

Revelation: Discipleship Lessons

by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson

Appendix 1: Questions for Group Participants

If you're working with a class or small group, feel free to duplicate the following handouts in this Appendices 1 and 2 at no additional charge. If you'd like to print 8-1/2" x 11" or A4 sheets, you can download the free Participant Guide handout sheets at:

www.jesuswalk.com/revelation/revelation-lesson-handouts.pdf

Discussion Questions

You'll find 4 to 6 questions for each lesson. Each question may include several sub-questions. These are designed to get group members engaged in discussion of the key points of the passage. If you're running short of time, feel free to skip questions or portions of questions.

Charts

For many lessons there are charts which will aid in study. It's best to distribute most of the charts a week ahead of time (according to the schedule below) so people have a chance to read the lessons and fill out the charts before your group meets. Though you can copy the charts from this Appendix, it's better to download the set from the Internet so they'll copy easily on copy paper.

1. Christ in the Midst of the Lampstands (Rev. 1)
Letters to the Seven Churches (Rev. 2-3)
7 Churches Comparison chart
3. The Lion That Is the Lamb (Rev 4-5)
4. The 144,000 (Rev. 6-10)
7 Seals chart
7 Trumpets chart
Parallelism chart
5. By the Blood of the Lamb (Rev. 11-13)
7 Mystic Figures chart
6. Alas, Babylon!(Rev. 14-18)
Visions of Final Judgment chart
7 Bowls chart
7. The Millennium (Rev. 19-20)
Chronologies of the Millennium and Christ's Return chart
8. We Shall See His Face (Rev. 21-22)

Introduction to Revelation: Discipleship Lessons

Purpose and Theme of the Book of Revelation

The purpose of the Revelation is to jolt those Christians who are compromising with idolatry out of their spiritual anesthesia so that they will perceive the spiritual danger they are in and repent (Beale). It is also designed to comfort and encourage the faithful, witnessing church in its struggle against the forces of evil. Assurance is given that: God sees their tears (7:17; 21:4); their prayers rule the world! (8:3-4); death ushers them into a glorious heaven (14:13; 20:4); their final victory is assured (15:2); their Christ lives and reigns forever, who governs the world in the interest of His church (5:7-8); and that He is coming again to take his people to Himself (chapters. 21-22). The theme of the book is the victory of Christ and of His church over the dragon (Satan) and his helpers. The theme is stated in 17:14:

“They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with Him are called and chosen and faithful.”

Interpretation

Historically there have been four major divisions of interpretation (with many variations):

1. The **preterite**--everything has already been fulfilled.
2. The **historical**--the predictions are in the process of fulfillment.
3. The **futurist**--all predictions are in the future.
4. The **spiritual**--the events described are only symbols of spiritual realities and struggles, without any literal or historical application.

John was told, “Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter” (1:19). After the letters to the seven churches he is told, “Come up hither, and I will show you what must take place after this” (4:1). As the author considers the text, he finds it necessary sometimes to hold the preterite view (this was fulfilled in the first century or shortly thereafter); sometimes the historical view (this was fulfilled in the middle ages, or is in the process of fulfillment); sometimes the futurist view (this is still yet to come); or perhaps even the spiritual view (that these events are symbols of spiritual realities and struggles).

Principles of Interpretation

1. The Revelation is rooted in **contemporaneous events and circumstances**. Its symbols should be interpreted in light of the conditions which prevailed when the book was written.
2. Revelation shares a characteristic of Bible prophets, in that **contemporary historical events** are seen as a **type of, or a prelude to, the great Day of the Lord** in the latter days. Often they do this without a chronological distinction between the two.
3. **John is an artist in words and symbols.** We are to look for the meaning conveyed by each symbol in that symbol itself. It doesn't really matter whether or not the symbols can be visualized or reconciled.

4. **Be hesitant to speculate** which, if any, *current* events, nations, or political figures are referred to in Revelation. The history of interpretation is littered with hundreds of mistaken identities. Rather look for the basic structure of events and principles of faith and action for Christians in the End Times.
5. **Be reluctant to superimpose upon Revelation a preconceived system of interpretation** (that is, pre-, post-, a-millennial, or pre-, mid, or post-tribulation rapture). In this study we'll consider these various alternatives. The time to synthesize the *whole* teaching of the Bible about the End Times is after we have carefully analyzed each portion on its own terms.
6. Revelation may not be **a simple chronology of events from chapters 4 through 22**; rather a **series of visions which may parallel each other** chronologically, but which emphasize different aspects of divine truth. This view is called "parallelism".
7. **We can learn much from Revelation, even though there are parts we do not understand.** Consider yourself a student of the book, not a master of it. God will reveal some of the hidden parts of Revelation to Christians only when we need to know them. Until then, all our speculations are a waste of time and can get in the way of learning.

1. Christ in the Midst of the Lampstands (chapter 1)

Q1. Revelation is written to encourage and strengthen a church facing intense persecution. Why is the theme of testimony and witness so important to that purpose? How is Jesus as the “faithful witness” (1:5) supposed to encourage us? Why are we afraid to be clear witnesses in a culture where we aren’t persecuted?

Q2. What does 1:8 tell us about the Father? The Father is the speaker here in 1:8 and in 21:6. But Jesus is the speaker in 1:17 and 22:12-13. What is the significance of this for our understanding of who Jesus is?

Q3. In what countries are Christians presently experiencing tribulation or persecution for the faith? How can the Book of Revelation be a comfort and encouragement to them?

Q4. The vision of Christ among the lampstands (1:12-20) is much different than the Carpenter-Teacher who walked the roads of Galilee and Judea. Why? What overall emotions is this vision of Jesus among the lampstands designed to evoke in the reader? Why is this understanding of Jesus important to a balanced faith?

Q5. What is the significance of the exalted Jesus walking among the lampstands? What does this teach us about the church? What does it teach us about Jesus?

Note: Distribute the 7 Churches Comparison Chart at the end of the lesson today so people use it to study for next week.

2. Letters to the Seven Churches (chapters 2-3)

Q1. How can a local congregation lose its “first love” for Jesus? What are the signs of genuine love for Jesus in worship and ministry? How does the lack of love show up? How can a congregation regain this love?

Q2. Why would loosening of sexual standards to conform to the prevailing morals of the culture be destructive of vital Christian faith and witness? How has your culture tended to take the edge off your own Christian moral convictions or forced you to be quiet about them?

Q3. Why do you think the religious compromise required by participating in heathen religious practices in the trade guilds was so spiritually destructive? What compromises do twenty-first century Christians struggle with? Let’s not settle for trite legalisms about drinking and smoking. What are the real compromises that dilute vital Christianity?

Q4. Why are so many churches a “hotbed of apathy”? (Don’t rag on other denominations!) How can we combat spiritual apathy and an insipid witness in ourselves?

Q5. Summarize the lessons of this chapter. What are the churches criticized for? What are they praised for? How should these observations shape the twenty-first century Church?

Note: No need to distribute charts for next week’s lesson.

3. The Lion That Is the Lamb (chapters 4-5)

Q1. Many Christian hymns, songs, and choruses come from Revelation chapters 4 and 5. Which can you think of?

Q2. These chapters contain many insights into worship that have been adopted by the Christian Church. What do you learn about Christian worship from chapters 4 and 5? Don't miss the basics. Your list might include 20 elements and concepts of worship – or more.

Q3. (Revelation 5:9, 12) *What made Jesus so worthy* of opening the scroll and thus bringing history to its consummation? Why was this act so noteworthy and praiseworthy?

Q4. (Revelation 5:10) How can our destiny as believers include reigning? In what sense could we reign? In what sense do we serve as priests? In what sense are we a kingdom?

Q5. (Revelation 5:13) What is the significance of the same quality of worship being offered to both God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son? What does this tell us about their relationship to each other? Their relationship to us?

Note: Distribute so people will be able to study them for next week these items:

1. 7 Seals Chart
2. 7 Trumpets Chart
3. Parallelism Chart

4. The 144,000 (chapters 6-10)

Q1. (Revelation 6) Who initiates this great storm of destruction represented by the Seven Seals? Against whom is it directed? Is it just?

Q2. (Revelation 6:9-11) What do we learn about the Church from what is revealed in the Fifth Seal? Where are these “souls” at the time of this scene? What does their proximity to the altar signify? Why were they killed? Why do they ask for vengeance? Is that a Christian prayer? What does the white robe represent? What do we learn from their instruction to “wait a little longer”?

Q3. (Revelation 7:1-4) There’s disagreement about exactly who the 144,000 represent. Let’s not debate that, but look deeper. From 7:1-4 what do we learn about God? Read Ezekiel 9, then answer: What is this seal supposed to do for the 144,000? (Please wait to consider 14:1-5 until we get there, okay?)

Q4. (Revelation 7:9-18). From this passage what do we learn about the kind of people who make up the “great multitude” before the throne? Let’s *not* debate whether they are the 144,000 or not. But what is their origin? What does their spirit within them cause them to do? What does the first verse of the song “Amazing Grace” have to do with 7:14?

Q5. (Revelation 10:1-9) What is bitter about what you’ve read in Revelation 6 through 10? What is sweet? Why do we tend to reject what is hard for us to understand?

Note: Distribute so participants can study them for next week the 7 Mystic Figures chart.

5. By The Blood of the Lamb (chapters 11-13)

Q1. (11:3-12) Interpreters disagree upon the identity of the Two Witnesses, but they are certainly strong and brave. What positive characteristics do you see in their actions that we should emulate in our day? What is their reward?

Q2. (12:1-17) The vision of the woman and the dragon is heavily symbolic, but comprehensible when you take care to understand. In your own words, what does this vision tell us about the cosmic battle in Jesus' day and in our own? What comfort should we disciples draw from this passage?

Q3. Revelation 12:11 could be considered a theme verse for the book. What does it mean? Who is overcome? In what sense do we have victory if we die in the process? What does the "blood of the Lamb" have to do with this? How does loving our lives prevent spiritual victory today? (See Luke 14:25-27; Matthew 10:37-39.)

Q4. (13:1-18, optional) The two beasts belong to the period of the ascendancy of the Antichrist at the very end of the Last Days. Together with 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, summarize what have you learned about the Antichrist and the False Prophet.

Gospel Age ("Tribulation")	"Great Tribulation"
Church trampled 42 months, 2 witnesses prophecy 1260 days (Revelation 11:2-3)	2 witnesses dead, 3-1/2 days (Revelation 11:9)
Woman in wilderness, church protected to declare gospel, 1260 days. 1X, 2X 1/2X (Revelation 12:6, 14)	War on offspring; beast: authority; church decimated by persecution, 42 months (Revelation 13:5-7)
Mystery of lawlessness at work but restrained (2 Thessalonians 2:7)	The lawless one will be revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:8)
Spirit of antichrist (1 John 2:18b)	Antichrist prevails (1 John 2:18a)
Sacrifice and offering (Daniel 9:27a)	Abomination in temple, desolator (Daniel 9:27b)
Power of holy people (Daniel 12:7a; 1X, 2X, 1/2X).	After shattering of power of holy people. Time after abomination, 1290 days. Total = 1335 days (Daniel 12:7b, 11-12)
	"Little Horn" wears out saints 1X, 2X 1/2X (Daniel 7:21-25)

Note: Distribute in advance so people can study Revelation 14-18 for next week:

1. Visions of Final Judgment chart
2. 7 Bowls chart

6. Alas, Babylon! (chapters 14-18)

Q1. (14:3-5) In what ways do the 144,000 provide an ideal for all Christians to emulate?

Q2. (14:10-11) Why is everlasting punishment so difficult for us Christians to accept? In what ways might eternal punishment be considered just punishment?

Q3. (15:3-4) We see singing and praise in heaven before the throne a number of times in Revelation (4:8, 11; 5:9-10, 12-13; 7:12; 11:17-18; 15:3-4; 19:1-3). What do you learn about appropriate worship from studying these songs? Do you recognize any contemporary songs that seem similar to these?

Q4. (18:4) We Christians are instructed to be “in the world” but not “of the world” (John 17:15-19). One interpretation has been to be hermits, ascetics, to distance ourselves from the political process, and to adopt stringent dress and behavior codes. Another interpretation is to be “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13-16) in the world so that we might bring about cleansing and change through God’s spirit. Where do you think the balance lies? How and when should we fulfill the command, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins....”?

Note: No charts need to be distributed in advance this week, but read carefully Revelation 19-20.

7. The Millennium (chapters 19-20)

Q1. (19:7-9) These verses draw together two themes from Scripture – (1) God’s people as his betrothed Bride and (2) the feast of all God’s people in heaven. When you meditate on these themes, how are you both admonished and encouraged?

Q2. (19:16) What are the implications of Christ’s title: “King of kings and Lord of lords” for your life? For the everyday world that surrounds you?

Q3. (20:11-12) Why is this awesome scene of judgment so frightening? Why do people seem to resist the idea of a final judgment?

Q4. (20:12-15) Here is a serious question for each of us – not one we should respond to with pat answers. What assurance do you have that your name is written in the Book of Life?

Note: Distribute with today’s lesson one chart to be discussed in class, the final Chronologies of the Millennium and Christ’s Return chart.

8. We Shall See His Face (chapters 21-22)

Q1. (21:3-5) What is the significance of the fact that in heaven “God himself will be with them”? Why can the promises in 21:4 only be fulfilled in heaven? Which of these do you especially look forward to?

Q2. Read Revelation 21:6; 22:17; and Isaiah 55:1-3. What does the “water of life” represent here and in 22:1? In what sense is it a “free gift” (22:17). In what ways should “the Spirit and the Bride” (22:17) extend that invitation in your community?

Q3. (Revelation 21:9-27) John’s vision of the Holy City is obviously strongly symbolic. But the Holy City pictures “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (21:9-10; 21:2). What does John’s vision of the Holy City tell us about the way that Jesus looks at his Church?

Q4. Three times in these two chapters, John stresses that those who continue to practice sin will not enter. Read Revelation 21:8, 27; 22:14-15; and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. What things in these passages point to salvation by the grace of God rather than mere salvation by right living? In what way is holy living important to salvation? Why is holy living important to God?

Q5. (Revelation 22:20) If you were convinced that Jesus Christ would return in your lifetime, how would it affect your life? What would you do differently than you do now?

Note: No charts are to be distributed with today’s lesson. This concludes our study of Revelation.

Appendix 2: Charts

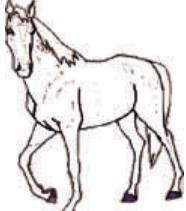
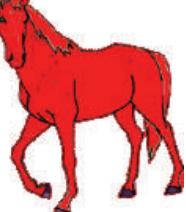
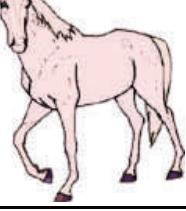
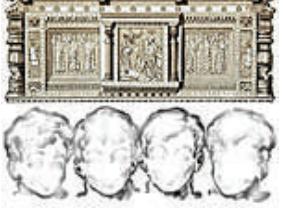
The charts that follow may be duplicated for class or small group participants at no charge:

1. 7 Churches Comparison chart (for Lesson 2, distribute at the conclusion of Lesson 1)
2. 7 Seals chart (for Lesson 4, distribute at the conclusion of Lesson 3)
3. 7 Trumpets chart (for Lesson 4, distribute at the conclusion of Lesson 3)
4. Parallelism chart (for Lesson 4, distribute at the conclusion of Lesson 3)
5. 7 Mystic Figures chart (for Lesson 5, distribute at the conclusion of Lesson 4)
6. Visions of Final Judgment chart (for Lesson 6, distribute at the conclusion of Lesson 5)
7. 7 Bowls chart (for Lesson 6, distribute at the conclusion of Lesson 5)
8. Chronologies of the Millennium and Christ's Return chart (for Lesson 7, do not distribute ahead of time, but is for classroom discussion during Lesson 7)

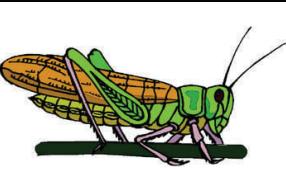
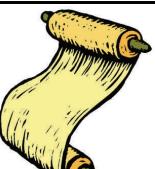
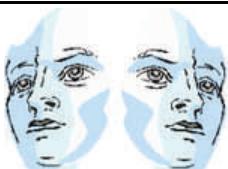
Comparison Chart – Letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation

	Ephesus (2:1-7)	Smyrna (2:8-11)	Pergamum (2:12-17)	Thyatira (2:18-29)	Sardis (3:1-6)	Philadelphia (3:7-13)	Laodicia (3:14-22)
Portrayal of Jesus	7 stars in hand Walks among lampstands						
Praise for the Church	Patient endurance. Toil, sound doctrine hates Nicolaitans						
Criticism of the Church	Abandoned earlier love						
Exhortation: A. Correction/ Encouragement	Remember, repent, do earlier works						
B. Penalty/ Reward	Lampstand can be removed						
Promises to Overcomers	Eat of the tree of life						
General Admonition	"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."						

The Seven Seals (Revelation 6)

		White horse Bow Crown Conquering	6:1-2
		Bright red horse Great sword Take peace from the earth	6:3-4
		Black horse Balance Famine	6:5-6
		Pale horse Death and Hades 1/4 of earth Death	6:7-8
		Souls of martyrs under the altar “How long?”	6:9-11
		Signs in heavens Sun, moon, stars, sky Day of Wrath	6:12-17
		Silence	8:1

The Seven Trumpets (Revelation 8-11)

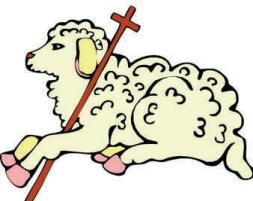
		Earth burned 1/3 destroyed	8:7
		Sea to blood 1/3 sea, 1/3 fish 1/3 ships	8:8-9
		Water poisoned “Wormwood” Star 1/3 water bitter	8:10-11
		Sun, moon, stars 1/3 darkened	8:12
		Locusts Torture 5 months from bottomless pit	9:1-12
		Cavalry host kills 1/3 4 angels, 200 million horses	9:13-21
		Little Scroll eaten Bitter — Sweet	10:1-11
		Two Witnesses prophecy 1260 days, slain 3-1/2 days, resurrection, rapture	11:1-14
		Consummation: Christ reigns Kingdoms > Christ	11:15-19

Parallelism in Revelation

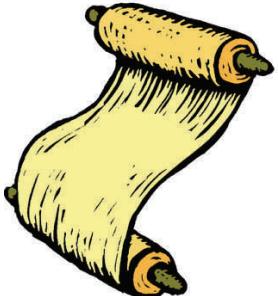
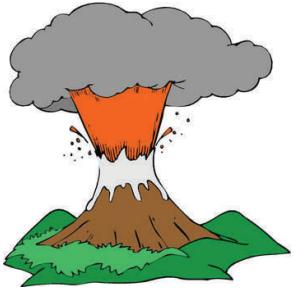
You'll find all sorts of theories of how Revelation fits together. Some see the series of 7 seals, 7 trumpets, and 7 bowls chronologically following one after another. The interpretation I think works best is a partial parallelism as suggested below. You'll see many parallels, but some don't fit so well. Certainly, parallelism has some weaknesses – but so do all the other views.

Matthew 24	7 Seals (Rev 6)	7 Trumpets (Rev 8-9, 11)	7 Bowls (Rev 16)
Many come in my name (5)	1. White Horse (false messiah?), conquering (1-2)		
Wars & rumors of wars (6-7a)	2. Red Horse, war (3-4)		
Famines & earthquakes (7b-8)	3. Black horse, famine (5-6) 4. Pale horse, pestilence, famine, death (7-8)		
Tribulation of the church, many fall (9-11)	5. Heavenly vision of martyrs (9-11)		
Love grow cold, endure, gospel preached (12-14)			
Desolating sacrilege in holy place (15)			
Feeling judgments on Jerusalem (16-20)			
Great tribulation (21-22)			
		1. Hail and fire (8:7) 2. Seas turn to blood (8:8-9) 3. Wormwood, bitter (8:10-11)	1. Sores (2) 2. Sea like blood (3) 3. Fresh water turns to blood (4)
Sun dark, moon dark, stars fall, heavenly bodies shaken (29)	6. Earthquake, sun dark, moon blood, stars fall, sky rolled up, earth moves (12-14)	4. Sun, moon, stars darkened (8:12)	4. Sun scorches people (8-9) 5. Darkness on beast's kingdom
Nations mourn (30a)	Ungodly leaders hide in caves, cry for fear of wrath of the Lamb (15-17)		
	Sealing of 144,000 for protection (chapter 7) 7. Silence (8:1)		
		5. Locusts torture unbelievers, but not believers (9:1-12)	
Son of Man on the clouds with great power and glory, trumpet call, gathers his elect—rapture (30b)		6. 200 million cavalry kills 1/3 (9:13-19)	6. Nations assemble, battle of Armageddon (12-16)
		7. Kingdoms are Christ's, dead judged, servants rewarded, destroyer destroyed (11:15-19)	7. "It is done." Lightning, thunder, earthquake, Babylon falls, hailstones, cursing God (16-21). Marriage Supper, judgment (chapters 19-20)

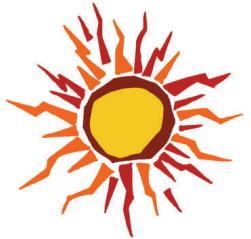
The Seven Mystic Figures (Revelation 12-14)

1		The woman with child	12:1-2, 6, 13-16
2		Red Dragon, 7 heads, 10 horns, 7 diadems on heads. = Devil = Satan = Ancient serpent	12:3-4
3		Male child	12:5
4		Archangel Michael	12:7-12
5		Beast from the Sea. 10 horns, 7 heads, 10 diadems on heads (= Antichrist)	13:1-10
6		Beast from the Earth. 2 horns, like lamb, spoke like dragon. Number is 666	13:11-18
7		Lamb and the 144,000 on Mt. Zion	14:1-5

Visions of Final Judgment (Revelation 14:6-20)

	Eternal Gospel Worship God	 First Angel	14:6-7
	Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great	 Second Angel	14:8
	God's wrath Judgment of fire and brimstone	 Third Angel	14:9-11
	Reap the harvest of the earth		14:14-16
	Reap the vintage of the earth		14:17-20

The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath (Revelation 16)

 1		Foul and evil sores	16:2
 2		Sea becomes as blood of a corpse	16:3
 3		Fresh water becomes blood	16:4-7
 4		Sun scorches men with fire	16:8-9
 5		Darkness on the throne of the beast. Torment.	16:10-11
 6		River Euphrates dries up. Armies march to Battle of Armageddon.	16:12-16 17:7-18
 7		Great earthquake. Babylon and major cities destroyed. Hailstones.	16:17-21 Ch. 18

Chronologies of the Millennium and Christ's Return

Theories of the Order of Events

Great Tribulation — The “7 year” period marking the rise of the Antichrist, increase of evil, persecution of Christians (Matthew 24:21, 29; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Revelation 7:14;), just prior to Christ’s return in glory (Matthew 24:30-31; Acts 1:11). One’s theory of the time of the rapture is described as pre-trib, mid-trib, or post-trib.

Rapture — (from Latin *raptus*, “snatch away”), the catching up of Christians to meet Christ in the End Time (Matthew 24:29-31; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1).

Millennium — “1,000 year” period of Christ’s earthly reign, during which time Satan is bound (Revelation 20:1-6). One’s theory of the timing of Christ’s return is described as pre-millennial or post-millennial (before or after the millennium). Amillennialists believe the millennium is not a literal period time, but coincides with the Church Age.

Church Age — The period of time the Church has to declare the Gospel before Christ’s return (Matthew 24:14; Luke 21:24; Romans 11:25)

