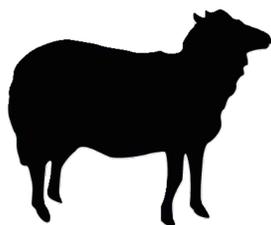


REVELATION



WORSHIP GOD, WITNESS TO THE TRUTH,
FOLLOW THE LAMB

BY SCOTT KERCHEVILLE

NAME: _____

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

1. March 5th: Unity to Maintain and Attain; The What and Why of a Revelation
2. March 8th: The Genre of the Book of Revelation (+ BibleProject Apocalyptic Literature)
3. March 12th: Interpreting Revelation
4. March 15th: Reading Revelation: Big Picture and Timing
5. March 19th: The Biblical Story Completed in Revelation (+ BibleProject Story)
6. March 22nd: Themes in Revelation
7. March 26th: Structure (+ BibleProject Structure)
8. March 29th: **CH. 1** —
9. April 4th: **CH. 2:1-17** —
10. April 7th: **CH. 2:18-3:6** —
11. April 11th: **CH. 3:7-22** —
12. April 14th: **CH. 4-5** —
13. April 18th: **CH. 6-7** —
14. April 21st: **CH. 8-9** —
15. April 25th: **CH. 10** —
16. April 28th: **CH. 11** —
17. May 2nd: **CH. 12** —
18. May 5th: **CH. 13** —
19. May 9th: **CH. 14**—
20. May 12th: **CH. 15-16** —
21. May 16th: **CH. 17** —
22. May 19th: **CH. 18-19** —
23. May 23rd: **CH. 20** —
24. May 26th: **CH. 21:1-22:5** —
25. May 30th: **CH. 22:6-21** —
26. June 2nd: **Recap of Revelation's Themes and Relevance for Today**

RESOURCES

I am highlighting the resources I am using because, though this booklet is my work, I am indebted to these resources. I will cite them as I specifically quote or paraphrase something they have said, but I may not be able to trace down all the ways these resources impact this booklet. Listing these resources here is not a full commendation of these resources — I simply must give credit where credit is due.

However, if you want to read one book on Revelation, Richard Bauckham's book is the gold standard (though I do not agree with his views on how Revelation came to be). Bauckham's book is not long, but if you prefer an easy, fast read, Mark Robert's book is a helpful start.

Beale, G K. *Revelation : A Shorter Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015.

Revelation alludes to the OT more than any other book in the Bible. G.K. Beale's expertise is in helping us understand the meaning of a symbol by couching it in its OT roots. While John's use of the OT may not always be restricted to its original context, a proper understanding of the symbolism will be aware of and often grounded in the original context. His larger scholarly commentary is the best rated commentary on Revelation, but this shorter commentary strips away the many footnotes and references to the Greek language for an easier read. It is five hundred and fifty-two pages.

Bauckham, Richard. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge England ; New York, NY, USA, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

After helping us think about how to read Revelation, Bauckham focuses on the five major themes that span the book. He helps you see the roles cast by God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as well as by the church in the book of Revelation. While Bauckham uses more challenging vocabulary, it is not overly scholarly. It is a treasure-trove. Hands down, this is my favorite book on Revelation. It is one hundred and sixty-five pages.

Gorman, Michael J. *Reading Revelation Responsibly*. S.L., Cascade Books, 2011.

Gorman urges Christians to stop deciphering Revelation like a coded history written in advance and instead to see its key message: worship God and flee civil worship. He urges readers to ground their "contemporary interpretation of Revelation in its message for the first-century church."

After an introduction, Gorman overviews Revelation in large sections. *I agree with the general parallel Gorman sees between the beast/prostitute and the USA, but not in every specific aspect. As he mentions, other correspondences exist in other places too.* It is one hundred and ninety pages.

Roberts, Mark. *Understanding Apocalyptic Literature: A Guide to the Book of Revelation*. Temple Terrace, FL, Florida College Press, 2011.

Mark Roberts preaches for the Westside Church of Christ in Irving, TX. He cuts through the clutter to help you read Revelation by getting you accustomed to the genre of apocalyptic literature and by pointing out very big picture themes in all apocalyptic literature. This book is both helpful and accessible. A teenager could read it. It is ninety-five pages long. *Not on Amazon. Cheapest at truthbooks.com.* Also available on the Florida College Online Bookstore.

Unless stated otherwise, all quotations of Scripture in this booklet are from the English Standard Version published by Crossway Bibles in 2001, updated in 2016.

PROSPECTUS: WORSHIP GOD, WITNESS TO THE TRUTH, FOLLOW THE LAMB

Everything was not alright — at least for some Christians. Faithfulness wasn't what it should be. God's coming victory wasn't as evident as they had hoped. But for others, life was great. "I am rich and I need nothing." But all was not as it seemed to many in the churches. It was time to make things clear. And so, by means of an angel, John was transported to heaven and to the future to grant him and the churches a transcendent perspective. The happenings on earth look a lot different when you see them from heaven. Today looks a lot different when you see it in light of how it will all play out.¹

Unfortunately, Revelation rarely seems to provide a transcendent perspective. Instead of unveiling things that were hidden and unclear, our reading of Revelation so often muddies the water. Christians have always struggled reading and interpreting Revelation. Humility is needed. Fortunately, time is on our side to help us see what has been historically helpful and fruitful in reading Revelation, and what hasn't.

When we ground our interpretation of Revelation in the first century and interpret (but not over-interpret) its images responsibly before bringing its vision into our own day, Revelation truly helps us see our world in a new light. But this happens in a different way than we are accustomed to the Bible doing it. Instead of offering an objective explanation, Revelation works to train our imagination.² (Mentally stimulating movies and political cartoons can work on a similar level in their own unique ways) In particular, Revelation challenges Christians to worship God only and to reject the civil worship that pervades most societies.³ It pushes Christians to testify to the truth of Jesus unto death in a world blinded by massive and widely accepted lies. It urges us to endure persecution by hoping not in the power of the beast and in the comfort of Babylon, but in the New Jerusalem.

We will spend a few classes introducing Revelation and its genre to help us grasp the whole before looking at the parts. We will spend time discussing the meaning and application of Revelation, but this class will contain more lecture so as to help give a clear direction. I ask that you take this study seriously by reading Revelation outside of and before class to help train your imagination and to help you prepare questions and offer helpful comments as you desire.

¹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 7-8

² Alluding to Richard Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination*

³ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*

#1 UNITY: MAINTAIN AND ATTAIN

Studying Scripture together always carries the opportunity for a more unified understanding and practice of the truth as a church, but it also carries the risk of dividing us due to disagreement. Studying Revelation heightens our opportunities and risks because, while Revelation is a challenging study, it can unite and inspire us when we see its key messages. Because of this, it is important to briefly return to Scripture and ask why we are studying the Bible together at all.

In Ephesians 4, Paul urges the church to both *maintain* a unity and to *attain* to another unity. Pay attention to how these instructions cast a vision for the church today.

*“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:1-6 ESV)*

*“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,** to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:11-16 ESV)*

There is unity to *maintain*. In our faith and baptism the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in us to regenerate us and renew us so we reflect the image of God. Our common participation in the Spirit unites us as a family. We can often see the spirit of a person’s parents in them. This common spirit unites siblings and families. We must *maintain* the unity that the Spirit of Jesus has created in us.

This doesn’t just happen. Paul urges us to have humility, gentleness, patience, and to bear with one another in love. That’s easy when we all agree and tough when we don’t. Maintaining unity also requires that we stay on the same foundation. If one of us proclaims or participates in a different hope, Lord, baptism, etc., we simply aren’t united. However, we shouldn’t divide the church uselessly. Romans 14 allows Christians to have different ideas and practices. Wisdom and further study can help us determine if the differences put us on two different foundations or not.

We are also to *attain* to unity in our understanding of “the faith” and in our knowledge of the Son of God. We cannot be satisfied remaining united at the same elementary knowledge of the truth and of Jesus. Neither can we simply always say, “I’ll have my belief and you’ll have yours.”

Pressing into this pursuit of a united understanding can feel divisive and unimportant when everything is going well. Why study a challenging book like Revelation? Why challenge one another’s assumptions and beliefs so directly? It is vital because storms are coming that will either further unite us, or expose and exploit our various differences and immaturities. Not only does Revelation demonstrate that, we have been living it in 2020 and 2021. Attaining to greater unity through studying a book like Revelation can unite us before the storm ever comes by helping us think more deeply about the truth, the purpose of God, the lies of Satan, and how we should respond to it all.

People have disagreed about how to interpret Revelation for a long time and it isn’t likely we will avoid this. But we shouldn’t have bad attitudes or resign ourselves to our separate interpretive corners. Let’s focus on maintaining unity through love and attaining to greater unity through a greater knowledge of the faith and of the Son of God.

#1 THE WHAT AND WHY OF A REVELATION

The first paragraph on *apokalupsis* and on the example revelations to Jacob, Jesus, and Paul are based on **BibleProject Podcast episodes 194** (*Dreams and Visions — Apocalyptic E2*) **and 195** (*Is the Gospel an Apocalypse? Apocalyptic E3*) from 2020

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.” The word translated as “revelation” is the Greek word *apokalupsis*. Strong’s defines *apokalupsis* as “disclosure: — appearing, coming, lighten, manifestation, be revealed, revelation.” You may recognize that this Greek word is where we get our English word “apocalypse.” However, when we hear “apocalypse” in English, we often think we are about to hear information about how the end of the world will happen. And while Revelation is certainly eschatological (pertaining to the study of the “end times”; eschatology: the study of the end times.), the **goal** of the book of Revelation is not to walk you through the “history” of the end of the world before it happens. The book of Revelation is, well, a *revelation*. It unveils reality. In the Bible, a *revelation* can be about anything. God is making something manifest that was previously hidden or unclear.

Seeing other events referred to as a “revelation” can help us get a handle on the goal of the book of Revelation. Rewind to the book of Genesis. The grandson of Abraham, Jacob, has just deceived his father, Isaac, in order to steal Esau’s blessing. Esau is furious, so Jacob begins fleeing from the promised land to seek refuge with extended family in Haran. While he was still in the land of promise, Jacob stopped to rest. By all appearances, Jacob was all alone in a nondescript, unimportant place. But when he slept, God gave him a dream that pulled back the curtain. He saw a ladder that reached from the ground to the heavens. Angels ascended and descended on the ladder. The Lord stood above it and promised to be with Jacob wherever he went and to bring him back to this land. When Jacob awoke he was stunned. This place looked ordinary, but it wasn’t. *“Surely the LORD is in this place and I did not know it!” “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”* What just happened? Genesis later says that in this place, *“God had revealed himself to [Jacob],”* (Genesis 35:7). Jacob felt alone and afraid, but God pulled back the curtain and revealed that Jacob was not alone and wouldn’t be alone. You could say this was the *apokalupsis* of Jacob — and it has nothing to do with end times.

Fast forward to when Jesus and his messengers were traveling and proclaiming the good news. Some received Jesus while some arrogantly rejected him. Notice how Jesus reflects on this in a prayer. Note his contrasting use of the words reveal (*apokalupto*) and hidden.

“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children... No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him,” (Matt. 11:25–27).

As Jesus and his followers were teaching people, they were revealing things. The true nature of God and his kingdom was being made manifest to them in Jesus and his message.

Fast-forward to Paul. He was passionately striving to bring Israel to a zealous obedience of God’s Law in hopes that the Messiah would finally bring God’s kingdom. But Christians were proclaiming that the Messiah had already come and his name was Jesus. This heresy was derailing everything Paul was doing, so he worked hard with others to stamp out Jesus’ name by harshly persecuting his church. In Acts 9 Paul was on his way to Damascus when a great light from heaven shown around him and the glorified Lord Jesus appeared to him and charged him to stop persecuting him. Saul was *blinded* for three days as a result of the event, but he later says that God *“reveal[ed] his Son to me,”* (Galatians 1:16). Though he was temporarily blind, Paul now saw Jesus,

himself, everyone, and everything thing else in a new light. This *apokalupsis* (revelation) led him to count everything he once valued as dung and to value knowing Jesus above everything else.

Rewind to 1 Kings 22 — a rather humorous and disastrous “unveiling.” Kings Ahab and Jehoshaphat wanted to battle against Syria, so Ahab gathered four hundred of his favorite prophets and asked them to consult Yahweh on the matter. All the prophets urged them to do battle, but Jehoshaphat smelled something fishy. *“Is there not here another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire?”* King Ahab regretfully sent for Micaiah, warning Jehoshaphat ahead of time, *“I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil.”* At first, Micaiah mockingly joined the chorus of prophets, *“Go up and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the king.”* Ahab didn't appreciate this, so Micaiah told the truth — go home, don't fight. But this made Ahab all the more angry. *“Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?”* And with that Micaiah pulled the veil back on Ahab's four hundred yes-men. Earlier, Micaiah had seen the Lord on his throne running a heavenly staff meeting. “I need someone to entice Ahab so he will go die in battle with Syria.” One spirit volunteered: I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets. And so Micaiah pulled the curtain back for Ahab: the Lord has declared disaster against you, these prophets are lying. But no one wanted to hear it. Zedekiah gave Micaiah a knuckled sandwich for his words. Ahab threw him in prison. Revealing the true nature of things can be a dangerous business. Ahab died in battle for ignoring Micaiah's warning.

We could continue by looking at Isaiah's and Ezekiel's experiences, or a number of other places, but hopefully the point is clear: regardless of the subject matter, the purpose of any revelation is to help one look at their world in the right light.

Let's think about the second half of the first century when Revelation was written (some believe it was written toward the end of Nero's reign (AD 54-68), while most look to the end of Domitian's reign (AD 81-96)). Christians lived throughout the Roman Empire in various cities and — as can be seen from the letters to the churches — in a wide variety situations. Some Christians suffered persecution — whether social, economic, or life-threatening — while others were able to escape it. Some Christians were slaves, some were rich. Some were exhausted and hopeless, others were content — getting along well with the culture at large. But all the churches to whom Revelation was addressed shared one thing in common: they lived in the Roman Empire during the second half of the first century AD.

The Roman empire was tremendously powerful. Their trade and influence were far-reaching. Many cities and people aligned themselves with Rome's way of thinking and living and benefitted from their dominance. Through political, military, and economic might, the Roman Empire created “peace” throughout their vast empire. But the Roman way of thinking was arrogant and obsessed with opulence. Their wealth and power was gained on the backs slaves. Their peace was won through bloodshed, through a unity that came from false worship, and through marginalizing Christians who protested or even simply “didn't adopt the appropriate reverent position”⁴ toward Rome and its emperors.

Meanwhile, John (the writer of Revelation), was on the island of Patmos. He was likely exiled there by Rome for testifying that “Jesus is Lord” too loudly. John recounts how suddenly, he was “in the Spirit” and was given a vision to write down and send to seven churches in Asia Minor. He saw Jesus, the one looking after the churches. At first, John was given messages that revealed what was really happening in each church. After this, John was given an unveiled perspective in two ways: he was brought to a **new location** (heaven) and to a **new time** (the eschatological future). He was transported to the heavenly throne-room. He was transported to eschatological future. Sometimes this happened at the same time, sometimes at different times. This perspective

⁴ I am reapplying the words of a friend and preacher, Drew Nelson.

was not so John could get his head stuck in the clouds or so he could chart out the end times. The point of this revelation was to give him a “transcendent perspective”⁵ on reality. The true nature of things on earth look a lot different when you see them from heaven. Today looks a lot clearer when you see it in light of how everything is going to turn out.⁶

For now, we could say that the transcendent perspective provided by John’s revelation enabled him to see the truth and testify to it. The vision transformed his imagination so he could see right.⁷ Everything was not as it seemed in the world, particularly in the Roman Empire. Powerful and seductive forces of deception were at work. The vision enabled him to encourage churches like in Smyrna or Philadelphia with a transcendent vision of God and his kingdom so they did not give up or give in. The vision enabled him to stimulate churches in places like Thyatira or Laodicea by showing them how some of them had been compromised by Babylon.

John sees things that *must soon take place*. However, Revelation would not help John or his hearers if they read this as a mere time-map of the world’s troubles until the end. Rather, God is enabling his followers to have a transcendent perspective on reality as it happens. The true nature of things must be seen, and Revelation is the path forward.

⁵ My use of this phrase here and throughout this booklet comes from Bauckham, *Theology*, 8

⁶ This paragraph is based on Bauckham, *Theology*, 7-8.

⁷ Alluding to Richard Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination*.