

**THE BOOK OF REVELATION**  
**Overview Notes – Handout #2**  
**Immanuel Lutheran Church, 2022**

**The Contents of the Book of Revelation (section by section)**

Chapter One - setting the stage

Verse 3 - Urgency of the message of Revelation. When people are under fire in their lives, they are desperate for a message. Around every bend in the story of Revelation, people are challenged to make a decision: "Are you on the side of Jesus or the beast?" (decisional character of the literature of the bible, especially the New Testament – Luke 1:1-4, John 20:30)

Verses 4-6 - The centrality of Jesus is all of life

Verses 9 and following - John's vision of the resurrected Jesus...quite different from the gospels view of Jesus. These are some characteristics of the "post-resurrected/ascended Jesus" (note how this is different from the gospels description of Jesus – except possibly for the Transfiguration story in Mark 9):

Chapters Two and Three – Traditionally called, "the letters" to the seven churches/otherwise known as Jesus' SERMONS to the seven churches

- a) This section includes 7 letters/sermons to 7 churches in Asia Minor
- b) These letters/sermons come from Jesus Himself...remember, Jesus knows the church
- c) They speak to a specific audience. By reading this section, you get a peek into the lives of the people of each church...kind of like reading somebody else's mail
- d) They speak to us...through the timelessness of the Word of God, these letters come to us as churches and individuals.
- e) The numbers 6, 7, 12 are very important in Revelation. Each carries enormous meaning both literally and symbolically.
- f) Jesus has an opinion about what's going on in each church. He is the "head" of the church. Jesus sees things from a different perspective than we do. We are tempted to compare ourselves to human models. Jesus compares us to how He sees our potential in Him.
- g) Each letter/sermon has a specific form:
  - A statement of who Jesus is...maintaining His centrality
  - An exhortation - pros and cons
  - A promise - reward for faithfulness
- h) There is a **STRONG** Decisional character in this section of the book (as well as much of Revelation) - call to repentance, restating urgency

Chapters 4 and 5 - the heart of the book

- a) Jesus is "sitting on the throne"...a position of power and authority and HOPE. Chapter 4:2-11 gives us a glimpse of the throne of God, what surrounds God's throne and who sits on the throne.
- b) This is done **VERY** intentionally. John is showing us who is in control of creation. God is in His heaven...worship is happening, beings of all types are acknowledging God's preeminence. In chapter 5, the Lamb of God takes the scroll, which is the testament of God's will for His creation, and He alone has the power and right to open it. Again, worship is the central point of this chapter which sets us up for the rest of the book.

Chapters 6 through 16 - The "craziness" of Revelation – Battlefields, battlegrounds, villains

- Chapter 6 - The seals that held together the scroll referred to above are opened. Each tells of the implications of sin making it final impact upon humanity. Sin brings death, spiritual confusion and wreaks havoc upon nature.
- Chapter 7 - An "interlude" in the action of Revelation. This is basically John's attempt to bring people an opportunity to make another decision about who is going to run their lives. 144,000 "faithful" are mentioned (vs. 4-8). They belong to God.
- Chapters 8-11. The Trumpets are sounded. This is God's intervention into human history. We anticipate the visitation of God. Each trumpet sounds and brings us closer and closer to God having the final victory.
- Chapter 10 - Another "interlude" in the action of the book. An angel picks up a smaller book and tells John to "eat" it. This is symbolic of the dual nature of proclaiming the Word and Truth of God. On the one hand, it is a privilege to share God's word. On the other hand, when you proclaim it, sometimes it isn't easy to hear and respond to.
- Chapter 11:1-2 - the image of the measuring rod. Another image that points to the decisional character of the book.
- Chapter 11:3-14 - the two witnesses. They are heralds of the end times. They have miraculous power, kingdom authority, the power of God's Word behind them and a very impressive prophetic ministry. The point - there is still a chance to come to the Lord. He is waiting (Revelation 3:20).
- Chapter 12 and 13 - the dragon and the two beasts - this is the great antithesis to the Holy Trinity. The Dragon is none other than the Devil. The first beast has to do with political power. The second beast has great religious power.
- Chapter 14 and 15 - another reiteration of God's victory in our lives and the centrality of Christ
- Chapter 16 - The bowls of wrath are poured out. Judgement upon the earth is intensifying.

#### The End of the Story - Chapter 17-22

- Chapter 18 - the fall of evil powers and institutions that align themselves with evil and rebellion against God.
- Chapter 19 - 22- God having the final say...the glimpse we get into heaven, God's final judgement of evil and God bringing creation to a newness and goodness that will last for eternity; restoring the original "vision" of God for creation – oneness with God and with each other!
- The book ends with an urgency and an encouragement to decide for ourselves whether we will align ourselves with the Lamb or evil.

#### **Bonus Material - Martin Luther's Preface to the Revelation of St. John (1522)**

About this Book of the Revelation of John, I leave everyone free to hold his own opinions. I would not have anyone bound to my opinion or judgment. I say what I feel. I miss more than one thing in this book, and it makes me consider it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic.

First and foremost, the apostles do not deal with visions, but prophesy in clear and plain words, as do Peter and Paul, and Christ in the gospel. For it befits the apostolic office to speak clearly of Christ and his deeds, without images and visions. Moreover there is no prophet in the Old Testament, to say nothing of the New, who deals so exclusively with visions and images. For myself, I think it approximates the Fourth Book of Esdras; I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it.

Moreover he seems to me to be going much too far when he commends his own book so highly [Revelation 22]—indeed, more than any of the other sacred books do, though they are much more important—and threatens that if anyone takes away anything from it, God will take away from him, etc. Again, they are supposed to be blessed who keep what is written in this book; and yet no one knows what that is, to say nothing of keeping it. This is just the same as if we did not have the book at all. And there are many far better books available for us to keep.

Many of the fathers also rejected this book a long time ago; although St. Jerome, to be sure, refers to it in exalted terms and says that it is above all praise and that there are as many mysteries in it as words. Still, Jerome cannot prove this at all, and his praise at numerous places is too generous.

Finally, let everyone think of it as his own spirit leads him. My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book. For me this is reason enough not to think highly of it: Christ is neither taught nor known in it. But to teach Christ, this is the thing which an apostle is bound above all else to do; as Christ says in Acts 1[:8], "You shall be my witnesses." Therefore I stick to the books which present Christ to me clearly and purely.

***The 1522 "Preface to the Revelation of St. John" in Luther's translation of the New Testament. Pages 398-399 in Luther's Works Volume 35: Word and Sacrament I (ed. E. Theodore Bachmann; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960).***

With this kind of an interpretation we can profit by this book and make good use of it. First, for our comfort! We can rest assured that neither force nor lies, neither wisdom nor holiness, neither tribulation nor suffering shall suppress Christendom, but it will gain the victory and conquer at last. Second, for our warning! [We can be on guard] against the great, perilous, and manifold offense that inflicts itself upon Christendom. Because these mighty and imposing powers are to fight against Christendom, and it is to be deprived of outward shape and concealed under so many tribulations and heresies and other faults, is impossible for the natural reason to recognize Christendom. On the contrary, natural reason falls away and takes offense. It calls that "the Christian Church" which is really the worst enemy of the Christian Church. Similarly, it calls those persons damned heretics who are really the true Christian Church. This has happened before, under the papacy, under Mohammed, indeed with all the heretics. Thus they lose this article [of the Creed], "I believe in the holy Christian Church." [LW 35:409-410] "By 1529/30, however, Luther came to have a much more favorable attitude toward the Apocalypse, as we have also noted. This new outlook toward the book of Revelation most probably originated in Luther's concern over the same situation that led to his translation of, and comment on, the book of Daniel, prepared in the same year. By now Luther was willing to acknowledge the striking relationship between these two prophetic books-at least, insofar as they both seemed to him to deal with the papacy and were both for "comfort in this last time."