

Class 1 – What Do We Do with Revelation?

About this class

- We will be moving fast
- Goal: not to identify every individual symbol, but to understand the basic message of Revelation
- Revelation is a deeply challenging book and deserves our full attention
- I strongly encourage that you do the readings beforehand and the supplemental readings to get your bearings
- My goal is to have sheets detailed enough for you to still understand even if not present

Dates

- There are two major schools of thought on the date of Revelation's writing – just before 70 AD (early date) and around 95 AD (late date)
- Early daters link Babylon/beast idea to Judaism/Jerusalem and the judgment in question to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70
- Late daters link Babylon/beast idea to Rome, emperor worship and persecution under Domitian around AD 90+
- I will teach the class from the late date perspective
- The main factors that influence my dating are:
- The references to emperor worship (13:4, 7-8, 14) and its linking to persecution of Christians
- The descriptions of the beast/Babylon/great city (13:7-8; 17:6, 9, 15; 18:3, 9)
- Spiritual conditions in the churches (that imply significant time has past) (2:3-4; 3:1-4, 15-17)

Subject Matter

- Jesus' people are under attack: some are being persecuted, some are compromising, some are discouraged
- All are wondering: if Jesus is king, why are his people struggling? Why is evil winning?
- Emperors are insisting that Christians worship them, threatening them
- Revelation explains what is happening, reassures the faithful, and challenges the wavering to stronger commitment – through a set of spectacular visions

What is apocalyptic?

- Apocalyptic is a special genre of writing
- "A story, written in a time of crisis and distress, that is given by otherworldly beings explaining how God will reverse everything so that the righteous will triumph" (Mark Roberts)
- Apocalyptic is a genre that speaks to its time
- Apocalyptic gives divine perspective on human events, changing and challenging the prevailing narrative

- Apocalyptic has a purpose: to encourage God's people that he hasn't forgotten us – and to warn those who have grown hardhearted that judgment is still coming
- Its horrific, grotesque, and vivid images are a part of real visions that are described to give warning and hope

My approach to Revelation

- Revelation is not intended to be a roadmap of the end-times – as both its genre and structure attest
- Revelation is not intended to be taken literally; it is specifically said to be “signed/symbolized” (1:1, “made known” in many versions)
- We will assume that Revelation speaks primarily to its time – with future prophecies only speaking vaguely about God's ultimate victory
- We will assume that Revelation is figurative/symbolic unless the literal reading is necessary

Structure of Revelation

- 1:1-8 – Introduction
- 1:9-3:22 – Jesus addresses his churches
- 4:1-8:1 – Throne scene followed by 7 seals
- 8:2-11:19 – 7 trumpets
- 12:1-14:20 – The beast(s) and the lamb
- 15:1-16:21 – 7 bowls of wrath
- 17:1-19:10 – Victory over Babylon
- 19:11-21:8 – Victory over Satan
- 21:9-22:6 – The New Jerusalem

Structure of Revelation

- Revelation tells the same story in cycles of visions and judgments; it is cyclical rather than linear
- Revelation repeats the same story without concern for time order, emphasizing the “already, but not yet” element of the kingdom
- At every stage of the structure, we are reminded of our mission: to remain faithful to Jesus, keeping ourselves pure from compromise, preparing for the New Jerusalem

Themes

- **Witness** (in a hostile world)
- **Victory** (in nonviolence and even death) (through Jesus)
- **Judgment** (against evil, intended to produce repentance)
- **Compromise** (to avoid the threats evil makes)
- **Repentance** (to avoid judgment and enjoy new creation)

What will I get out of this study?

- Deeper thought about the spiritual ramifications of earthly events
- Stronger sense of connection between Old and New Testaments
- Challenge to see Satan at work in our time
- Challenge to refuse to compromise with the evil in our world
- Hope and anticipation for the blessings to come