

Supplemental Study in preparation for:
February 29

Revelation 1:1-3:22

The Lamb of God

“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29

Perspective: The book of Revelation is not for people who are especially good with crossword puzzles or calculus problems. The very book that was designed to be awe-inspiring, thought-provoking, and heart-stirring has been trivialized by bible-hackers. It is not written in a secret code that needs to be deciphered, but in powerful images that call for prayerful discernment. Instead of dissecting the text, we want to be transformed by the truth. Our purpose in studying Revelation is not to feed our curiosity but to deepen our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. We want to keep our focus sharp. Revelation is not about lining up John’s prophecy with world politics or predicting the future. It is about living today as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not so much about new information as it is about becoming involved in the spiraling intensity of worship and judgment in a fallen and broken world. Out of the 404 verses, there are 518 references to earlier Scripture, yet not a single direct quotation. John is not proof-texting a point-of-view but assimilating the whole counsel of God into a final, climactic conclusion to biblical revelation.

Outline: Many Christians find the first four chapters of the book of Revelation the most familiar and the easiest to understand. The apostle John opens with a greeting and a call to worship. He begins with benediction and doxology (1:1-8). This is followed by John’s brief introduction of himself, his location (Patmos) and the recipients of his prophecy (the seven churches). The main focus of the prologue is John’s vision of Christ (1:12-18), followed by John’s commission to write to the churches. In the letters to the seven churches, Jesus Christ is introduced to each church by one aspect of his being. Taken together the churches represent the fulness of Christ (2:1-3:22). The key to interpretation is to focus on Christ.

John the Baptist introduced Jesus by saying, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). The apostle John picked up on the metaphor of the Lamb and used it some thirty times in the book of Revelation. Even though it is not used until chapter five, it is the most repeated descriptive metaphor for Christ in the entire book.

Questions:

1. How does the emphasis of the prologue (1:1-8) define the essence of the book of Revelation?
2. Which description of Christ in the prologue makes you think of the Lamb of God?
3. Why does John say that “all the peoples of the earth will mourn” because of the coming of Christ?
4. How does John’s vision of Christ (1:12-16) express Christ’s position (office), character (being), and work?
5. How does John introduce the Church to a spirituality that is adequate for the pressures of life? Patmos was a barren rocky island about ten miles long and five miles wide, 40 miles West-southwest of Miletus. By boat it was some 14 hours from Asia Minor. John was a political exile. When the Roman Empire banished him to this infamous island, they thought they were getting rid of him for life. The Spirit of Christ, however, had other plans and the apostle John was led to write a subversive manifesto on living faithfully in Christ.
6. How does John define the “seven stars” and “seven golden lampstands”?
7. Think of the letters to the seven churches as a single message on the Church. Each letter begins by drawing from one aspect of the vision of Christ and each letter ends by focusing on one dimension of the reward in Christ. How would you characterize John’s Spirit-led analysis of the churches?
8. How does each church illustrate the seven habits of highly effective churches? Is Christ’s critique of the church different from ours?
9. What is the best background resource for understanding the many metaphors and allusions that John used in his letters?
10. Meditate on the picture of Christ at the end of this passage (3:20). Compare the “I am the Alpha and the Omega” picture of Christ in the prologue (1:8) and the “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock” picture of Christ at the conclusion to the letters to the seven churches. Have you opened the “door” of your life to Christ?