



**Adelaide College**

*Fear the Lord and be wise*

## *End Times Prophecy*

### **Lecture 12: The Book of Revelation (2)**

The final lecture is a summary of the contents of the Book of Revelation, following broadly the analysis put forward in Lecture 11.

The Church on earth – Chapters 1-3

Introduction and Greetings – 1:1-8

The book is described as “this prophecy” (1:3) but it begins like a letter, with a greeting “To the seven churches in the province of Asia” – modern, western Turkey(1:4). The apostle John is the writer of the book but its Composer is the Trinity of the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son (1:4, 5). The titles given to Jesus in vv.5-8 describe the faithfulness of His earthly ministry, His resurrection as the first Man to live for ever, His rule over all other rulers on earth, and His eternal nature as the Son of God who is “the Alpha and the Omega” (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet), i.e. He is the Beginning and the End. There is also a reference to the cross and the second coming.

John on the island of Patmos - 1:9-11

John is a political prisoner on the island of Patmos for making known “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:9). Patmos is a tiny island lying about 37 miles off the coast of the mainland where the seven churches were. The earliest of church historians, Eusebius of Caesarea, mentions in the 4th Century that John was banished to the island by the emperor Domitian in A.D. 95 and released 18 months later by the emperor Nerva.

The Vision of the Glorified Lord - 1:12-20

John is told a number of times to write what he sees (v.11). The first vision he has is of the risen and glorified Jesus the description agreeing with imagery used of God’s majesty and power in Dan. 7:9-14, Ezek. 1:4-28; 8:2-4. The long robe and golden sash which Jesus wears is the same as the robe worn by the Old Testament priests (Ex. 28:4). Here it signifies Jesus as the great High Priest to the churches. The “lampstands” represent the churches (v.20) bearing the light of God’s word to the nations. The seven “stars” are the angels (probably not pastors) of the churches (v.20). The “sharp double-edged sword” coming from the mouth of Christ is symbolic of the power and authority of His spoken word (v.16). His face is like “the sun shining in all of its brilliance” (v.16),

speaking of His divine glory. His suffering, death and resurrection have won Him the right to have the “keys of death and Hades (the grave)” (v.18)

It is not surprising that John “fell at his feet as though dead” (v.17) as Ezekiel and Daniel had done centuries before him (Ezek. 1:28; Dan, 8:17, 10:9)

### The Letters to the Seven Churches – 2:1-3:32

Without going into detail, each letter has the same form. It is addressed to the local church, followed by a tribute, then approval, a reproof to bring about an improvement, some advice, then an assurance for those who overcome their difficulties, and finally an appeal to “hear what the Spirit says”. In the last four letters the appeal comes before the assurance. Only two churches are exempt from criticism, Smyrna and Philadelphia. In the case of the others: Ephesus had forsaken its first love for Jesus; Pergamum and Thyratira were guilty of idolatry and immorality, the latter following a false prophetess called “Jezebel”; Sardis had a reputation for being spiritually alive but was unreliable; and Laodicea was only lukewarm spiritually but did not know it. The closing remark of each letter, “He who has an ear, let him hear...” expects a positive response.

The Dispensationalists regard the seven churches as depicting seven periods of the history of the Church. We today are in the Laodicean Age – lukewarmness.

### God in Heaven – Chapters 4 and 5

Chapter 4 affords a glimpse of worship in heaven, earthly worship being but an echo of it. John is invited to see what heaven is like (4:1). He sees a throne (4:2) because heaven is the place where God rules. He sees a green rainbow encircling the throne (v.3) and 24 elders sitting on 24 thrones wearing golden crowns (v.4). He sees thunder and lightning and seven blazing lamps) the sevenfold Spirit of God) (v.5). He also sees God Himself, whose brilliance is like the shining of precious stones (v.3). A “sea of glass” like crystal stretches out from the throne (v.6). The “four living creatures” covered with eyes (symbolic of alert awareness), one looking like a lion, one an ox, one a man and one an eagle, are cherubim, the guardians of God’s throne (vv.6, 7). They lead the worship of God (v.8). The 24 elders (v.10) probably stand for the two covenant peoples of God, Israel and the Christian Church. They also worship God as the Creator of “all things” (vv.10, 11).

In Chapter 5 a scroll, which seems to contain the events of the end times, is in the right hand of the One who sits on the Throne. Someone worthy is sought to break its seals and open it (5:1-4). The only One found worthy is He who is both a “lion” (of the tribe of Judah) and a “lamb” (slain on the cross), who has seven horns (perfect power) and seven eyes (the sevenfold Spirit of God?) – vv.5, 6. When He takes the scroll the four living creatures and the 24 elders break into worship, joined by thousands of angels, who are then joined by all the creatures in the universe, as they praise God the Father and the Son (vv.7-14).

### Satan on Earth – Chapters 6-16

This longest section is the heart of the book and the most difficult to interpret. The most striking feature of these chapters is the wrath of God directed as a sinful and unrepentant world, that wrath being expressed through the seals, the trumpets and the bowls, all administered by angels.

#### The Seals – 6:1-8:5

The 1st Seal – a white horse, representing military aggression (6:1, 2).

The 2nd Seal – a red horse, representing bloodshed (6:3, 4).

The 3rd Seal – a black horse, for famine and inflated food prices (6:5, 6).

The 4th Seal – a green / pale horse and its rider called “Death”, accompanied by the Grave / Hades, representing disease and epidemics (6:7, 8)

The four horses, known as “the four horses of the Apocalypse”, are followed by –

The 5th Seal – the cry of the martyrs in heaven for justice (6:9-11).

The 6th Seal – a great earthquake and cataclysmic events in the sky (6:12-14).

Then follows a scene of terror as everyone on earth tries to hide from the wrath of the One on the throne and the wrath of the Lamb (6:15-17).

In contrast to the six seals, and the seventh seal to come, which tell us about what is going to happen to unbelievers, a scene now follows in ch. 7 in which we see God’s protection on two groups of believers. The first group consists of Jews on earth. Their number is “144,000”, being 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel: symbolic of the complete number of the nation of Israel which will be saved in the last days (7:1-8). The second group is an unlimited number of Gentile believers in heaven from “every nation, tribe, people and language”. They have “come out of the great tribulation” and are wearing white robes washed “in the blood of the Lamb” and are praising God (7:9-17).

The 7th Seal – consists of “silence in heaven” while “the prayers of all the saints” are offered up to God by an angel, who then hurls fire on the earth, which results in an earthquake (8:1-5).

The seals speak of the wrath of God in the form of troubles which are going to come on the world in the last days. In the midst of these troubles God will save for Himself a number of Jews on earth who will come to faith in Jesus. This agrees with Paul in Rom. 11:25-32. At the same time God will comfort those Gentile believers in heaven who have come through the tribulation.

#### The Trumpets – 8:6-11:19

The 1st Trumpet – hail and fire-storms will ravish the earth (8:7)

The 2nd Trumpet – polluted seas will destroy both fish and ships (8:8, 9).

The 3rd Trumpet – contaminated fresh water will kill many (8:10, 11).

The 4th Trumpet – sunlight will be reduced (8:12)

These four ‘natural’ disasters will be followed by far worse calamities (8:13)

The 5th Trumpet – insects and plague for 5 months (9:1-12), the severity of which will cause people to long for death (9:6).

The 6th Trumpet – invasion from the east by 200 million troops (China?) who will kill a third of mankind (9:13-19), but those who survive will not repent or give up their many sins (vv.20, 21).

Again, as with the seals, before the seventh trumpet is sounded a statement is made that concerns the people of God. “The mystery of God will be accomplished”, the details of which are written on a scroll which no one is allowed to read (Ch. 10). In those final and terrible days “the holy city” will be trampled on by the Gentiles for “42 months” or 3 ½ years (11:1, 2). “Two witnesses” of God will appear, who will prophesy for that length of time, or “1,260 days”. They will add to the woes of that time because they have been given power to withhold rain, to pollute the earth’s waters, and “to strike the earth with every kind of plague” (11:3-6), until they are killed by “the beast” (Antichrist) and their dead bodies gloated over by “the inhabitants of the earth” (11:7-10). But God will raise them from the dead and lift them up into heaven (11:11, 12). At the same time “a severe earthquake” will cause “a tenth of the city” to collapse, and 7,000 people will be killed (11:13).

The 7th Trumpet – the kingdom of God comes to earth, where Jesus “will reign for ever and ever” (11:15). This gives rise to more worship in heaven by the 24 elders. God’s temple is opened and “the ark of the covenant” is revealed. From it comes “flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm” (11:16-19).

Just as the first four seals were mainly to do with man-made disasters, such as death through warfare, so the first four trumpets are largely to do with ‘natural’ disasters. They all represent the wrath of God on a sinful and unrepentant world.

## An Interlude Chapters 12-15

An interlude now occurs before the seven bowls of wrath are poured out.

### 1. Satan and his angels are hurled to the earth (Ch. 12) –

Chapters 12 and 13 are about three persons who will form an unholy alliance in the very last days. They are Satan and the two beasts. One beast is the Antichrist and the other the false prophet. During the breaking of the seals and the blowing of the trumpets it seems that Satan has been in heaven, but his fury is now brought to bear on earth, because he and his angelic following lose “their place in heaven” after a mighty battle with “Michael and his angels”. Satan is “hurled to the earth, and his angels with him” (12:7-9). These “angels” are fallen angels who are part of the heavenly angelic host; “a third of the stars” (12:4), who have committed themselves to Satan. They are known to us as demons or evil spirits. Satan also has his human followers on earth. Besides the two beasts he has “seven heads and ten horns” (12:3), speaking of political and military leaders on earth who will seek to carry out his purposes.

### 2. The Church seeks to escape complete destruction (Ch. 12) –

The main purpose of Satan and his followers in the last few years before the return of Jesus is to destroy the “woman clothed with the sun” and “with the moon under her feet”. The “crown of twelve stars on her head” (the twelve apostles) identifies her as the church in the end times (12:1). She is pregnant and gives birth to a son, who is “snatches up to God and his throne” before Satan / the ‘dragon’ can devour him (12:2, 5, 4).

Many interpreters believe this is a reference to Mary, the birth of Jesus and the attempt of King Herod to destroy Him, as detailed in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. This may seem a natural interpretation, but Chapters 12-14 deal with the very end times, not the very beginning of the New Testament Church with the birth of Jesus; and why should Mary, if she is the woman, flee into a desert place for refuge, where she is protected during the last 3 ½ years before the second coming (12:6)? She was committed to the care of the apostle John. Identifying the woman as Mary “with a crown of twelve stars” has led to the Roman Catholic image of her as “the queen of heaven”!

For these reasons many regard the woman in Chapter 12 as being the Christian Church. The male child is the persecuted remnant of the Church in the end times (12:6, 14). Believers will flee into remote regions just as Jesus said they should (Mt. 24:16). Those who believe that the child is Jesus point to the fact that he “will rule the nations with an iron sceptre” (12:5), but so also will the Church (20:4).

### 3. The two beasts take control of the inhabitants of the earth (Ch. 13) –

The “beast coming out of the sea” (13:1) is a political leader, a dictator who rules all the nations for the “forty-two months” of the very last days (13:5). He is the Antichrist and a blasphemer (13:5). He makes “war against the saints” and he has satanic power “to overcome them” temporarily (13:7). He seems to receive a fatal wound, perhaps an attempt to assassinate him, but he miraculously recovers (13:3). The whole world follows him and worships him (13:4, 8).

The beast “coming out of the earth” is a religious leader who is mild in his appearance, “like a lamb” (13:11). He has supernatural power and his aim is to encourage the world to worship the first beast (13:12). He deceives the world with his miracles of bringing fire down from the sky and causing images of the dictator to speak (13:13-15). He exercises control over all peoples by dominating the world’s markets. This he does by forcing everyone to bear a mark of allegiance to the first beast, which excludes Christians from all commerce and even the ability to buy the necessities of life (13:16, 17).

The number of the dictator is “666”, a coded name. Attempts have been made to identify the man, from Nero Caesar to the Pope, to Napoleon, but all such speculation is futile. Who he is will be obvious when he appears.

As we near the last days all these troubles will increasingly call for the “patient endurance and faithfulness” of Christians (13:10, 14:12).

### 4. The Lamb of God is in heaven with His people (14:1-5) –

This section reminds us that no matter how bad things get on earth, believers who have died are in heaven with the Lamb, where “the four living creatures and the elders” are worshipping God (v.3). The believers also have a mark on them, but in their case it is the names of the Father and the Son (14:1). They are known for their integrity of speech (v.5) and their pure sexual relations (v.4). They are the “firstfruits” of the many other believers yet to join them (v.4). Their number is “144,000”, which is not to be confused with the 144,000 in Ch. 7, where the listing of the 12 tribes indicated Jewish believers. In Ch. 14 it probably represents the “firstfruits” of all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike.

#### 5. Three angels bear messages from God to the earth (14:6-13) –

In this section we see that in spite of increasing evil on earth God still holds out the offer of salvation to those who will believe. The first angel proclaims the Gospel and calls for the fear and worship of God (vv.6, 7). The second angel announces the fall of “Babylon”; the destruction of the commercial and political system set up in the last days (v.8). The third angel warns all on earth about the consequences of worshipping the beast and bearing his mark. They will suffer the torments of hell forever (vv.9-11).

#### 6. Other angels harvest the earth (14:14-20) -

The “son of man” has a sickle in His hand (v.14), and He sends angels out to harvest the earth. This, along with “the great winepress of the wrath of God” (v.19) signifies a mass slaughter of people with a great deal of bloodshed (v.20). This is probably an anticipation of the battle of Armageddon, when the vultures clean up the corpses (19:17-21).

#### 7. Seven angels come with seven plagues (Ch. 15) –

Believers who pay with their lives in the very last days stand near the throne of God. They have harps with which they praise God (vv.2-4). The seven angels are given “golden bowls filled with the wrath of God” (v.7). These plagues contained in the bowls are poured out in the next chapter and they complete the wrath of God (15:1). The interlude is over and we return to the pouring out of God’s wrath.

#### The Bowls Ch. 16

The 1st Bowl – boils on the skin of those who worship the beast (16:2).

The 2nd Bowl – blood in the sea, killing everything in it (16:3).

The 3rd Bowl – blood in the rivers and the springs (16:4-7).

The 4th Bowl – people are seared by the unusually intense heat of the sun (16:8, 9).

None of these things succeed in bringing people to repentance. Instead they curse the name of God (16:9).

The 5th Bowl – the kingdom of the beast is plunged into darkness, and in spite of the pains people suffer they continue to curse God (16:10, 11).

The 6th Bowl – demons inspire the kings of the earth to prepare for “the battle on the great day of God Almighty”, which is Armageddon (16:12-14).

A pattern emerges with the last of the seven seals, trumpets and bowls –

The 7th Bowl – like the seventh seal and trumpet consists of an earthquake, but far worse than any earthquake ever known. It results in various catastrophes (16:17-21).

The fact that the seals come first, then the trumpets and lastly the bowls, suggests that the wrath of God begins with the seals, continues with the trumpets and ends with the bowls. But since the seventh seal, trumpet and bowl are similar, in that they end in a catastrophic earthquake, it is thought by some that they refer to the same event and so occur at the same time. Together they complete the pouring out of God's wrath on earth. In this case the seals, trumpets and bowls seem to overlap in time. But others, especially those who prefer a historicist interpretation regard the seals, trumpets and bowls as cyclical events, i.e. each cycle is completed before the next begins. But the order of these events is not as important as the events themselves. They constitute the great tribulation of the last seven years, or the last half of the last seven years, before Jesus comes.

The events of the interlude between the trumpets and the bowls seem to fit in best just before the seventh seal, trumpet and bowl. But for us the question arises, How far away is the great tribulation? It could be in the near future since current world events could be leading towards a final one-world government, through computer technology, and a one-world religion, through the increasing influence of New Age religious concepts and the use of New Age language like, "global village". Increasing concern throughout the world for environmental issues, which is an important part of the New Age agenda, may also force world governments to act together as one world government. All that is lacking at present are the two supreme political and religious leaders.

### Man on Earth – Chapters 17 and 18

This section is about the very last part of the tribulation period, at the time of the great earthquake heralded by the seventh seal, trumpet and bowl. In ch. 17 we have a woman who is a prostitute. She is identified as the city of Babylon (17:5), the world centre for commerce and politics. This world capital is corrupt in its materialism and morality, and she is "drunk with the blood of the saints" (vv. 2, 6). She sits on "a scarlet beast" having "seven heads and ten horns", which must be a confederation of political leaders (v.3). They, with the beast, will eventually destroy the city, "for God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose" (vv.16, 17). Kings of the earth and merchants will weep when Babylon falls (18:9-19), but there will be great rejoicing in heaven and among all God's people (18:20). The city will never be built again because of all the bloodshed she has caused, especially "the blood of prophets and of the saints" (18:21-24).

### Christ on Earth – Chapters 19 and 20

The series of events which now unfolds bring history, as we know it, to a close. There is praise in heaven because the time has come for Jesus to appear on earth and for the wedding of the Lamb to His Bride, the Church, to take place (19:1-8). But the return of Jesus riding a white horse causes great consternation on earth and a huge military force is brought together at Har-Megiddo, or Armageddon, where it is defeated (19:11-21). In the midst of it all the beast and the false prophet are captured, and they are both "thrown

alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur” – the first human beings to be sent to hell (v.20). At this point Jesus locks up Satan in the Abyss for a 1,000 years, and the dead in Christ are raised up to take over the government of the world by reigning with Jesus for the 1,000-year period (20:1-6). At the end of that period Satan is released for a short time. He gathers a great army to invade “the camp of God’s people” but they are destroyed by fire from heaven. Satan is thrown into hell fire (20:7-10). The unbelievers are raised in the second resurrection, they are judged and they also are “thrown into the lake of fire” (10:11-15).

It should be noted that chs. 19 and 20 belong together. The return of Jesus in ch.19 is followed by the 1,000 year reign in ch.20, which would be impossible if the millennium is the present church age. And yet this 1,000-year period between the return of Jesus and the second resurrection, or the resurrection of unbelievers, is widely rejected by the Christian Church. It is usually taught that the unbelievers, whose names do not appear in the “Lamb’s book of life”, are sent to hell, and the believers go to heaven all at the same time. But this is a denial of the plain statements found in ch.20.

## Heaven on Earth – Chapters 21 and 22

The new heaven and new earth come into being, together with the “new Jerusalem”, which comes “down out of heaven from God” (21:1, 2). The new Jerusalem is a real, physical city, as the new heaven and new earth are real. Most Christians, however, find it difficult to accept this because Augustine, influenced by Greek philosophy, separated the physical from the spiritual realms back in the 5th Century. Therefore life with Jesus on His return is thought of mostly, if not altogether, in spiritual terms and as being a life “in heaven”. This has left Christians with a very hazy idea of how things will be in eternity.

But 21:3-8 gives an explanation of how things will be. God Himself will come to live with the redeemed on earth, as it was in the garden of Eden before the Fall (Gen. 3:8). Death, sorrow and pain will have no place in His presence. This is the meaning of the words, “I am making everything new” (Rev. 21:5). Jesus, “the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End” has created a new order in place of the “old order” (21:4). This will not be a renovated universe, but a new one in which He will give “the water of life” to the “thirsty” (21:6).

John is then shown the Bride and the New Jerusalem, both of which are beautiful beyond description (21:9-14). The city is measured. It is enormous. The NIV gives a footnote of 1,400 miles in every direction, and it is made of the most precious materials (21:15-21). The city does not have a temple because the whole of the city itself is the temple, and neither does it need the sun or the moon because God Himself gives it light, and “the Lamb is its lamp” (21:22, 23). The nations will walk by that light, and nothing impure will ever enter the city (21:24-27).

Then comes the final chapter of the book. John is shown “the river of the water of life”, and “the tree of life” (22:1, 2), speaking of the spiritual sustenance that will always be there for God’s people. Believers will even see the face of God (22:4).

The epilogue to the book (22:7-21), emphasises the shortness of the time before Jesus comes back, and a warning is given not to take away or add to the book.



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