeated enemies...This includes not only the kingdoms and peoples represented by the kingdoms but also the satanic forces behind these kingdoms.”⁸²
- “*made us a kingdom, priests to his God*” (1:6)
 - “God’s people are a kingdom not merely because they are the people over whom God reigns, but because they are to participate in the messianic reign of Christ. Here are the clearest references in the New Testament where the church is called a kingdom, and it does not provide adequate exegetical support to identify the church with the Kingdom of God. Believers are a kingdom because they will fill the role of kings along with the messianic King—Jesus. Jesus had promised his disciples a share in his rule. (See Matt. 5:2-5; 19:28; Luke 22:30)...Believers are also *priests*. This does not mean that the church serves as mediator between God and the rest of mankind; it means that believers have no need of further mediation

⁷⁹ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 67.

⁸⁰ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 113.

⁸¹ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 191.

⁸² Beale, 191.

because they have access to the immediate presence of God where they perform the priestly functions of offering sacrifices of thanksgiving, worship, and praise to God (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5).”⁸³

- “*Alpha and Omega*”
 - “...is a figure of speech called a merism (a merism states polar opposites in order to highlight everything between the opposites.) Similar merisms...[‘the Beginning and the End,’ 21:6; 22:13 and ‘the First and the Last,’ 22:13; cf. 1:17] express God’s control of all history, especially by bringing it to an end in salvation and judgment...The God who transcends time guides the entire course of history because he stands as sovereign over its beginning and its end.”⁸⁴

Background Info:

- Mounce: Readers in the Church
 - “In John’s day the vast majority of the people could not read and therefore learned aurally...The public reading of Scripture was taken over from Jewish practice (Neh 8:2; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:15; cf. Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27). At first the reader was probably someone chosen from the congregation who had acquired some proficiency in the art. Later the office of reader became an official position in the church.”⁸⁵
- Ladd: The Blood of Christ
 - “In the Bible, blood is a metaphor drawn from the slaughter of the sacrificial lamb to represent sacrificial death, particularly at the Passover, when God freed Israel from bondage to Egypt. The sacrifice of Christ on his cross was the cost of loosing men from bondage to their sins.”⁸⁶

Theological Meaning:

- Ladd: The Love of God
 - “The tenses of the verbs in the doxology are significant. He **loves us**. Christ’s love is permanent abiding fact. He **freed us from our sins by his blood**: a finished work of redemption. Here is the one unambiguous evidence of the fact that God is a God of love who conveys his love to men through his Son. ‘God shows [or displays] his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us’ (Rom. 5:8). The early Christians were facing possible persecution when it would seem that God’s love was obscured and only evil was dominant; but the love of God, in spite of all evil experiences, is assured by an event in history—the death of Jesus Christ.”⁸⁷

⁸³ Ladd, 27.

⁸⁴ Beale, 199.

⁸⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 43.

⁸⁶ Ladd, 27.

⁸⁷ Ladd, 26-27.

- Barclay: The Love of God
 - “John says that Jesus *loves* us and *set us free*. *Loves* is the *present tense* and it means that the love of God in Christ Jesus is something which is continuous. *Set us free* is the *past tense*, the Greek aorist, which tells of one act completed in the past and it means that in the one act of the Cross our liberation from sin was achieved. This is to say, what happened on the Cross was one availing act in time which was an expression of the continuous love of God.”⁸⁸
- Spurgeon: Enlarging your Thoughts of Jesus by the Revelation of the Exalted Christ
 - “Low thoughts of the Lord Jesus Christ are exceedingly mischievous to believers. If you sink your estimate of him you shift everything else in the same proportion. He who thinks lightly of the Savior thinks so much the less of the evil of sin; and, consequently, he becomes callous as to the past, careless as to the present, and venturesome as to the future.... If our conceptions of the Lord Jesus are very enlarged, they will only be his due. We cannot exaggerate here. He deserves higher praise than we can ever render to him. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high is he above our loftiest conceptions.”⁸⁹

Illustrations:

- **Biblical**
 - God’s revelation of himself is blessing to humanity. God did not have to reveal himself—he did not have to speak to men and women who disobeyed his law and rebelled against him. God’s justice could have easily been eternal silence to humanity. Yet he speaks. Throughout the Old Testament God graciously speaks to and through patriarchs and prophets, and now in the last days, which started at the arrival of Jesus in Bethlehem, he has spoken grace and blessing to the world in the person of Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-2). The book of Revelation is meant to reveal to the world that Jesus Christ is revelation of God and is coming again to bless all who trust him and to judge all who reject him (Rev. 1:5-7).
- **Classical**
 - William Hendriksen compares the book of Revelation to a movie. He states, “The book of Revelation is a series of pictures. The pictures move. They are full of action. Everything is constantly astir. You see one picture. It soon makes place for another; again, another, and another. IF you really wish to understand the book, you must imagine that you are enjoying a movie-film...The entire book consists of changing scenes, moving pictures, active symbols...Moreover, there are sounds, voices, songs, responses, choruses. Cf. 4:8, 11; 5:9, 10; 5:12, 13, 14; 11:15-18; 12:10; 15:3, 4; 19:1-8; 22:17...It is, as it were, as ‘sound-film.’”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Volume 1 (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976), 34.

⁸⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Glorious Master and the Swooning Disciple”, No. 1028, The Charles H. Spurgeon Library, Version 1 (AGES Digital Library CDROM), 2-3.

⁹⁰ Hendriksen, 49-50.

Revelation 1:9-20

Big Idea: The Reaction to Jesus Christ from John

- “John is commissioned to write to the churches because their confidence is grounded in Christ’s installation as cosmic judge, priest, and ruler of the church as a result of his victory over death.”⁹¹

Word Studies:

- “*I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus*” (1:9)
 - “John and his community are people who even now reign together in Jesus’ kingdom...But this is a kingdom unanticipated by the majority of Jews. The exercise of rule in this kingdom begins and continues only as one faithfully endures tribulation. This is a formula for kingship: faithful endurance through tribulation is the means by which one reigns in the present with Jesus.”⁹²
- “*The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow.*” (1:14)
 - “[shows] his antiquity and immortality, and the source of his majesty; for ‘the head of Christ is God.’”⁹³
 - “...not without reason is he called white, because he is compared to white wool and to snow on account of his tenderness which he gives without ceasing to sinners.”⁹⁴
- “*I fell at his feet as though dead, but he laid his right hand on me*” (1:17)
 - “Terror was common during visions (Gen 15:12); those who received revelations of God (Ezek 1:28; 11:13) or of angels (Dan 8:18; 10:9, 15) in the Old Testament often fell on their faces, unless the revealer touched and strengthened them (Dan 8:18; 10:10).”⁹⁵
- “*seven golden lampstands*” (1:20)
 - “The lampstands symbolize the churches in their light-bearing or witness-bearing function (1:20; Matt. 5:14-16). The churches are the reality to which the symbolic lampstands in the tabernacle and the temple pointed forward.”⁹⁶

⁹¹ Beale, 200.

⁹² Beale, 201.

⁹³ Victorinus of Petovium, Quoted in William C. Weinrich, *Revelation*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, Volume 12 (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2005), 13.

⁹⁴ Apringius of Beja, Quoted in William C. Weinrich, *Revelation*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, Volume 12 (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2005), 13.

⁹⁵ Craig S. Keener, Commentary on Revelation 1:17.

⁹⁶ Poythress, Accessed online: http://www.frame-poythress.org/Poythress_books/Returning_King/BRvCom1.htm (October 14, 2010).

Background Info:

- Beale: OT Allusions to Commissioning of Prophets
 - “The introduction of the commission uses the language of the prophet Ezekiel’s repeated rapture in the Spirit, thus giving John’s revelation prophetic authority like that of the OT prophets (cf. Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 11:1; 43:5). This identification with prophetic authority is enforced by the description of the voice that John hears as ‘a great voice as a trumpet,’ evoking the voice that Moses heard when Yahweh revealed himself on Mount Sinai”.⁹⁷
- Poythress: The Island of Patmos
 - “**Patmos** is a small island off the west coast of Asia Minor. It had a Roman penal settlement, used for persons considered dangerous to good order. John had probably been exiled there on account of his uncompromising loyalty to Christ. John is thus a picture of the persecutions that may come to any Christian.”⁹⁸
 - “John’s further statement that he *was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God*...probably means banishment and, in the case of one so insignificant as a Christian preacher, that would have meant hard labour in quarries or the like. *Was* may mean that he was no longer there. Patmos is one of the Dodecanese Islands off the coast of Asia Minor. It is crescent-shaped and about 8 miles by 4 miles.”⁹⁹
- Schreiner: Jesus’ Burnished Bronze Feet
 - “In the ancient world warfare conducted without good footwear for soldiers spelled disaster. Armies that engaged in long marches could lose battles because the soldiers were incapacitated by damage done to their feet by the long journey. Jesus as the divine warrior does not suffer from the same malady. His bronze feet overcome any obstacles with ease (Rev. 2:18). He is prepared to crush any who oppose him (Rev. 2:26-27). As the divine warrior on a white horse, he is prepared to lead the armies of heaven into the last battle (Rev. 19:11-21).”¹⁰⁰
- Morris: Jesus’ Two-Edged Sword
 - “The sword is a weapon of offence and points to decisive action against those who oppose his will. This imagery ‘is not so strange as appears at first sight, for the short Roman sword was tongue-like in shape’.”¹⁰¹
- Beale: Jesus’ Long Robe with a Golden Sash
 - “Although the clothing of v 13 could also resemble kingly attire, its use here evokes the image of a priest because of the clear temple atmosphere of the ‘lampstands’ and the angels coming out of the heavenly temple, who wear the

⁹⁷ Beale, 203.

⁹⁸ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000). Accessed online: http://www.frame-poythress.org/Poythress_books/Returning_King/BRvCom1.htm (October 14, 2010).

⁹⁹ Morris, 52.

¹⁰⁰ Schreiner, 425.

¹⁰¹ Morris, 55

same clothing in 15:5-8). The ambiguity may be deliberate: perhaps both a king and a priest are in mind, which would have precedent in the two figures of Zech. 4:3, 11-14 (see on Rev. 11:4) and in the descriptions of Jonathan (1 Macc. 10:88-89; 14:30) and Simon, the ‘governor and high priest’ of Israel (1 Macc. 14:32-47).”¹⁰²

- Keener: Keys of Death and Hades
 - “In the Old Testament (Ps 9:13; 107:18) and Jewish literature, ‘the gates of Hades’ referred to the realm of the dead and thus to the power of death; one who held the keys to these realms thus ruled over them. (Whoever held the keys in a royal house held a position of great authority in that house, as in Is 22:21–22; keys symbolized authority to control whatever they opened, and Jewish texts spoke of God dispensing keys to rain, etc.) Jewish literature said that God had authority over death and the gates of Hades (Wisdom of Solomon 16:13). Christ’s power over death, as the one who had risen, would encourage his followers now facing possible death.”¹⁰³

Comparison

- Poythress: The Seven Churches¹⁰⁴

Church	Character of Christ	Strength	Problem	Duty	Promise
Ephesus	authority	doctrinal zeal	lost love	repent	tree of life
Smyrna	giving life	spiritually rich		suffer for Christ	Freedom from death
Pergamum	warrior against sin	holding fast	false teaching, immorality	repent	Spiritual significance
Thyatira	searching heart	love, service	false teaching, immorality (Jezebel)	repudiate Jezebel	rule over nations
Sardis	source of Spirit	a few faithful saints	spiritually dead	awake!	White robe (honor)
Philadelphia	opening door	keeping the word	little strength	continue	Secure dwelling
Laodicea	true witness		worthless	admit need; receive from Christ	Fellowship

¹⁰² Beale, 209.

¹⁰³ Keener, Commentary on Revelation 1:18.

¹⁰⁴ Table taken from Poythress, Accessed online: http://www.frame-poythress.org/Poythress_books/Returning_King/BRvCom1.htm (October 14, 2010).

- Storms: The Jesus-Driven Church
 - “One cannot read these seven letters without noting the utter and unequivocal *Christocentricity* of their content. Jesus is the center of which all church life is the circumference. He is the head of the church, both local and universal. He is the unrivaled Lord over all. He is himself the standard according to which the life of every congregation is judged and the One whose person and personality shape the beliefs and behavior of all. He is the one who walks among the lampstands (i.e., the churches; 2:1) and exercised exclusive sovereignty over the life of every congregation... The spiritual condition of each body of believers is only as good as their faithful adherence to what Jesus has taught them and their perseverance in bearing witness to him in the face of persecution. Quite simply, if a church is not Jesus-driven, it stands on the brink of certain discipline (cf. 3:5; 2:16; 3:3; 3:19).”¹⁰⁵
- Peterson: The Seven Churches are Like Our Churches
 - “There is no evidence in the annals of ancient Israel or in the pages of the New Testament that churches were ever much better or much worse than they are today. A random selection of seven churches in any century, including our own, would turn up something very much like the seven churches to which St. John was pastor.”¹⁰⁶

Theological Meaning:

- Beale: Identity with Jesus and Enduring Suffering
 - “John views Christians as identified corporately with Jesus... This corporate identity is the basis for both the trials that confront them and their ability to endure such trials and to participate in the kingdom as kings (cf. Luke 24:46; Acts 14:22; Phil. 1:29)... Therefore when believers ‘endure’ in their faith, they are said to have ‘kept the word of *Christ’s* endurance’ (3:10). The Apocalypse reveals that their reign, like Jesus’ initial kingship, consists in ‘conquering’ by not compromising their faithful witness in the face of trials (e.g., 2:9-11, 13; 3:8; 12:11), in ruling over the powers of evil (e.g., 6:8 in relation to 6:9-11), in defeating sin in their lives (see chs. 2-3), and in beginning to rule over death and Satan by identification with Jesus (cf. 1:5-6, 18). Their endurance is part of the process of ‘conquering’ (see the concluding promise in each of the letters).”¹⁰⁷
- Wesley: Falling down Dead
 - “And I fell at his feet as dead - Human nature not being able to sustain so glorious an appearance. Thus was he prepared (like Daniel of old, whom he peculiarly resembles) for receiving so weighty a prophecy. A great sinking of nature usually

¹⁰⁵ Sam Storms, *To the One who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 17.

¹⁰⁶ Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John & the Praying Imagination* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1991), 56.

¹⁰⁷ Beale, 201-202.

precedes a large communication of heavenly things. St. John, before our Lord suffered, was so intimate with him, as to lean on his breast, to lie in his bosom. Yet now, near seventy years after, the aged apostle is by one glance struck to the ground. What a glory must this be! Ye sinners, be afraid cleanse your hands: purify your hearts. Ye saints, be humble, prepare: rejoice. But rejoice unto him with reverence: an increase of reverence towards this awful majesty can be no prejudice to your faith.”¹⁰⁸

Illustrations:

- **Biblical**

- When sinful people meet Jesus they don't slap him on the back and go on their merry way, they fall on their face. The resurrected Christ is not your homeboy, he is the sovereign ruler who is the head of the church and holds the universe in his hand. John was Jesus' best friend and yet John doesn't embrace him, but falls like a dead man. His feelings were probably similar to Isaiah's when he saw the Lord and cried out “Woe is me!” and confessed his own sin and the sin of his people Israel (Is. 6:5). Pure holiness demands the prostration of sinful humanity; however it does not *only* do that. Like the seraphim who touched Isaiah's lips with a hot coal and said “Your sin is atoned for” (Is. 6:7); Jesus, who died for the sins of John, pulls him up with his right hand honoring him and says, “Do not be afraid” (Rev. 1:17). The holy revelation of Jesus Christ demands the response of human repentance and then offers the grace of fearless acceptance because he is alive having forgiven sinners, defeated Satan, and conquered death.

- **Classical**

- St. John of the Cross (1542-1591): “God has said so much about so many things through his Word that nothing more is needed, since that which he revealed partially in the past through the prophets, he has now revealed completely by giving us the All, which is his Son. Therefore if someone were now to ask questions of God or seek any vision or revelation, he would not only be acting foolishly but would be committing an offence against God – for he should set his eyes altogether upon Christ and seek nothing beyond Christ.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ John Wesley, *Wesley's Notes on the Bible*. Accessed online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/notes.i.xxviii.ii.html> (October 19, 2010).

¹⁰⁹ St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, 2.22.

Revelation 2:1-7

Big Idea: Reaction #1 - All Head No Heart (Ephesus)

- “Christ commends the Ephesian church for its orthodoxy, condemns it for its lack of witness, and exhorts it to overcome this lack in order to inherit eternal life (2:1-7).”¹¹⁰

Word Studies

- “*enduring patiently and bearing up for my names’ sake, and you have not grown weary.*” (1:3)
 - “...the emphasis is on persevering in guarding the internal doctrinal purity of the church. This was not an occasional strength of the church but an ever vigilant attitude toward inner purity, which the church maintained well into the second century in the fact of continued threats from false teachers”.¹¹¹
- “*abandoned*” (2:4)
 - “...(*aphekes*) is a strong term; they had completely abandoned their first fine flush of enthusiastic love. They had yielded to the temptation, ever present to Christians, to put all their emphasis on sound teaching. In the process they lost love, without which all else is nothing.”¹¹²
- “*remember*” (2:5)
 - “First they should remember their first state (there is a tragic air of completeness about the perfect *peptokas*, fallen). It is possible to slip away gradually without realizing what is happening. A useful counter is to go back in thought to the first days. The Greek imperative is present, with a meaning like ‘keep on remembering’, ‘hold in memory’. They had enjoyed a close walk with God. Let their minds dwell on that.”¹¹³
- “*repent*” (2:5)
 - “...repentance is a change of mind leading to a change of direction. It is resolutely and completely to turn one’s back on all known sin. Jesus Christ does not advocate the conjuring up of an emotional experience. He does not urge the Ephesian Christians to feel bad about their sins. It is not what they feel about them which matters, so much as what they do about them.”¹¹⁴

Notables: “*Jesus hates moral and theological compromise.*”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Beale, 228.

¹¹¹ Beale, 229-230.

¹¹² Morris, 60.

¹¹³ Morris, 60.

¹¹⁴ John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 32.

¹¹⁵ Storms, *To the One who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3*, 43.

Background Info

- Martin: Rampant Idolatry in Ephesus
 - “Epigraphic, numismatic and literary evidence reveals that the people of Ephesus worshiped up to fifty different gods and goddesses. Primacy of place, however, went to Artemis of Ephesus (Diana Ephesia) who enjoyed an official covenant bond with the city. Ephesus was also famous in antiquity as a center for the practice and dissemination of the magical arts... Certain magical formulas were even referred to as ‘the Ephesian letters.’ Not surprisingly, then, Luke records two incidents portraying the impact Christianity had on the local magical practices and the cult of Artemis (Acts 19:13–20, 23–41).”¹¹⁶
- McGee: Immorality and Idolatry
 - “Around the temple of Diana was performed the grossest forms of immortality. She was worshipped by probably more people than was any other idol. The worshipers indulged in the basest religious rites of sensuality and the wildest bacchanalian orgies that were excessive and vicious. And farther inland, the worship of Diana became nothing more than sex orgies, and her name was changed from Diana to Sybil.”¹¹⁷
- Ladd: The Doctrinally Immaculate Church in Ephesus
 - “The church in Ephesus was outstanding because of its ability to distinguish between true and false apostles and its refusal to tolerate those who were false. That this was a deeply rooted characteristic of the church is witnessed by the fact that Ignatius commends the Ephesians because no false teaching could gain a hearing among them”.¹¹⁸
- Beale: Nicolaitans
 - “The Nicolaitans taught that some degree of participation in the idolatrous culture of Ephesus was permissible... The city had also been declared a ‘temple warden’ of two temples dedicated to the imperial cult, which mean that the cult also played an essential part in the cities life. Therefore, the church’s resistance to internal pressures to accommodate to aspects of this idolatrous society was very commendable”.¹¹⁹

Theological Meaning

- Ladd: Abandoning One’s First Love
 - “Doctrinal purity and loyalty can never be a substitute for love.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Martin, Ralph P.; Davids, Peter H., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press) 2000, c1998.

¹¹⁷ J. Vernon McGee, *Revelation*, Volume 1 (Pasadena, CA: Through The Bible Books, 1981), 64.

¹¹⁸ Ladd, 39.

¹¹⁹ Beale, 234.

¹²⁰ Ladd, 39.

- Stott: No Light from the Church without Love in the Church
 - “Christ’s warning to Ephesus is just as appropriate to us today. Our own church’s light will be extinguished if we stubbornly persevere in our refusal to love Christ. The church has no light without love. Only when its love burns can its light shine. Many churches all over the world today have ceased truly to exist. Their buildings remain intact, their ministers minister and the congregations congregate, but their lampstand has been removed. The church is plunged in darkness. No glimmer of light radiates from it. It has no light, because it has no love. Let us heed this warning before it is too late.”¹²¹
- Storms: Loss of First Love as a Loss of Love for Christ or Love for the Church
 - “The words do not make it clear whether the “first love” which they had abandoned was love for Christ or for their fellow-Christians, but both may be in view. The subsequent command to “do the first works” which are a reflection of that love indicates that *brotherly love* may be the prominent idea.”¹²²
 - “What we see in the church at Ephesus, therefore, was how their desire for orthodoxy and the exclusion of error had created a climate of suspicion and mistrust in which brotherly love could no longer flourish. Their eager pursuit of truth had to some degree soured their affections one for another. It’s one thing not to ‘bear with those who are evil’ (Rev. 2:2), but it’s another thing altogether when the intolerance carries over to your relationship with other Christ-loving Christians.”¹²³
- Barnhouse: Orthodoxy without Devotion
 - “It is to be noted that no question of doctrine is raised in all this. The difficulty of these believers was that they were holding to orthodoxy without a heart of personal devotion to Christ. This is the real meaning of the letter without the Spirit. This loss of love showed the soul’s distance from Christ, for we do not think longingly of those have ceased to love; but true love ever annihilates distance, even though half a world lies between love and its object. The heart bridges the distance constantly.”¹²⁴

Illustrations:

- **Biblical**
 - Jesus’ rebuke of the Ephesian church for doctrinal orthodoxy without passionate devotion is similar to Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees before his death. In Matthew 5:39 Jesus says to them, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me”. The

¹²¹ Stott, 33.

¹²² Sam Storms, “The Letter to the Church at Ephesus (2:1-7)”, Accessed online: <http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/the-letter-to-the-church-at-ephesus-21-7/> (October 16, 2010).

¹²³ Storms, *To the One who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3*, 50.

¹²⁴ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Revelation: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 41.

Pharisees knew the Old Testament Scriptures inside and out and yet they missed the very point of the Old Testament Scriptures being Jesus Christ himself. Similarly those in Ephesus knew the Old Testament, as well as, the apostolic tradition about the person and work of Jesus Christ and could defend and proclaim their facts of knowledge about him with the best of them, but that was just it, it was just facts. There was no sense of devotion to a person. It was devotion to sentences and tradition. Doctrine, which is derived from the Scriptures, is meant to enflame devotion to the person of Jesus not just knowledge about Jesus as an end in itself. Of course, knowledge about Jesus (and the Scriptures) is essential, and the Ephesian church is commended for it, but sadly like the Pharisees they missed worshipping the person the Scriptures were pointing to.

- **Classical**

- In the 16th century a man named Faustus Socinus attacked the Reformers' view that Christ died on the cross as a penal substitute, arguing that the doctrine did not make sense logically. According to J. I. Packer, some responded by trying to beat the Socinians at their own game and, in their zeal to prove themselves rational, became rationalistic. The sad result, according to Packer, was that “they made the word of the cross sound more like a conundrum than a confession of faith – more like a puzzle, we might say, than a gospel.”¹²⁵ Although we must seek to understand the cross, we can only do so when we stand under the cross, which demands a response not only from our minds, but our hearts and bodies as well.

¹²⁵J. I. Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution,” in *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, by Mark Dever and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 55–56.

Revelation 2:8-11

Big Idea: Reaction #2 – Just Plain Faithful (Smyrna)

- “Christ commends the church of Smyrna for enduring tribulation and encourages it to continue to be faithful in anticipation of imminent, more severe persecution, in order to inherit eternal life and heavenly kingship”.¹²⁶

Notables:

- Jesus calls the churches to repent at least seven times in chapters 2 and 3.

Word Studies

- “*slander*”(2:9)
 - “...its proper meaning is not blasphemy of the name of God but slanderous accusations against men... We may conclude that in Smyrna the Jews found grounds for effective accusation of Christians before the Roman authorities which made them appear to be violators of Roman law.”¹²⁷
- “*prison*” (2:10)
 - “...a number of commentators think, prison was simply a place of confinement while awaiting execution”.¹²⁸
- “*faithful*” (2:10)
 - “‘Faith’ in the Book of Revelation is the way we persevere, by putting all our trust in the God who is sovereign over history and will indeed vindicate his people for all their suffering. It does not mean that suffering is not our lot but rather that God will bring victory out of seeming defeat.”¹²⁹
- “*the second death*” (2:11)
 - “Those who do suffer the ‘second death’ will not participate in the resurrection of the saints or in the life of the new world to come, but will experience unending punishment.”¹³⁰
- “*one who conquers*” (2:11)
 - “...here refers to an ironic victory wherein the earthly defeat of death is heavenly victory and life.”¹³¹

Background Info

¹²⁶ Beale, 239.

¹²⁷ Ladd, 43.

¹²⁸ Morris, 64.

¹²⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 134.

¹³⁰ Beale, 245.

¹³¹ Beale, 244.

- Walvoord: Smyrna Christians as “myrrh”
 - “The name of the city, Smyrna, means ‘myrrh,’ an ordinary perfume. It was also used in the anointing oil of the tabernacle, and in embalming dead bodies (cf. Ex. 30:23; Ps. 45:8; Song 3:6; Matt. 2:11; Mark 15:23; John 19:39). While the Christians of the church at Smyrna were experiencing the bitterness of suffering, their faithful testimony was like myrrh or sweet perfume to God.”¹³²
- Beale: The Cause of Poverty for Christians in Smyrna
 - “...the imperial cult permeated virtually every aspect of city and the often even village life in Asia Minor, so that individuals could aspire to economic prosperity and greater social standing only by participating to some degree in the Roman cult. Citizens of both upper and lower classes were required by local law to sacrifice to the emperor on various special occasions, and sometimes even visitors and foreigners were invited to do so. City officials were so dedicated to the cult that they even distributed money to citizens from public funds to pay for sacrifices to the emperor (in, for example, Ephesus). It was almost impossible to have a share in a city’s public life without also having a part in some aspect of the imperial cult.”¹³³
- Wall: Synagogue of Satan
 - “The agents of the Evil One in this case are the **Jews** who lay claim to God’s Israel but who belong to a **synagogue of Satan** which actively opposes the church’s witness in Smyrna.”¹³⁴

Theological Meaning

- Beale: The Satanic Influence of Persecution, the Testing of Believers, and the Sovereignty of Jesus
 - “...Christ tells them to brace for severer punishment. They are ‘not to fear’ the imminent trial because their lives and destiny are in the hands of the eternal Pantokrator of history, who has already experienced persecution, even to death, and yet overcome it through resurrection...They are not to be afraid of the devil himself, who instigates oppressive measures through the Romans and Jews (so v 9b). For Jesus has defeated him (1:1, 18; 12:1-12) and even his rebellious efforts can only fulfill Christ’s sovereign plan for history (cf. 17:17). Therefore the true saint should not be afraid of the devil’s attempts to bring about compromise in the church through persecution *because*...these are really ‘divine tests’ to distinguish genuine from false believers in the church (cf. 1 Cor. 11:19)... Indeed, Jesus employs the devil’s efforts for the *purpose*...of strengthening his people through these tests. However, because Jesus is the ultimate disposer of history, he is able

¹³² John F. Walvoord, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck eds., (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications, 2000), 934.

¹³³ Beale, 240-241.

¹³⁴ Wall, 73.

to reveal that their coming tribulation will be brief.”¹³⁵

- Storms: Faithfulness is the Fruit of Faith
 - “Jesus calls for our faithfulness in such circumstances no less than he called for theirs (v. 10). But it’s not automatic. Endurance doesn’t just happen. *Faithfulness is the fruit of faith.* In other words, there are truths we must embrace if we are to endure. Unbelief leads to bitterness and despair.”¹³⁶

Illustrations:

- **Biblical**
 - Faithfulness is a rarity in our culture, and as many of these letters that Jesus wrote to the seven churches in the first century demonstrate, it was rare then too. One of the evidences of grace within the Smyrnan church that Jesus points out is that they, as opposed to many of the other seven churches, were faithfully enduring persecution. Interestingly, Jesus writes to them not promising to alleviate the persecution but to prophesy that more is coming (Rev. 2:10). How could they faithfully endure continued persecution even unto death (Rev. 2:10)? With the kind of faith that the church that the author of the Hebrews wrote too; the kind that joyfully accepts persecution in the face of poverty (Rev. 2:9) because heaven with Jesus is a better and abiding possession than a temporary and wealthy earthly one without him (Heb. 10:34). Pain from persecution doesn’t last, while those who are faithful to Jesus will live forever living in eternal pleasure.
- **Classical**
 - Polycarp, the early second-century bishop of Smyrna, whose martyrdom was published in the early church document the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, may have been a recipient of this letter from Jesus through John. He is an example of one Smyrnan who did not fear, but overcame and was faithful to Jesus unto death. Before a mob of persecutors and bound to a stake, Polycarp was given the choice of freedom if he would only deny his allegiance to Christ. Polycarp response is astounding: “Eighty and six years have I served him, and he hath done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me.” Polycarp was then burned at the stake before a crowd and received into the presence of his Lord.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Beale, 241-242.

¹³⁶ Storms, *To the One who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3*, 69.

¹³⁷ Henry Bettenson, Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church*, (Oxford: Oxford, 1999), 11.

Revelation 2:12-17

Big Idea: Reaction #3 —Good Works Bad Doctrine (Pergamum)

- “Christ commends the church in Pergamum for its persevering witness in the midst of persecution, condemns it for its permissive spirit of idolatrous compromise, and exhorts it to overcome this in order not to be judged but to inherit end-time fellowship and identification with Christ (2:12-17).”¹³⁸

Word Studies

- “*I know where you dwell*” (2:13)
 - “[Jesus] is not ignorant of the fact that the Christian Church is set in the non-Christian world, and that it feels on all sides the continuous pressure of heathen influence.”¹³⁹
- “*hold fast my name*” (2:13)
 - “The verb means to ‘grasp forcibly’ or, in this figurative use, to ‘remain firm.’ In 2:1 Jesus ‘holds the seven stars firm’ as he watches over the churches, and here the believers ‘hold firm’ to his name.”¹⁴⁰
- “*did not deny my faith*” (2:13)
 - “The tense of the verb points to some definite situation in the recent past when members of the church were faced with the challenge of denying their faith in Christ.”¹⁴¹

Background Info

- Beale: Pergamum the Capital of the Imperial Cult and many other Pagan Cults
 - “It was the first city in Asia Minor to build a temple to a Roman ruler (Augustus) and the capital of the whole area for the cult of the emperor. The city proudly referred to itself as the ‘temple warden’ ...of a temple dedicated to Caesar worship.... Pergamum was also a center of pagan cults of various deities. For example the cult of Asclepius, the serpent god of healing, was prominent in Pergamum; the serpent symbol of Asclepius also became one of the emblems of the city and may have facilitated John’s reference to ‘the throne of Satan’ (cf. 12:9; 20:2!). Zeus, Athene, Demeter, and Dionysus were also gods receiving significant cultic attention.”¹⁴²
- Osborne: Satan’s Throne

¹³⁸ Beale, 245.

¹³⁹ Stott, 52.

¹⁴⁰ Osborne, 141.

¹⁴¹ Ladd, 46.

¹⁴² Beale, 246.

- “In the ancient world a throne signified special authority and royal governance, so in some way Pergamum is named as the seat of satanic power. There have been several interpretations of ‘Satan’s throne’... The best option is the imperial cult, the major problem behind Revelation as a whole (as we will see) and the core of Pergamum religion. It was emperor worship that most directly occasioned the persecutions under Domitian and Trajan, and Pergamum was the center of the imperial cult for all of the province of Asia.”¹⁴³
- Morris: Antipas
 - “The reference to one martyrdom, that of *Antipas*, and the aorist tense in the verb *renounce* point to one definite crisis rather than a continuing persecution. Nothing more is known of Antipas (though legend has it that he was roasted in a brazen bull). But clearly he remained firm; he was *my faithful witness* (in time this term came to mean ‘martyr’, one who witnessed by his death)”.¹⁴⁴
- Beale and Osborne: Balaam, Balak, and the Nicolaitans
 - “Balaam was a pagan prophet hired by Balak, king of Moab, to pronounce a curse upon the invading Israelites. God prevented Balaam from doing so and caused him to issue a blessing on them instead (Num. 22:5-24:25). However, Balaam subsequently devised a plan in continued disobedience to God whereby some of the Moabite women would entice the Israelite men to ‘defect from the Lord’ (31:16) by fornicating with them and joining with them in the worship of their pagan gods (25:1-3). This plan was successful, and God punished the Israelites for their idolatrous involvement... Balaam became proverbial for the false teacher who for money influences believers to enter into relationships of compromising unfaithfulness, is warned by God to stop, and is finally punished for continuing to disobey”.¹⁴⁵
 - “The two areas of [the teaching of Balaam]—idolatry and immorality—relate to practice rather than doctrine... the movement centered on praxis more than theory. The description—‘eating meat sacrificed to idols’ and ‘commit idolatry’—is reminiscent of Acts 15:20, 29 and the four restrictions placed on Gentile believers by the Jerusalem council. These were always problems among Gentile Christians, raised in an atmosphere of idolatry and immorality. Apparently this cult movement sought accommodation with such pagan practices.”¹⁴⁶

Theological Meaning

- Beale: Pergamum’s Problem the Opposite of Ephesus
 - “The problem is the opposite of that in Ephesus. An overemphasis on internal doctrinal purity can lead to a lack of concern for the outside world, whereas a

¹⁴³ Osborne, 141.

¹⁴⁴ Morris, 66.

¹⁴⁵ Beale, 249.

¹⁴⁶ Osborne, 144.

deemphasis can lead to overidentification with the world. The Christians in Pergamum staunchly withstood external pressures to compromise from pagan governmental and religious authorities but had permitted an apparently subtle form of compromise to develop internally.”¹⁴⁷

- Stott: The Perfect Balance of Truth and Love
 - “...Scriptures hold love and truth together in perfect balance. Some Christians are so resolved to make love paramount, that they forget the sacredness of revealed truth. ‘Let us drown our doctrinal differences’, they urge, ‘in the ocean of brotherly love!’ Others are equally mistaken in their pursuit of truth at the expense of love. So dogged is their zeal for God’s word that they become harsh and bitter and unloving. Love becomes sentimental if it is not strengthened by the truth, and truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love.”¹⁴⁸
- Wall: Gospel Fidelity means Conflict with the World
 - “The effects of God’s grace within the church may well be obscured by the effects of living within a society at odds with the notions of divine truth and the character of divine love. Conflict is therefore the necessary result of fidelity to God’s gospel. Even though such faithfulness results in affliction, it is nevertheless motivated by the reality of Christ’s resurrection and the hope of his return.”¹⁴⁹
- Osborne: New Name
 - “The ‘name’ (38 times in this book; only Acts uses it more frequently) connotes the essence of the person, and in the LXX as here often speaks of the person’s basic characteristics. For instance, Jesus (see Matt. 1:21, 25 on the name Jesus) gave Simon the name ‘Cephas/Peter’ to designate what he would become, the ‘rock.’ When the believers are given ‘new names in 2:17 below, they have a new identity, a new family (cf. 3:5, 12; 14:1; 22:4). Therefore, to remain true to Jesus’ name means to live up to the responsibility of this new identity, to resist the lure of this pagan world.”¹⁵⁰

Illustrations:

- **Biblical**
 - John, who received this revelation from Jesus Christ, was known as the apostle of love, but in some senses he was also the apostle of truth. In another letter to a different church community he designates false teachers in their midst as antichrist because they denied that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22). Unlike those in Pergamum he had no patience for those who may have done many good works, yet held to false doctrine. Indeed John would identify tangible good works (1 Jn. 3:17) and love for others (1 Jn. 3:10) as an evidence of Christian faith, but he also

¹⁴⁷ Beale, 248.

¹⁴⁸ Stott, 53-54.

¹⁴⁹ Wall, 75.

¹⁵⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 142.

classifies holding fast to the apostolic Gospel message (1 Jn. 2:24) as an evidence of authentic conversion. Christianity is not, when it comes to gospel truth and gospel love, either/or—it is both/and. Pergamum needed this rebuke of love (Prov. 27:5), and to return to the remedy for false teaching, namely, holding fast to the apostolic message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- **Classical**

- In the early 20th century a young pastor from New York was moved by the dire physical needs of those around him and the clear biblical commands to care for the poor and oppressed. The passion of this man, Walter Rauschenbusch, would eventually spawn an entire movement that, although attended to the social needs of the time, did so at the cost of sound biblical doctrine. The “social gospel” may have begun out of a legitimate desire to provide for the needs of the less fortunate and oppressed, but by denying substitutionary atonement, a literal hell, and the second coming of Christ, it ultimately lost the gospel itself.

Revelation 2:18-29

Big Idea: Reaction #4 – More Tolerant than God (Thyatira)

- “Christ commends the church of Thyatira for its Christian works of witness, condemns it for its permissive spirit of idolatrous compromise, and exhorts it to overcome this in order not to be judged by to inherit end-time rule together with Christ”.¹⁵¹

Word Studies

- “and that your latter works exceed the first” (2:19)
 - “...the quality of life in this church was not diminishing. They were continuing to grow in their good deeds...Most likely, this is intended both quantitatively and qualitatively: There were more good deeds and they had more impact than when Thyatira was a young church. This is high praise indeed.”¹⁵²
- “tolerate” (2:20)
 - “The problem in Thyatira was an unhealthy tolerance. They recognized the presence of the false prophetess; they recognized the evil character of her teaching, but they tolerantly refused to deal with her...Here is a church abounding and increasing in love and faith which is tolerant of false prophets to her own detriment.”¹⁵³
- “seducing my servants” (2:20)
 - “This is the only place in the book where Christians are ‘deceived’; elsewhere it is always unbelievers...The verb means to ‘seduce’ a person into sin by leading that one into error.”¹⁵⁴
- “To the one who conquers [overcomes, NIV]” (2:26)
 - “...those who fail to prove themselves ‘overcomers’ fail thereby to prove themselves Christians.”¹⁵⁵
- “keeps my works until the end” (2:26)
 - “Works are never the ground or means of our salvation, but they are the evidence of it, and therefore they constitute an excellent basis for judgment.”¹⁵⁶
- “I will give him the morning star” (2:28)
 - “But as Christ is himself referred to as ‘the bright Morning Star’ (22:16) it is likely that it is the presence of the Lord that is meant. Even though this is an unusual way for Christ to refer to himself this seems the best way of taking the

¹⁵¹ Beale, 259.

¹⁵² Osborne, 155.

¹⁵³ Ladd, 52.

¹⁵⁴ Osborne, 157-158.

¹⁵⁵ Beale, 272.

¹⁵⁶ Stott, 80.

words. The ultimate reward of the Christian is to be with his Lord.”¹⁵⁷

Background Info

- Osborne: Jezebel and the Guild of Thyatira
 - “One thing we can state with a sense of confidence: the problem in Thyatira centered on the guilds. For persons to maintain their livelihood, some connection, indeed membership, in the guilds was a virtual necessity. For Christians the problem was that this mandated participation in the guild feasts, which themselves involved ‘meat offered to idols’ . . . , since the patron gods of the guilds were always worshipped at the feasts . . . At times this could also involve immorality . . . Whenever Christians refused to participate in the feasts because such participation would compromise their faith, they faced the anger of the pagan populace, and it had economic repercussions if they lost their jobs. Thus while at Pergamum it was a life-threatening situation, at Thyatira the problem was more economic and social. Jezebel probably ‘taught’ that there was nothing wrong with a Christian taking part in the guild feasts and celebrations, for it was merely civil.”¹⁵⁸
- Poythress: Jezebel and the Deep Things of Satan
 - “She may have argued that those with her secret knowledge (v. 24) could see that an idol is nothing (cf. 1 Cor. 10:19), and that for people with deep “spiritual” knowledge the use of the body no longer made a difference.”¹⁵⁹

Theological Meaning

- Bauckham: The Church Must Witness to the Truth
 - “. . . the church’s witness to the world is authentic only as primarily a witness to the truth—to the one true God and the truth of his righteousness and grace. In western societies today this witness to the truth does not confront a totalitarian ideology which claims sole truth and seeks to suppress the Gospel. Instead it faces a relativistic despair of the possibility of truth, and even more, a consumerist neglect of the relevance of truth. The church’s witness will be of value only if it knows truth worth dying for.”¹⁶⁰
- Stott: No Other Burden
 - “A new immorality must not drive us into a new asceticism. We may be surrounded by unchastity, but we are not to let an extreme of laxity around us stampede us to an extreme of rigidity in ourselves. Christ has no new burden for those living in an environment where standards are low. We are simply to hold fast what we already have, that is to say, what He has already given us in His

¹⁵⁷ Morris, 74.

¹⁵⁸ Osborne, 157.

¹⁵⁹ Poythress, Accessed online: http://www.frame-poythress.org/Poythress_books/Returning_King/BRvCom1.htm#message (October 20, 2010).

¹⁶⁰ Bauckham, 160.

written word.”¹⁶¹

- Bauckham: Ruling with Jesus
 - “[God’s] kingdom turns out to be quite unlike the beast’s. It finds its fulfillment not in the subjecting of God’s ‘servants’ (22:3) to his rule, but in their reigning with him (22:5). The point is not that they reign over anyone: the point is that God’s rule over them is for them a participation in his rule. The image expresses the eschatological reconciliation of God’s rule and human freedom, which is also expressed in the paradox that God’s service is perfect freedom (cf. 1 Pet. 2:16).”¹⁶²
- Storms: Thyatira, the Church Suffering from Spiritual Osteoporosis
 - “Much of the church today is suffering from an advanced case of what I call *spiritual osteoporosis*. It’s not widespread throughout the body of Christ but is concentrated along the spine. What I have in mind is the church’s loss of theological backbone.”¹⁶³

Illustrations:

- **Biblical**
 - God does not tolerate the toleration of false teaching, but desires his people to be courageous with the truth. Paul’s words to his young protégé’s Timothy and Titus are suitable to any young Thyatirans who were tempted to tolerate evil. He calls Timothy to flee from false doctrine (1 Tim. 6:11; cf. 6:3-6), and exhorts Titus to “rebuke those who contradict” true doctrine (Titus 1:9). The Thyatiran Christians did not flee false teaching or call out those who contradicted it; instead they remained passive toward it. Jesus desires courage in the hearts of his church not only in the face of being physically persecuted, but in having minds equipped to refute false teaching whether moral or creedal.
- **Classical**
 - G.K. Chesterton, “Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions.”
 - Martin Luther, “Peace if possible, truth at all costs.”
 - What often goes under banner “tolerance” today has been called “syncretism” in the early church. This is the idea of taking Christianity and “syncing” it with other opposing beliefs. This caused many problems in the early church as some Christians attempted to sync Christianity with Platonism, Gnosticism, and other belief systems outside of Christianity.

¹⁶¹ Stott, 79.

¹⁶² Bauckham, 142.

¹⁶³ Storms, *To the One who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3*, 125.

Revelation 3:1-6

Big Idea: Reaction #5 – Dead Indifference (Sardis)

- “...Sardis was the classic embodiment of inoffensive Christianity.”¹⁶⁴

Notables:

- “Ramsay pointed out that the two churches condemned most harshly belong to the only two cities of the seven that are completely uninhabited in modern times, Sardis and Laodicea.”¹⁶⁵
- “...Jesus had nothing good to say about the church in Sardis.”¹⁶⁶

Word Studies

- “I know your works. You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.” (3:1)
 - “Here is a picture of nominal Christianity, outwardly prosperous, busy with the externals of religious activity, but devoid of spiritual life and power.”¹⁶⁷
 - “They were the works of a church that had become *addicted to mediocrity*.”¹⁶⁸
- “I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God” (3:2)
 - “This church was noted for its good works, which by men were praiseworthy but which before God stood condemned because they were imperfect. They were incomplete, inadequate. The church was not troubled by persecution; it was not disturbed by heresy; it was not distressed by Jewish opposition; it was well known as an active, vigorous congregation, characterized by good works and charitable activities. But in the sight to God, all these religious activities were a failure because they were only formal and external, and not infused with the life-giving Holy Spirit. Here is a perfect example of purely nominal Christianity which in all outward and formal aspects is outstanding but which in the sight of God is a complete failure.”¹⁶⁹
- “Remember, then, what you received and heard.” (3:3)
 - “The two verbs tell the two ways these truths came to them, through apostolic tradition (‘received’) and the teaching of the church (‘heard’). ‘Received’ is often a code word for the reception of tradition... ‘Heard,’ as in the call-to-listen formula (2:7, 11, 17, 29), usually means not just to listen but to believe and act on

¹⁶⁴ Storms, *To the One who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3*, 137.

¹⁶⁵ Keener, Introduction to 3:1-6.

¹⁶⁶ Storms, *To the One who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3*, 137.

¹⁶⁷ Ladd, 56.

¹⁶⁸ Storms, *To the One who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3*, 145.

¹⁶⁹ Ladd, 56.

the teaching. The Christians of Sardis had not only been taught the Christian truths but had exemplified them in the past. Now they were in danger of losing it all.”¹⁷⁰

- “*people who have not soiled their garments*” (3:4)
 - “Spiritual indifference was due to the fact that Christians, while maintaining outwardly their good works and Christian activities, wished to adapt themselves to the luxury and pleasures of their pagan environment.”¹⁷¹

Background Info

- Ladd: “Wake Up” and the Sardis Acropolis
 - “A more literal translation for ‘awake’ would be ‘be watching.’ This admonition was particularly relevant in Sardis, for in the city was an impregnable acropolis which had never been seized by frontal attack; twice, however, in the history of the city, the acropolis had been taken by stealth because of lack of vigilance on the part of its defenders. This admonition suggests that the church was not yet entirely beyond hope. It was not too late to awaken from spiritual lethargy; there still remained a residuum of life which could be revived. But unless such a revival occurs, this small remainder will also fall subject to spiritual death.”¹⁷²
- Beale: White Robes
 - “‘White’ represents not mere purity but a faithful, noncompromising spirit, which stands in contrast to those who have ‘stained their garments,’ that is, have compromised. The metaphorical ideas of festivity and triumphs associated with white robes from the broader biblical and pagan (e.g., Roman) background may also be evoked, especially because of the context here of promise and reward linked to ‘overcoming.’”¹⁷³

Theological Meaning

- Stott: “Strengthening what remains” and reviving a dead church
 - “An alive and awake minority can recall the majority from death... Let the revived Christians come together to pray and to wait upon God. A dynamic minority of living and awakened Christians can by prayer and love preserve a dying church from utter extinction.”¹⁷⁴
- Stott: The Seven Spirits, the Holy Spirit, and the Dead Church
 - “...Jesus reminds the church of Sardis that He has ‘the seven spirits.’ Christ has the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ... Perhaps then there is no

¹⁷⁰ Osborne, 176.

¹⁷¹ Ladd, 57.

¹⁷² Ladd, 56.

¹⁷³ Beale, 278.

¹⁷⁴ Stott, 91.

more urgent message for twentieth century Christians than this: ‘Be filled with the Spirit’ (Eph. 5:18)...Not that we can press a button and settle this matter for good. The fullness of the Holy Spirit is an experience to be maintained. It may be lost. In St. Paul’s command to us to be filled, the verb is a present imperative passive. It means ‘go on being filled’, or even ‘be in the state of being filled’. Every day we must renew our repentance and obedience and by faith receive his filling, until we live continuously in an attitude of humble, empty dependence on Him.”¹⁷⁵

- Beale and Osborne: The Book of Life
 - “In Revelation, it is a major motif, linked with predestination (‘from the foundation of the world,’ 13:8; 17:8), the record of one’s deeds (20:12), and eternal reward or punishment (20:15). Revelation 21:27 refers to it as ‘the Lamb’s book of life,’ and 13:8 links it also with the cross. In other words, participation depends on Christ’s sacrificial death and the believer’s faithful perseverance in Christ. Both aspects must remain intact”.¹⁷⁶

Illustrations:

- **Biblical**
 - Throughout Old Testament history God’s people Israel would consistently lapse into dead indifference. They would appear as authentic worshippers in formality, but inwardly their hearts would be far from God and in love with idolatry and wickedness. In Isaiah 1 God speaks out against Israel’s offerings, feasts, and Sabbath’s calling them “vain”, an “abomination”, and even expresses that he “hates” them (13-14). Like Sardis, God’s people had soiled their garments and though they had works that appeared to be genuine they proved incomplete because they were spiritually lifeless. God desires authentic worship and repentant hearts.
- **Classical**
 - The only hope for those with “dead indifference” is being brought back to life by the giver of life. “The word for “revive,” translated by the New International Version as “renew” in Habakkuk 3:2, comes from the Hebrew word *chaya*, meaning “to bring back to life.” The concept of revival, however, extends far beyond occurrences of this word in the Old Testament. Indeed, biblical history includes several occasions when God revived his people by giving them new spiritual life.”¹⁷⁷ “Revive Us Again,” a hymn written by William Mackay in 1863 is representative of the cries for revival amidst the Great Awakenings that swept across America.

¹⁷⁵ Stott, 95.

¹⁷⁶ Osborne, 180.

¹⁷⁷ Collin Hansen and John Woodbridge, *A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories that Stretch and Stir* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 20.

We praise Thee, O God, for the Son of Thy love,
For Jesus who died and is now gone above.
All glory and praise to the Lamb that was slain,
Who has borne all our sins and has cleansed every stain.
Revive us again; fill each heart with they love,
May each soul be rekindled with fire from above.
Hallelujah, Thine the glory! Hallelujah, amen!
Hallelujah, Thine the glory! Revive us again.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 19-20.

Revelation 3:7-13

Big Idea: Reaction #6 – Real Christianity (Philadelphia)

- “The basic message is profound: God is more interested in faithfulness than success.”¹⁷⁹

Notables:

- “A mega-church without a mega-Christ is of little benefit to anyone. A mini-church with a mega-Christ makes them big in the eyes of him whose opinion is the only one that matters.”¹⁸⁰

Word Studies

- “*I know that you have but little power*” (3:8)
 - “A small number (mostly a few popular preachers; I have not found any commentators understanding it this way) interpret [‘you have a little power’] as a rebuke rather than a commendation, saying the church has ‘little (spiritual) power.’ This is exceedingly unlikely, for the whole context is positive on the Philadelphia church. Rather, it means that the church lacked size and stature in the community and was looked down upon and persecuted. They had ‘little authority’ or influence.”¹⁸¹
- “*you have kept my word and have not denied my name*” (3:8)
 - “In 2:26 and 3:3 the church is commanded to ‘keep’ or remain faithful to Christ’s deeds (2:26) and the truths of the church (3:3). The ‘word of Christ,’ like the ‘word of God’ in 1:2, 9, refers to his revealed truths, the gospel message. They have not only ‘guarded’ (a connotation of this verb) the gospel from error but have ‘obeyed’ (another connotation) it in the midst of severe persecution.”¹⁸²
- “*Because you have kept my word about patient endurance*” (3:10)
 - “Christ will show his faithfulness to the Christians in Philadelphia in the *immediate* future because they have been faithful *witnesses* to him in the past. ‘You have kept the word of my endurance’ is best understood as referring to ‘the word about Jesus’ own endurance’ in his ministry. . . . The clause is meant to recall and summarize the clauses in v 8b, ‘you have kept my word and did not deny my name.’ The summarization stresses the persevering nature of their witness in imitation of Jesus, who was the faithful, true, and enduring witness to the

¹⁷⁹ Osborne, 199.

¹⁸⁰ Storms, 166.

¹⁸¹ Osborne, 189.

¹⁸² Osborne, 189-190.

Father”.¹⁸³

- “those who dwell on the earth” (3:10)
 - “...is a technical term throughout Revelation for unbelieving idolaters, who suffer under various forms of retributive tribulation (...cf. 8:13; 11:10; 12:12; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8).”¹⁸⁴

Background Info

- Keener: Key of David
 - “These verses clearly allude to Isaiah 22:22, which speaks of one who had David’s key to open and shut, indicating full authorization to rule the house. To Jewish Christians excluded from the synagogue, this was Jesus’ encouragement that he who rightly ruled the house of David now acknowledged them as his own people.”¹⁸⁵
- Beale: Earthquakes in Philadelphia and the Hope of the New Jerusalem
 - “Such a promise of permanently dwelling in God’s temple would have been appreciated by the Philadelphians, since their city suffered from earthquakes more than any other of the cities addressed. Though the true church is a spiritually inviolable temple, it suffers presently in its physical form...However, at the final consummation no form of physical or spiritual suffering will harm the church because of the full manifestation of God’s presence in its midst.”¹⁸⁶
- Beale: Conquerors in Philadelphia are Pillars in God’s Temple
 - “The permanent establishment of the overcomer as a pillar in the temple may also continue the imagery of Isa. 22:22ff., where Eliakim’s relatives achieve glory by ‘hanging on him as a *peg* firmly attached to a wall.’ Some Greek OT witnesses even refer to Eliakim as being set up as a ‘pillar’ in Isa. 22:23...In contrast to Eliakim’s dependents, who eventually lost their glory and position in the palace when he was finally removed (cf. Isa. 22:23-25), the followers of Jesus will never be removed from their position in the temple/palace because Jesus, the ‘true’ Messiah, will never lose his regal position in the presence of his Father (‘pillar’ is metaphorical for permanence).”¹⁸⁷
- McGee: Philadelphia, the Bible and Missionary Church
 - “The thing that the Lord Jesus emphasizes is this: ‘Thou...has kept my word, and has not denied my name.’ In a day of unbelief and skepticism, the Lord Jesus is commending this church because it has kept His Word. This is the church that got out the Word of God, and as far as we know, this church lasted longer than any

¹⁸³ Beale, 289.

¹⁸⁴ Beale, 290.

¹⁸⁵ Keener, Commentary on Revelation 3:7-8.

¹⁸⁶ Beale, 294.

¹⁸⁷ Beale, 295.

other of the seven churches mentioned here. Until the thirteenth century, it had a continuous existence. It was destroyed by the Seljuk Turks when they came in and brutally murdered all of the believers who were left in this church. It was also a missionary church. It is the belief now that the fact that Christianity penetrated into India as early as it did was because this church had sent out missionaries.”¹⁸⁸

Theological Meaning

- Stott: Eliakim and Jesus
 - “...Eliakim prefigured or foreshadowed Jesus Christ; for Christ is the head of God’s household, the Church. He is the ‘true’ vizier, of whom Eliakim was the prototype, and He was ‘faithful over God’s house’...No man can enter until Christ opens the door. Nor can any man enter when He has closed it. Christ says of Himself, as God had said of Eliakim, that He opens and no one shall shut and shuts and no one opens (v. 7). So, if the door is the symbol of the church’s opportunity, the key is the symbol of Christ’s authority.”¹⁸⁹
- Bauckham: New Jerusalem
 - “As a place, the New Jerusalem is at once paradise, holy city, and temple. As paradise it is the natural world in its ideal state, rescued from the destroyers of the earth, reconciled with humanity, filled with the presence of God, and mediating the blessings of eschatological life to humanity. As holy city, it fulfils the ideal of the ancient city, as the place where heaven and earth meet at the centre of the earth, from which God rules his land and his people, to whose attraction the nations are drawn for enlightenment, and in which people live in ideal theocentric community. As temple, it is the place of God’s immediate presence, where his worshippers see his face.”¹⁹⁰
 - “God’s creation reaches its eschatological fulfillment when it becomes the scene of God’s immediate presence. This, in the last resort, is what is ‘new’ about the new creation. It is the old creation filled with God’s presence.”¹⁹¹

Illustrations:

- **Biblical**
 - A small group of God’s people can alter the course of history. The odds were stacked against Gideon’s 300 warriors and their assault on the entire Midianite army, yet God gave them the victory (Judges 7-8). In the eyes of most, Jesus and his little band of disciples probably looked like the typical nationalistic messianic groups that would appear throughout Israel’s post-exilic history and then fizzle

¹⁸⁸ McGee, 104

¹⁸⁹ Stott, 107-108.

¹⁹⁰ Bauckham, 132.

¹⁹¹ Bauckham, 140.

out accomplishing little (Acts 5:34-40). God consistently has used faithful people of apparent insignificance in the world's eyes to accomplish history-making and world-changing events. No matter what the size or what the current level of influence a small group of the people of God walking in faithfulness to him can have a ripple effect that turns into a tidal wave many generations later.

- **Classical**

- Although Jonathan Edwards' fruitful ministry brought him much fame, Edwards himself was impressed with a much less known, but ever-so-faithful friend, David Brainerd.¹⁹² Brainerd was a missionary to the American Indians in the 18th century and difficulty of life was only matched by his loyalty to Christ. Brainerd's parents both died before he was fifteen, and Brainerd himself only lived to the age of 29. His entire life was marked by physical illness and psychological depression. As he devoted his life to preaching to the gospel to the unreached, hardly a day went by that he didn't cough up blood and experience painful spasms. Yet in the midst of such pain and misery, Brainerd remained faithful to his mission and loyal to his Lord. "God has been pleased to keep my soul hungry almost continually, so that I have been filled with a kind of pleasing pain. When I really enjoy God, I feel my desires of Him the more insatiable, and my thirstings after holiness the more unquenchable. And the Lord will not allow me to feel as though I were fully supplied and satisfied, but keeps me still reaching forward."¹⁹³

¹⁹² David Brainerd, *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd: With a Biographical Sketch of the Life and Work of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Jonathan Edwards (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989).

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 103.

Revelation 3:14-22

Big Idea: Reaction #7 – Lukewarm (Laodicea)

- “Christ condemns the church in Laodicea for its ineffective witness and deplorable spiritual condition and exhorts its members to persevere by becoming faithful witnesses and renewing their fellowship with him so as to reign with him (3:14-22).”¹⁹⁴

Notables:

- “Even in the nearly dead church of Sardis there was a faithful remnant, but no such remnant is clearly discernible in the Laodicean church, nor is there any commendation as occurs to varying degrees in all the other letters.”¹⁹⁵

Word Studies

- *“I am about to spit you out of my mouth”* (3:16, NIV)
 - “Simcox comments, ‘The word used does not necessarily imply that the intention is final, and v. 19 shews that it is not.’ A very strong warning has been given, but it is still a warning.”¹⁹⁶
- *“I counsel you”* (3:18)
 - “Perhaps we could first observe the fact that we have a God who is content to give advice to his creatures...He has the right to issue orders for us to obey; He prefers to give advice which we need not heed. He could command; He chooses to counsel. He respects the freedom with which He has ennobled us.”¹⁹⁷
- *“buy from me”* (3:18)
 - “The commercial nature of the verb is perfect for this city; they had ‘bought’ everything from earthly merchants and so had gone to the wrong ‘store.’...Christ is the only proper source of goods that will last, so they have to switch their broker from the marketplace to him.”¹⁹⁸
- *“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline,”* (3:19)
 - “Christ encourages the Laodicean Christians to understand that the preceding indictments are not yet indications of judicial wrath toward them but still marks of his ‘love’ for them as children. Therefore, his message to them is still one of

¹⁹⁴ Beale, 296.

¹⁹⁵ Beale, 302.

¹⁹⁶ Morris, 82.

¹⁹⁷ Stott, 119.

¹⁹⁸ Osborne, 208.

‘reproof and discipline’ and not the punishing judgment of rejection (cf. Prov. 3:12; Pss. Sol. 10:1-3; 14:1).”¹⁹⁹

- “*be zealous and repent*” (3:19)
 - “The advice to the Laodiceans, therefore, is that they repent (in one decisive act: aorist imperative) and make it their practice to continue to live zealously for the Lord (present imperative).”²⁰⁰
 - “The tenses change significantly. Let them repent at once and irrevocably; then let them continue always to be fired with zeal.”²⁰¹
- “*I stand at the door and knock*” (3:20)
 - “The picture of Christ standing at the door and knocking may reflect Song 5:2, where the beloved says, ‘Listen! My lover is knocking; ‘Open to me...my darling.’ Christ’s compassion is nowhere better exemplified than in this image of him as a loving visitor seeking admittance to one’s home.”²⁰²
- “*The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.*” (3:21)
 - “The image here is one of sharing God’s rule; Jesus shares as coregent or viceroy, whereas his people share because they are exalted to rule over the earth (as in Old Testament and Jewish expectations for Israel’s exaltation).”²⁰³

Background Info

- Osborne: Lukewarm and the Springs of Hierapolis
 - “Six miles north lay Hierapolis, famed for its hot springs. Ten miles to the east lay Colosse, known for its cold, pure drinking water...Hierapolis’s streams were so well known for their healing qualities that the city became a major health center, while the cold, life-giving water of Colosse, the only place in the region it was available, may account for its original settlement. Laodicea had no water supply of its own. It was founded at the junction of trade routes not for its natural but for its commercial and military advantages. When piped in its water from the hot springs of Denizli..., the water did not have enough time to cool in the aqueducts but arrived ‘lukewarm’.”²⁰⁴
- Osborne: Wealth of Laodicea
 - “In A.D. 60 a devastating earthquake leveled their city, but they rebuilt it without help from Rome. Moreover, the buildings that resulted from the reconstruction

¹⁹⁹ Beale, 307.

²⁰⁰ Mounce, 113.

²⁰¹ Stott, 123.

²⁰² Osborne, 212.

²⁰³ Keener, Craig S., *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press) 1997.

²⁰⁴ Osborne, 205.

were remarkable: a gymnasium, a stadium with a semicircular track nine hundred feet long, a triple gate and towers, and several beautiful buildings. In other words, the town was perhaps even more beautiful after the reconstruction. The church was like the city, believing that its material wealth connoted spiritual wealth... The problem was, the city had no perceived need for help from Rome, and the church had no perceived need for help from God.”²⁰⁵

- Morris and Osborne: Nakedness and Shame
 - “Nakedness was in the ancient world the ultimate humiliation (cf. 2 Sa. 10:4; Is. 20:4; Ezk. 16:37-39; Na. 3:5; etc.), while contrariwise to be clothed in fine clothing was to receive honour (Gn. 41:42; Est. 6:6-11; Dn. 5:29).”²⁰⁶
 - “Here there is undoubtedly a reference to the Jewish (contra the Greek) view that nakedness was [shameful]. Also, in the OT nakedness is a symbol of judgment (Isa. 20:1-4; Ezek. 16:36; 23:10), and ‘shame’ means to be disgraced and liable to judgment. When God brings a person to shame in both OT and NT, judgment is the result.”²⁰⁷

Theological Meaning

- Poythress: Not an Evangelistic Text
 - “Revelation 3:20 has often been used as an evangelistic text, but in its original context it is a promise directed to complacent Christians, who need to confess their dependence and restore fellowship with the Master.”²⁰⁸
- Stott: Wholehearted Devotion to Christ
 - “Here then is the great alternative which confronts every thoughtful person. To be half hearted, complacent and only casually interested in the things of God is to prove oneself not a Christian at all and to be so distasteful to Christ as to be in danger of vehement rejection. But to be wholehearted in one’s devotion to Christ, having opened the door and submitted without reserve to Him, is to be given the privilege both of supping with Him on earth and of reigning with Him in heaven. Here is a choice we cannot avoid. We must either throw the door open to Him or keep it closed in His face.”²⁰⁹
- Storms: What Being Lukewarm Looks Like
 - “To be lukewarm is to live as if what you presently know and experience of Christ is enough. No need or desire to press in further. No need or desire to seek after God. Little or no longing to pray and fast. Little or no longing to break free of sin. Satisfied with the current depth of delight in the Spirit. Satisfied with the

²⁰⁵ Osborne, 207.

²⁰⁶ Morris, 83.

²⁰⁷ Osborne, 209.

²⁰⁸ Poythress, Accessed online: http://www.frame-poythress.org/Poythress_books/Returning_King/BRvCom1.htm#message (October 22, 2010).

²⁰⁹ Stott, 126.

current extent of knowledge of the Father. The Laodiceans were content with life as it was and not in the least ashamed or hesitant to take full credit for what little they had achieved.”²¹⁰

- Storms: The Greatest Obstacle to Intimacy with Jesus
 - “The foundation for a relationship of passion is a heart of purity. *Sin kills intimacy*. It comes as no surprise, then, that perhaps the greatest obstacle to a vibrant and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ is the failure or refusal to repent.”²¹¹

Illustrations:

- **Biblical**
 - Laodicean lukewarm self-sufficiency is personified in Jesus’ classification of the Pharisee’s prayer at the temple in contrast to a tax collector’s prayer therein (Lk. 18:9-14). The Pharisee saw no need for repentance in his life but felt that he was sufficient in and of himself to approach God and very unlike other sinful men like extortionist tax collectors. He did not have any sense of dependence upon God. However, like the church in Laodicea, he too was blind and naked (Rev. 3:17) and needed eyes to see his exposed sinfulness before the eyes of God and his desperate need for zealous repentance. The remedy for Pharasaic and Laodicean lukewarmness is a heart like that of the tax collector who cried out: “God, be merciful, to me a sinner!” (Lk. 18:13).
- **Classical**
 - Spurgeon: “The great curse of the church — that which brings more dishonor upon the Lord than all the ribald jests of scoffing atheists — is the lukewarmness of its members.”²¹²
 - C.S. Lewis, "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important."

²¹⁰ Storms, *To the One who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3*, 213.

²¹¹ Storms, *To the One who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3*, 224.

²¹² Charles H. Spurgeon, “Lukewarmness”, No. 2902, The Charles H. Spurgeon Library, Version 1 (AGES Digital Library CDROM), 652.

The Throne of Jesus Christ in Revelation

Big Idea: The Revelation of Jesus Throne

- “[‘the one who sits on the throne’] occurs seven times (4:9; 5:1; 7, 13; 6:16; 7:15; 21:5), though variations of it are also used (4:2, 3; 7:10; 19:4; cf. 20:11). In addition, the throne itself, on which God sits in heaven, is mentioned very frequently. It indicates how decisive for the theological perspective of Revelation is faith in God’s sovereignty over all things.”²¹³
- “[Throne] occurs forty-five times in the book (three-fourths of the NT occurrences) and is one of the central motifs, symbolizing the sovereign rule of God as judge of the world and protector of his people.”²¹⁴

Word Studies

- “*around the throne was a rainbow*” (4:3)
 - “The ‘rainbow’ implies, as probably also in Ezek. 1:28, that God’s actions of judgment portrayed in the following visions will be tempered with considerations of mercy (in view of the Noahic covenant).”²¹⁵
- “*around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders...And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures*” (4:4, 6)
 - “If the four living creatures (v 6) are heavenly representatives of all animate life throughout creation, as most interpreters think, then the elders are probably heavenly representatives of God’s people...The four creatures represent general creation and the elders the elect of God’s special creation.”²¹⁶
- “*And [the Lamb] went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.*” (5:7)
 - “The reception of authority places Christ in a position together with his Father as Lord of all affairs in heaven and earth (so 3:21; chs. 11-14). More precisely, he exercises the Father’s reign, which has now been handed over to him”²¹⁷
- “*and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb*” (5:8)
 - “That the Lamb is worshipped is evidence of his full divinity, for in this book God

²¹³ Bauckham, 31.

²¹⁴ Osborne, 770.

²¹⁵ Beale, 321.

²¹⁶ Beale, 322.

²¹⁷ Beale, 356.

- alone is worshipped (22:9).”²¹⁸
- *“and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!” (7:10)*
 - “Their [‘salvation’] lies in their victories resistance to the forces of evil, which have attempted to thwart their faith (so 12:10-11; 19:1-2). The ‘overcomers’ acknowledge that their victory is really God’s victory, since it has been obtained by his power (so 12:10-11). ‘The salvation’ includes the idea of preservation, since the white robes symbolize a purity resulting from perseverance through testing ... The preservation of the saints’ faith is attributed to God’s sovereignty. God protects their faith in the midst of trials by means of the seal that he imparts to them (7:1-3).”²¹⁹
 - *“he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.” (7:15)*
 - “...in eternity the saints will literally experience the Shekinah presence of God. In 21:3, 15-18 the New Jerusalem is depicted as a Holy of Holies, so in that sense the people of God will spend eternity in a heavenly Holy of Holies as God dwells among them. Yet there is even more meaning than this, for we are told that God ‘spreads his tent’ ..., and the idea of God’s Shekinah being placed ‘over’ his people signifies protection and comfort.” They will never again fear any harm or misfortune (7:16).”²²⁰
 - *“he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne” (8:3)*
 - “The major thrust is that the fiery judgments that are to ensue in following chapters are God’s response to the cries o his people and his vindication of his followers for all that they have suffered”²²¹
 - “The distinctive feature of early Christian prayer is the certainty of being heard.”²²²
 - “The prayers are not simply stored on the altar, they are mixed with the fire of God’s spirit and returned to earth. Prayer is as much outer as inner. It is the most practical thing anyone can do. It is not mystical escape, it is historical engagement. Prayer participates in God’s action. God gathers our cries and our praises, our petitions and our intercessions and uses them. The prayers that ascended to God now descend to earth.”²²³
 - *“And to [the beast] the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.” (13:2)*

²¹⁸ Morris, 96.

²¹⁹ Beale, 431.

²²⁰ Osborne, 329.

²²¹ Osborne, 346-347.

²²² Heinrich Greeven quoted in Peterson, 94.

²²³ Peterson, 95.

- “The synonyms ‘power, throne, and authority,’ two of them followed by ‘his’ ..., emphasizes the direct transferral of Satanic authority. Though Satan has lost his legal rights of accusation (12:7-12), he still has authority to empower his evil earthly agents to act, which shows that he is still actively executing his schemes”.²²⁴
- “*And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”* (21:5)
 - “Back of creation is the Creator, the one who makes all things new. This renovation has already wrought in principle in Christ [2 Cor. 5:17]...However, it awaits the return of the Lord for its consummation...Salvation in the biblical sense is not only the salvation of the souls of men; it includes the redemption of the body and even of their physical environment.”²²⁵
- “*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*” (22:1)
 - “By the river being ‘in the middle of the great ‘street’ (21:21), it dominates the scene. Eden has been restored but is even greater than it was in Gen. 2-3, for life permeates the whole of it.”²²⁶
- “*No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.*” (22:3)
 - “The reasons for this transformation is nothing less than the presence of God himself... This repeats the central motif of the new age (21:3). The chief joy of the redeemed—God’s servants—will be the service of worship they render him.”²²⁷

Background Info

- Keener: The Throne as Parody of the Imperial Court and in Continuity with Old Testament Writings
 - “Jewish mystics (many of whom penned apocalypses, like 1 Enoch) strove for visions of the invisible God, and modeled their views of what they would find on visions of God’s enthroned glory in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1 (cf. Ex 24:9–11; 1 Kings 22:19; Dan 7:9–10). In time these visions were embroidered with every fantastic magnification of the divine glory the mystics could imagine. In contrast to such elaborate reports of the preexistent throne of God, John’s description is simple, like the Old Testament accounts: just enough description to convey the point of God’s majesty. The picture of the throne room, including the activity of those surrounding the throne, may also be a parody on the imperial court and the

²²⁴ Beale, 687.

²²⁵ Ladd, 278.

²²⁶ Osborne, 771.

²²⁷ Ladd, 288.

worship in the imperial temples—a daring revelation for a banished Jewish prophet like John.”²²⁸

- *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery: Throne*
 - “By far the most common biblical reference to a throne, however, is to God’s throne (close to 60 percent). God’s kingship is affirmed many times in Scripture, and his throne is a visible proof of his sovereign rule. The Lord presides from his throne, surrounded variously by all the host of heaven (1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron 18:18), a rainbow like emeralds (Rev 4:3), twenty-four other thrones (Rev 4:4), a crystal-clear sea of glass (Rev 4:6) and countless numbers of angels (Rev 5:11). His is a holy throne (Ps 47:8), glorious in its appearance (Is 63:15; Jer 14:21; 17:12; Mt 19:28; 25:31) and eternal in its duration (Ps 9:7; 45:6; 93:2; Lam 5:19; Ezek 43:7; Heb 1:8; Rev 1:8; 5:13)... It is a spectacular throne, variously described as flaming with fire (Dan 7:9), glittering with sapphires (Ezek 1:26; 10:1), flashing and crashing with lightning and thunder (Rev 4:5), dazzlingly white (Rev 20:11), from which flows a river of living water (Rev 22:1)... Some thrones in Scripture are set up in opposition to God, such as the corrupt throne in Psalm 94:20, the royal thrones of Babylon (Is 14:13; cf. Is 47:1) and Tyre (Ezek 28:2), and even Satan’s throne (Rev 2:13; 16:10). Yet these thrones represent no power or appeal when compared to the power and splendor of God’s throne.... References to God’s throne are found most often in the book of Revelation, appropriately enough, since this book describes God’s final victory over Satan and the forces of evil.”²²⁹

Theological Meaning

- Beale: The worship around the throne and the glorification of God
 - “[Rev. 4:8b-11] This section also tells why the four living beings represent the whole of animate life: They are performing the function that all creation is meant to fulfill. That is, all things were created to praise God for his holiness and glorify him for his work of creation. 5:13 bears out that this is not only the ideal purpose for all creatures but also that some day this purpose will actually be fulfilled, not only in heaven but also on earth, since it is an anticipation of the consummation. The twenty-four elders specifically represent the purpose of redeemed humanity, which is to praise and glorify God, and this purpose is actually carried out, not only by them in heaven, but also by the true community of faith on earth.”²³⁰
- Bauckham: The Slaughtered Lamb and the Throne
 - “When the slaughtered Lamb is seen ‘in the midst of’ the divine throne in heaven (5:6; cf. 7:17), the meaning is that Christ’s sacrificial death *belongs to the way*

²²⁸ Keener, Introduction to Revelation 4:1-11.

²²⁹ Ryken, Leland; Wilhoit, James C.; Longman III, Tremper, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity) 2000, c1998.

²³⁰ Beale, 332.

*God rules the world.*²³¹

- Osborne: Is it God or Jesus on the Throne?
 - “In 3:21 Christ says ‘I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne’; also, in 4:2 God sits on the throne, and in 5:6 the Lamb is ‘standing in the center of the throne’ (also 7:17). In chapters 6-21 God is the one on the throne, but now [in 22:1] we return to the theme that the throne belongs equally to God and the Lamb, as also in 22:3, where ‘the throne of God and the Lamb [is] in the city.’”²³²
- Osborne: The Throne a Symbol of Divine Transcendence or Divine Immanence?
 - “Park (1995:225) points out that elsewhere in the book (esp. chap. 4), the throne stressed the ‘inaccessibility of the transcendent God,’ but here in the New Jerusalem it stresses the nearness of God to his people.”²³³
- Bauckham: The God-centered implications of Worship around the Throne
 - “[The Seraphim] are heavenly beings whose existence is entirely fulfilled in the worship of God. Their ceaseless worship at the heart of all reality, around the divine throne, represents the theocentric nature of all reality, which exists ultimately to glorify God. They are therefore the central worshippers whose worship is taken up by wider circles. These wider circles expands—through chapters 4 and 5—to include all creatures in the cosmos (5:13). In this worship of God and the Lamb by the whole creation (5:13) the eschatological goal of God’s purpose for his creation is already anticipated... Its worth noticing how far from anthropocentric is this vision of worship. Humanity is radically displaced from the centre of things where human beings naturally tend to place themselves. At its heart and in its eschatological goal the creation is theocentric, oriented in worship towards its Creator.”²³⁴
- Storms: Sitting with Jesus on His Throne
 - “...I’m still a bit incredulous when it comes to this promise in Revelation 3:21-22 (cf. Rev. 2:26-27). But at least I know why I’m enthroned with him and why not. I’m there because he died for me and poured out the love of God into my heart through the Spirit who was given to me (Rom. 5:5). I’m there because of mercy, not merit. I’m there to share his rule, not usurp it. I’m there to exercise an authority that is rightfully his and derivatively mine.”²³⁵

Illustrations:

²³¹ Bauckham, 64.

²³² Osborne, 770.

²³³ Osborne, 770.

²³⁴ Bauckham, 33.

²³⁵ Storms, *To the One who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3*, 233-234.

- **Biblical**
 - One of the most spectacular displays of the throne of God in Scripture comes from the calling of Isaiah in Isaiah 6. Though the human king (Uzziah) has just died, Isaiah sees the eternal king enthroned over the earth. Isaiah does what any sinful human would do standing in the presence of a holy and sovereign God; he acknowledges his sin and fears the righteous judgment of God. Yet rather than receiving judgment, Isaiah receives atonement for his sin. Hundreds of years later, the beloved disciple, John, would read this very passage and declare that Isaiah had seen on the throne none other than Jesus Christ (John 12:39-41).
- **Classical**
 - “One hundred and eighty years after the death of Charlemagne, in about the year 1000, officials of the Emperor Otho opened the great king's tomb, where they found an amazing sight apart from the treasures. What they saw was . . . the skeletal remains of the king seated on a throne, the crown still upon his skull, a copy of the Gospels lying in his lap with his bony finger resting on this text: 'What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?'”²³⁶

²³⁶ Kent Hughes, *Mark: Vol. 1: Jesus, Servant and Savior* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989), 204.

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Community Group Guide

Introduction Part 1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Revelation 1:1-8

Questions:

- Verses 1-3 can be seen as a summary of the entire book. Take time to put a summary of these verses in your own words.
- What is the purpose and focus of Revelation? (see vs. 2)
- Make a list of the names and descriptions that John gives to Jesus in verses 4-8:
- What do these descriptions teach us about Jesus?
 - How do they compare to the way you see and/or describe Jesus to others?
 - What are the two reactions to Jesus that you see in these first 8 verses?
 - How does each response relate to His glory?
- Read verse 8 aloud. What does this pronouncement mean to you personally?

Prayer:

- Pray that this series would galvanize our witness of Jesus.
- Pray that we would allow the Holy Spirit to search us and teach us.
- Pray for our view of Jesus to be as big and awesome as John's.

Introduction Part 2

A Message to Seven Churches

Revelation 1:9-20

Questions:

- How do the descriptions of Jesus emphasize both his humanity and his deity?
- What is John's response to this vision? Is our response consistent?
- What has Jesus done for us in His life, death, and resurrection?
- How are you experiencing the freedom and grace of Jesus in your life today?
- What did you learn about Jesus in his interaction with John in verses 17-20?
- How have you experienced the personal, loving relationship with Jesus in your life?
- What are you praying the Holy Spirit will do in you through this series?

Prayer:

- Pray that we would more naturally respond to Jesus with heartfelt worship.
- Pray for opportunities to share what Jesus has accomplished on the cross with our neighbors.
- Pray that we would personally experience the love of Jesus in our lives.

Ephesus

Reaction #1 - Fundamentalist: All Head No Heart

Revelation 2:1-7

Big Idea: The love of God and the love of others will guard us against becoming heady, prideful, despising of unbelievers, and tired of the mission.

Questions:

- Why was the city of Ephesus so important to the mission of the early Christian church?
- Why are cities still strategically important to the work of the church today?
- In this letter to the Ephesian church, Jesus gives four encouragements. Which of these do you feel encouraged by? Which of these do you need to grow in by God's grace?
- In this passage, what charge does Jesus bring against the Ephesians?
- What in your life competes for becoming your first love in place of Jesus?
- Why is actively loving Jesus more effective in bringing about gospel transformation than simply trying to avoid the mistakes of Ephesus?
- How can we encourage one another in keeping Jesus as our first love?

Prayer:

- Pray that the Holy Spirit would reveal to us where we are losing our first love.
- Pray that God would help us repent and maintain our lamp stand.
- Pray that we would be moved and filled with love for our savior.

Smyrna

Reaction #2 - Persecuted: Faithful No Matter What

Revelation 2:8-11

Questions

- How does seeing a church that has remained faithful for so long and through persecution encourage you?
- What does suffering for the gospel look like in your life?

- The most common command in the Bible is “do not fear.” Why do you think this command is repeated so often?
- Where does fear have a foothold in your life?
- How does the gospel give us the power to live without fear and endure?
- Jesus is always present to comfort you because he has endured everything that we do. Are you able to connect with that promise? Why or why not?

Prayer:

- Pray for endurance as a church and as a community that we would perceive through opposition by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Pray for conviction where we are giving in to fear and compromising in our lives.
- Pray for joy in the promise of the gospel and the kingdom to come.

Pergamum

Reaction #3 -- Apostate: Good Deeds, Bad Doctrine

Revelation 2:12-17

Questions:

- How do you allow your identity to be shaped more by culture than Christ?
- Where are we compromising?
- Where have you been tempted to reject the uncomfortable or controversial parts of the Bible in favor of what society deems acceptable and appropriate?
- How have you held fast to the scripture? Where in your life have you drifted from the scripture?
- How have you experienced relationship with the Holy Spirit through prayer?
- What does it mean that God gives a new name to his people?
- How do we see Jesus in this passage? What attributes do we see displayed?
- Is your vision of Jesus as big as he is portrayed in the Bible?

Prayer:

- Pray for conviction where we have compromised doctrinally or sexually.
- Pray that we would embrace the identity that we have been given through Jesus.
- Pray that our vision of Jesus would be bigger than ever before.

Thyatira

Reaction #4 - Progressive: More Tolerant than God

Revelation 2:18-29

Questions:

- What comes to mind when you hear Jesus described as “the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.”?
- In what areas is the church of Thyatira doing well?
- What does it mean for a church to be tolerant then God?
- In what ways are we being challenged through culture or internally to compromise the truths of the Bible?
- The pressure for this church came from business world more than false religion, do you feel any pressure from that sector of culture?
- How can we contextualize the Gospel to our neighbors without changing the message?
- What do you think God wants you to learn from Thyatira?

Prayer:

- Pray that we would be jealous for the name of God and the truths of the Bible.
- Pray that we would never water down the gospel to make it more palatable.
- Pray that we would not be more tolerant than God or less.

Sardis

Reaction #5 - Dead: Stopped Caring or Trying

Revelation 3:1-6

Questions:

- How does it feel to read the greeting to Sardis?
- Do you think they would have been surprised by this condemnation?
- What is the difference between ritual and routine?
- Are there any areas in your walk with Jesus that have become routine?
- What types of rituals do you have with God that are life-giving to your soul?
- How does the gospel take us from an attitude of “I have to...” to “I get to...”?
- When can tradition become an act of death for a church community?
- How does staying close to the Holy Spirit keep us from falling into dead routine?
- How does the gospel give us the ability to repent of dead routine?

Prayer:

- Pray that our affections would be aroused by God.

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to convict us where our faith has become routine.
- Ask forgiveness for the areas of your life that do not reflect the truth of the Gospel.

Philadelphia

Reaction #6 - Missional: Didn't Give Up or Give In

Revelation 3:7-13

Questions:

- How does the description of Jesus in verse 7 encourage you?
- What does this letter say about God's concern for faithfulness versus success?
- What does it mean to you to "Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown."?
- Do you long for that crown?
- What things in your life compete for our longing and hope other than Jesus and such a crown?
- How do we encourage one another in times of fruit and in times of struggle?
- How does this message encourage us as a group in our missional effort to reach our neighbors?

Prayer:

- Thank Jesus for His promises and His faithfulness.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit would give us strength to never give up or give in.
- Pray that we would be fruitful in the mission of God as a community.

Laodicea

Reaction #7 - Lukewarm: Comfort & Convenience before Christ

Revelation 3:14-22

Questions:

- C.S. Lewis coined the term "chronological snobbery." How do we fall into the trap of thinking that we're better and smarter than those who lived before us?
- Hot water is healing and comforting, cold water is refreshing and life giving: would Jesus say you are hot, cold or lukewarm in your faith?
- Where is comfort winning the battle for your heart at the expense of your passion for Jesus?
- What does repentance look like for you as you accept correction from God your Father?
- What would it look like to live a life of passion for Jesus that reflects what he has done in your life?
- How can we encourage one another to walk in the Spirit?
- Reflect on the past 8 weeks: What encouragement and warning do you feel you have heard from the Holy Spirit in the way that you are walking with Jesus?

Prayer:

- Thank Jesus for His love to discipline and correct those he loves.
- Pray that our community would reflect a passion for Jesus in all we do.
- Pray that our hearts would never stray from Jesus and that our lamp stand would burn for generations.

Worship Guide

Sermon:

Introduction Part 1 - Revelation of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1-8)

This text is vivid proclamation of the glory of Jesus Christ. Throughout this service, we should call people to actually look at John's vision of the glory of Jesus and call them to respond. Throughout the first 8 verses we see how vividly John proclaims his glory.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Today is an exciting day because we begin studying the book of Revelation. Many people are intimidated by reading Revelation but it is a beautiful book because it is a vision of the glory of Jesus Christ. Today we see God's glory in the fact that Jesus Christ is seated on the throne and in control. We also see the glory of Jesus in the work that Jesus did on the earth. Let's read this together. As John writes:

"Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood." We need to turn our eyes to Jesus and stand in awe of his glory.

Today we are gathered to look at the glory of Jesus and respond in worship. We should respond in the same way that John did, in awe. He said "When I saw him, I fell at his feet." (Revelation 1:17 ESV)

FRONT SET

Focused on the glory of our transcendent Creator God. Turn our eyes to the throne of God.

Praise to the Lord

"Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth."

The Glory of God

"The deepest parts of the universe are not strangers to Your hand."

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Prompt the song saying that the lyrics of the song come directly from Revelation 21. In that passage we see another glorious vision of Jesus Christ. We see that he is sitting on throne, ruling and reigning over everything and that he is in control. Again, work to pointing people to the glory of God. You could use this excerpt

"And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb."

(Revelation 21:22-23 ESV)

BACK SET

Focused on how we see the glory of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ, in the work that he has done on the cross. We turn our eyes to the cross and see his glory.

How Deep the Father's Love for Us

"I will not boast in anything, No gifts, no power, no wisdom, But I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection"

Before the Throne of God Above

"Behold him there! the risen Lamb, My perfect, spotless Righteousness, The great unchangeable I AM, The King of glory and of grace!"

In Christ Alone

"And as He stands in victory, sin's curse has lost its grip on me"

How Great Thou Art

"When Christ shall come, with shouts of acclamation

And take me home; what joy shall fill my heart. Then I will bow, in humble adoration. And there proclaim, My God how great Thou art"

Sermon:

Introduction Part 2 - A Message to Seven Churches (Revelation 1:9-20)

Verses 9 - 20 show the glory of Jesus displayed for John to see in his Revelation:

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw... (skip sentence)...one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

(Revelation 1:12-16 ESV)

Likewise, our goal should be to focus on the glory and majesty of our risen King.

FRONT SET

Focused on the glory of our transcendent Creator God. Turn our eyes to the throne of God.

Come Thou Fount

Set our focus on the greatness of God (“tune my heart to sing thy praise”) and our response to his Grace.

Praise to the Lord Almighty

“The King of creation”

BACK SET

Focused on how we see the glory of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ, in the work that he has done on the cross. We turn our eyes to the cross and see his glory.

The Church’s One Foundation

Focuses on Christ’s work in building, loving, saving, and keeping his bride the church.

The Solid Rock

“On Christ, the solid rock, I stand.” Christ is the foundation for our lives and our church.

Oh! Great Is Our God!

Set our focus on the greatness of God and our response to his Grace.

Sermon:

Fundamentalist: All Head No Heart - (Revelation 2:1-7)

The Ephesians experienced the gospel quickly after Jesus's ascension. The Ephesian Christians were in a context of incredible debauchery with many temples to gods, temple prostitutes, idolatrous festivals. It was an affluent and important city that persecuted Christians. The Christians had to contend for their faith at every point, so they were sharp, educated, and experienced in fighting for truth.

But they became cold, dead and hard toward Jesus and their fellow Christians. Jesus rebukes them, reminding them to return to their first love. Pastor Mark examines the many ways we become like Ephesians and shows ways in which we may recover our first love and reclaim it as something of first importance.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Today we will look at the Ephesians, a people who were experts at handling scripture, whose knowledge was great, and were champions at contending for truth. Though they knew the Bible well, they had grown cold and lost their first love. How many of us find ourselves in the same place?

The writer of Hebrews reminds us to remember Jesus:

“Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.” Hebrews 12:3

Let us now remember him, the depths of his love for us and worship him in thankfulness and gratitude for his tremendous gift of love.

FRONT SET

Author & Perfecter

Focus our hearts on Jesus who is the author and perfecter of our faith, who for joy went to the cross to pay the price of our sins. He is our intercessor and lovingly serves us in the throne room before the Father.

For Your Goodness

Overall, we need to remember Jesus, his love, that we do not deserve it and that because of his gift, we may love. This song will focus our hearts well.

BACK SET

Jesus Paid it All

We need to remember the gift we've been given in Jesus. Because of what he purchased on the cross, we may live and have life in him. It's all because of his work, not ours. We love because he first loved us

In The Shadow of the Glorious Cross

The Glory of God in contrast to our broken estate. The picture of casting our crowns before the throne, bowing before the risen lamb, proclaiming his goodness, denying self, worshipping Jesus above all else.

In Tenderness

When we see Jesus and remember how he sought us and beckoned us tenderly, we may turn and offer that tenderness to our brothers and sisters.

Sermon:

Persecuted: Faithful No Matter What (Revelation 2:8-11)

Pastor Mark begins by stating there is spiritual opposition to the church which comes from demons and unclean spirits. He states that the church in Smyrna still exists today. He also states that the angel over this particular church has protected it for 2 thousands years. He then goes into 5 ways you will be mistreated as Christian: There will be tribulation, There will be poverty, You will be slandered, There will be suffering and Some will Die. And addresses fears, action for the Church and action for young Christian.

Know that Jesus experienced all the above. Therefore Do Not Fear! "In this world you will have tribulation. Fear not. I am with you."

CALL TO WORSHIP

No matter the circumstance, our hope "is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." As a church let's move forward with boldness. With clarity and conviction let's sing out what we believe. Jesus is our present eternal reality. Let us read together:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV)

FRONT SET

Be Thou My Vision

"Riches I heed not nor man's empty praise."

Our Great God by Fernando Ortega

"Surround us with your angels, hold us in your arms. Our cold and ruthless enemy, his pleasure is our harm. Rise up, oh Lord, and he will flee before our sovereign God."

Amazing Grace

"And grace my fears relieved." "Thro' many dangers, toils and snares..."

BACK SET

The Solid Rock

"On Christ, the solid rock, I stand."

I Surrender All

"All to you You, my bless Savior I surrender all"

In Christ Alone

"No guilt in life, no fear in death..."

Sermon:

Apostate: Good Deeds Bad Doctrine - (Revelation 2:12-17)

This is a heavy word of rebuke to the church to stick to the truth of scripture - really, the gospel - and not allow Satan to destroy God's work through false teaching or sinful practices. The trajectory should be to have a strong front end of celebrating God's attributes and follow the sermon with a sober time of repentance and reflection, moving to rejoicing in our secure salvation due to Jesus' faithfulness.

CALL TO WORSHIP

With a heavy word like this, it will be important to highlight God's faithfulness in a passage like 2 Timothy 2:11b-13:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he also will deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.

If you decide to read this passage, it could be good to intro the service by saying something like "we are here today to worship our good God - a God who is even good to us when we are faithless. 2 Timothy 2 says..."

FRONT SET

Start where God starts - in the beginning, with Him. Opening the service, focus on songs that reflect and sing of God's sovereignty, preeminence, and character.

How Great Thou Art

All Creatures

Other options: 'The Love of God', 'This is My Father's World' and 'To God All Praise and Glory'. 'To God...' is an upbeat look at the Christian life and why we have reason to praise him.

BACK SET

Psalm 51

Start the back set with a song of repentance.

How Deep the Father's Love

Moving to celebrating God's faithfulness at the cross of Christ in the song How.

Other suggestions for the back set are Grace Alone, In Tenderness, Great is Thy Faithfulness, or Prayer for Faith.

Sermon:

Progressive: More Tolerant than God - (Revelation 2:18-29)

The church at Thyatira was active and consistently growing in love, faith and service. However, despite their faithfulness in some areas, they also tolerated the teaching of false prophets, especially a “prophetess” named Jezebel. Not only did they tolerate false teachings but they began to adopt her practices of sexual immorality and idolatry. Very much like many in cities like Portland and Seattle, this church meant well and actively served the city but failed to hold to the core of the gospel as revealed in the scriptures. In an effort to love people they actually became more tolerant than God and adopted things that he hates. This will be a strong word of repentance to love what God loves and reject what God rejects.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Read together:

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2 ESV)

We are not looking for simply more “right thinking”. We are looking for a whole new life where we want what God wants, love what God loves and reject what he rejects. As we worship him, seeking his glory in all we do, are minds and hearts are changed from the inside out. Then our worship is acceptable and we start to live as he would have us live.

FRONT SET

We should start by inviting God’s presence, truth and Spirit to move and affect us. Invitational songs like “Be Thou My Vision” and “Come Thou Fount” do a great job of this. It could also be appropriate to highlight God character, majesty and lordship with songs like “How Great Thou Art” or “Oh, Great is our God”.

BACK SET

Our immediate response should be one of repentance as we have all tolerated false teaching and sin in our lives to some degree. A good place to start could be “Psalm 51”, “You Have Opened My Mouth” or “How Deep the Father’s Love”. Each of these gives a very clear message that we totally own our sin but there is grace through repentance.

From there it would be good to go to a place of assurance of what God has done on our behalf through Jesus. “Jesus Paid it All” works well for this. “Nothing but the Blood” would also work well with its emphasis on our inability to please God apart from Jesus’ blood. “Just As I Am” could also work well with this message as it captures the heart of response in the midst of sin and confusion.

Lastly, “In Christ Alone” would be a great proclamation of the centrality of Jesus amongst all the idolatries the world has to offer.

Sermon:

Dead: Stopped Caring or Trying - (Sardis Revelation 3:1-6)

This week we hear a heavy word from Jesus for the church in Sardis. He tells them that while they have a reputation for being alive, they are actually dead. Though there is no commendation for the church as a whole, there is praise for a remnant of faithful believers. The church is called to wake up and to repent, or Jesus will come against them like a thief in the night. If a church is not faithful or fruitful, Jesus will eventually shut it down.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Today is wake up call. A call to hold fast to the gospel of Christ that was delivered to us, and to live in a life worthy of it. The author of Hebrews gives us encouragement to do this and tells us how we it is possible:

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14–16, ESV)

That same Jesus today calls us today. He calls the sleeping to wake up, he calls the dead to new life in him, and he calls everyone, everywhere, to confess him as Lord and Savior, to the Glory of God the Father. Let’s sing his praises together.

SONG SUGGESTIONS

Come Thou Fount

a response of confession of our sin and stubbornness and hardness of heart, and to acknowledge our pressing and constant need of God to bind us to himself.

Be Thou My Vision

A prayer of petition, beginning to transition from our selfish wanderings to a vision of life where Jesus is truly the center of everything.

The Church’s One Foundation

With an energetic arrangement, this is a great closing song after such a heavy word. It focuses on Christ’s work in building, loving, saving, and keeping his bride the church.

Sermon:

Missional: Didn't Give Up or Give In - (Revelation 3:7-13)

The church in Philadelphia was meager in resources, but God promised them significant blessing because of their faithfulness and patient endurance. This week the focus will be on being a steady and faithful missional disciple, which can only come as a result of consistent submission to the Holy Spirit and responding to his faithfulness toward us. It's a week of celebrating His grace and returning to Him as our only source of righteousness. It's a good week for some classic time-tested old hymns.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Today we continue in our study of the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, focusing on the letter to the church in Philadelphia from Revelation chapter 3. We worship a God who has been abundantly gracious and faithful in his love toward the Christian church, our church family, and in each of our individual lives.

THIS IS A GOOD OPPORTUNITY TO BRIEFLY MENTION EVIDENCES OF GRACE IN THE CHURCH

God calls us to respond to Him in worship - consistent and devoted lives that are changed when we experience God's grace shown to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The only hope we have to live that life of worship is by the power of the Holy Spirit, so let's sing together asking the Holy Spirit to incline our hearts toward Him.

FRONT SET

Come Thou Fount

Leading into the sermon. It's a great reminder of His faithfulness ("streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise") and an earnest plea to the Holy Spirit to keep our hearts in line with His ("let thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee / prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love").

BACK SET

The Solid Rock

The only hope we have to be faithful disciples is to be anchored on The Solid Rock. There is also some imagery from Revelation in verse 3 ("When He shall come with trumpet sound, oh may I then in Him be found"). The idea is that we are acknowledging God's enduring grace as well as desiring to be solely grounded in His righteousness.

Grace Alone

It's only by grace that we can worship God the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Amazing Grace

"The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures, He will my shield and portion be, as long as life endures." Reflecting on evidences of God's grace and faithfulness in the past season. Encourage the congregation to shout out ways that they have seen God between verses of the song.

Great is Thy Faithfulness

Good song lyrically and the traditional, congregational vocal feel and is a good way to end the service. God is sovereign, consistent and faithful, and all of creation testifies to His faithfulness.

Sermon:

Lukewarm: Comfort & Convenience before Christ (Revelation 3:14-22)

Laodicea is a lukewarm church. Neither hot nor cold, and Jesus demands a different response. He is reigning over all creation, eternally, and we were created to worship him. Jesus longs for our hearts to neither be cold nor lukewarm, but hot. This is a week to push the congregation to have a big picture of God. To see that he is bigger than their comfort zones, our vocal abilities or musical talent. God is listening to hear the praises of his church and he takes delight when we sing loudly to him. Whether our congregations are full of musicians who have perfect pitch, or tone deaf jocks, Jesus wants to hear everyone in his church sing and shout His praises.

CALL TO WORSHIP

“Jesus alone is worthy of our worship. We’re going to worship him with our voices, by singing and shouting, we are going to lift our hands in honor to our king, we are going to clap for joy at the salvation and inheritance that God has richly blessed us with. We are going to join all of creation and worship Jesus with everything we have because he alone is worthy!”

Suggested reading is Psalm 96:1-6 ESV

FRONT SET

How Great Thou Art

“Then sings my soul, my savior God to Thee, How great Thou Art” - Focus on the greatness of God, from his creation to the sacrifice of Christ.

Agnus Dei

“Worthy is the Lamb, You are Holy!” - Focus our hearts towards the throne of Jesus.

Praise to the Lord

“Praise to the Lord who has prospered your work and defended....Let the amen, sound from his people again” - God has provided all we need in Jesus, we long to be a people that praises God with everything he has blessed us with.

BACK SET

Passover

“Crush all other gods, You alone sit on the throne” - We worship Jesus, not comfort. This song cries out to God to free us from our slavery to our idols that keep us lukewarm.

In Tenderness

“It seems as if eternal days, are far too short to sing His praise!” - Jesus died for us while we were sinners, this is the best news and we will never cease to express our worship to God for his grace, call the congregation to sing out as if they are surrounding God’s throne in heaven.”

To God All Praise and Glory

“Let all who claim Christ’s holy name give God all praise and glory” - Because we are God’s children we praise God with “all” we have.

Review Questionnaire

1. What was the most effective part of this Plan Book?
2. How could the communication surrounding the campaign be more clear or effective?
3. Describe your teams ability to implement this campaign, is there training that would be helpful?
4. Was anything about the campaign confusing or difficult to implement?
5. What reactions did you hear from your staff and from volunteer leaders?
6. What reactions did you hear from your congregation?
7. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions that will help us for the next campaign?

Please send your responses to chris.bristol@marshil.com.

Closing Thoughts

Give to the Mission

If you are benefiting from these campaigns, please consider giving to make future campaigns possible. Donations can be made at:

www.marshill.com/give.

Join the Mission

If you are interested in becoming a Mars Hill Church, please visit:

<https://mhcseattle.wufoo.com/forms/join-mars-hill-church/>