



FOLLOW THE LAMB

REVELATION

LEADER'S GUIDE
#NT18

NT LEADER'S GUIDE

REVELATION

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GOSPEL TRAINING CENTER
AT LAKEWOOD
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NT Leader's Guide: Revelation

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NT18

Welcome to NT18!

Authentic Community is more than a slogan or pithy phrase It is really about LIFE TRANSFORMATION.

I am so excited about our NT18, especially as I consider the Life Trans- formation that I know will occur as you read God's Word.

God's Word is strong, powerful, and provides Truth and Light for every aspect our lives.

This Leader's Guide will be extremely helpful to each of our community group leaders as Authentic Community occurs in and through the local church.

I am so very thankful for your love of God, HIS Word, and HIS Church.

Blessings, Dr. T

INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation seems to evoke either fear or fascination. On the one hand, there are those who are so bewildered by the images and scenes of the book that they avoid it all together. On the other hand, there are those who are so enchanted by this book that they seem to forget there are other parts of the Bible. My prayer is that this guide might play a part in helping us avoid those two extremes.

Two verses from chapter 1 will guide our approach to this book. First is Revelation 1:1, which begins this book by declaring that it is about Jesus: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.” First and foremost, God gave this book to reveal Jesus Christ to us. While this letter shows us “the things that must soon take place,” the goal of the book is not to describe the *what* of the events but to reveal to us the *who* in charge of the events. Revelation shows us that Jesus is King. He is in control of history and is bringing about his desired ends.

The goal of Revelation is to bring encouragement to believers of all ages that God is working out his purposes even in the midst of tragedy, suffering, and apparent Satanic domination.

G. K. Beale

Second is Revelation 1:3 where John writes, “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.” This book can be a blessing for those who read it today. Revelation is not just about informing us concerning the future, but it can be a guide for following Jesus Christ today. As we will see in the coming chapters, John wrote this work as a letter to the churches of his day. In 1:3, he makes it clear that this is a book to be read aloud in the church. The application for our day is that this book should be read in the community of the church. To guard ourselves from less than helpful interpretations, we need to read this book with our local church, and we need to read Revelation in the community of the universal church, taking into account the wisdom of those who have interpreted this book before.

In summary, then, the goal for this guide is twofold: (1) that we would see Jesus clearly in Revelation and (2) that we would be blessed by the reading of this book. Toward that end, this guide will start with a discussion of the authorship of Revelation, the genre of Revelation, and the major interpretative options for Revelation.

Authorship

While it is clear from 1:2 that God's "servant John" authored Revelation, there has been some discussion over exactly who this John was. The two main choices throughout the history of the Church have been the Apostle John, the author of the Gospel of John and 1-3 John, or someone known as John the Elder. Both the internal and external evidence suggest that the Apostle John is most likely the author. This letter shares a number of common themes with the Gospel of John and his epistles. Notably, common themes about Jesus arise from these words: Jesus is the Word, the Lamb, the Shepherd, Manna from heaven, and Living Water. Additionally, the themes of light and life, conquering, and the importance of keeping the commands of God recur throughout. Externally, the testimony of Irenaeus from the second century points to the Apostle John. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who had personally known John, so it is likely that his ascription of this work to John is correct.

Whether the Apostle John or John the Elder wrote this book does not have a large bearing on its interpretation. Evidence suggests that this book was written shortly after AD 90.

Genre

A genre is a category of literature. Upon reading Revelation, it is clear that this book is in a category altogether different from the rest of the New Testament. Knowing the genre of Revelation is more than an academic exercise. Knowing the genre informs how you read Revelation. The influence genre has on reading can easily be seen in flipping through a newspaper. You have different expectation of a story on the front page than you do a piece on the editorial page. In one, you expect to have the facts of an event relayed to you, and in the other, you know that you are reading someone's opinion. When you open the sports section, you read a box score from last night's game in an entirely different manner than either the front page article

or the opinion piece. We could go on and on: a classified ad and a comic are read even differently. The point is that you have already learned how to read different types of writing in different ways.

In his commentary, G. K. Beale helpfully identifies aspects of three types of writing in Revelation: epistle, prophecy, and apocalyptic. An *epistle* is a letter. Paul's writings throughout the New Testament are epistles. John begins and ends Revelation as a letter would have started and ended during this time, and in chapters 1-3, he directly addresses seven churches. As with all the epistles of New Testament, the letter of Revelation was not meant only for churches in the first century but is also applicable for the church today. For example, one of John's main themes through this book is how the people of God should live in the midst of an ungodly world. That is a message as applicable in the twenty-first century as in the first.

Revelation is also *prophecy*. In 1:3, John identifies his writing as prophecy. He sees himself as continuing in the line of the Old Testament prophets. Typically, when we think of prophecy, we imagine someone predicting the future. While Old Testament prophecy does include this element of foretelling, it is also forth-telling. Forth-telling means that prophet proclaims God's truth about the present and exhorts his hearers to live in accordance with that truth. Thus, when reading prophecy in general and Revelation in particular, we should not just look for clues about what will happen in the future. Rather, our primary focus should be on the truth about who God is and how he calls us to live in the present.

Finally, Revelation is *apocalyptic*. The first word of this book is "Apocalypse," which is typically translated "Revelation." Beale describes apocalyptic literature "as an intensification of prophecy." Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah all fall into this apocalyptic category. Typically, apocalyptic literature involves a vision given to the prophet, and one of the key differences that separates apocalyptic writings from prophetic works is that the apocalyptic genre particularly "focuses more on the source of revelation than does prophetic literature." The emphasis of Revelation is less on what will happen in the future and more on the God who directs the future. The book reveals Jesus Christ to us.

Major Interpretative Options

There are four main ways to read Revelation: preterist, historicist, futurist, and idealist. What distinguishes these views is when each interpretation posits the events described in Revelation take place.

The *preterist* view understands Revelation as a prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. In other words, everything in the book has already taken place. This view requires one to adopt an earlier date for the writing of Revelation.

The *historicist* view sees Revelation as describing successive ages in church history. In this understanding, Revelation paints a picture of the unfolding history of the church. From John's perspective, all the events were future, but from our modern day vantage point, some events have already occurred and some will occur in the future. A typical historicist view will see each prophecy from John as fulfilled in one historical event.

The *futurist* view understands Revelation, other than chapters 1-3, to be describing the events surrounding the second coming of Jesus. In this view, Revelation is primarily a book about the future. It is a book to tell us about the end of history. The vast majority of what John sees in his visions has yet to take place. A danger that must be guarded against by those who hold this view is to interpret the Bible by modern-day events rather than by Scripture itself.

The *idealist* view understands Revelation to picture the battle between good and evil that continues throughout the time between Christ's first coming and second coming. Like the historicist view, the idealist position sees fulfillment of John's visions in a variety of places throughout the history of the church. Unlike the historicist view, the idealist position does not limit the fulfillment of these visions to a particular event. The visions John sees reveal things that were true in his time and are true in every subsequent generation. There is a battle raging between good and evil, and King Jesus will win the battle.

Few people actually hold to a pure form of one of these four views. In reality, most people read Revelation in an eclectic manner. That is, they might read a particular portion as idealist and another section as futurist while believing as a historicist that some of the visions have been fulfilled.

Charity

Revelation is a notoriously challenging book to read and to understand. We should not be surprised, then, that we would differ with someone else on our interpretation. As followers of Christ we must affirm two key truths that Revelation teaches: Jesus is King, and he will return. These are the plain and main truths of this book. Outside of these two truths, we desire to have our interpretations align with Scripture, but we also need to refrain from being so insistent that our view is necessarily the right way to read the book. The difficulties of this book should lead us to show love for one another even as we disagree.

Reading Revelation should lead us to unity around our King Jesus rather than divide us over the details. The book reveals Christ to us as the King who conquers through his suffering. He will make all things new. This is a book with a message of hope for those who suffer and for those who are oppressed. It is a book that promises the church in an ungodly world that she will overcome - not by might or by power - but by following in the way of her king who conquered through suffering. Revelation is a book of promise and hope that should bring believers together in worship of the Lord God Almighty and of the Lamb who was slain.

Key Themes

There are three major themes that highlight the hopeful message of the book of Revelation.

1. *Jesus is King.* John's original audience lived under the rule of the Roman Emperor, and by all outward appearances, the Emperor, not Jesus, was Lord. John writes to encourage believers that there is more going on than meets the eye. There is a great cosmic struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. In the present, the outcome seems unsure, but God's victory is secure. King Jesus reigns sovereignly over the events of history.

Jesus as King is a message of great hope for believers, especially for those who suffer. Whether it is cataclysmic world events or personal crises, in Revelation, John helps us to see that Jesus is Lord over all. We can trust the one who left the glories of heaven in order to be slain to ransom his people by his blood.

2. *Victory comes through suffering.* John writes to a people suffering for their faith. He assures them that the path to victory is through patient suffering for Christ their savior. In this battle between good and evil, victory does not come by might and by power but by faithfulness to their savior. Those who persevere in faith will overcome. John calls on believers to remember that they follow a savior who conquered ironically: he put death to death by his own death.

God's message to us in the book of Revelation is that in the present we are not always going to win; our lives will not always be characterized by triumph. That is a lesson hard to accept - in fact, impossible - except that it is balanced on the opposite side with this hope: eventually we will win because Christ reigns.

Marva Dawn

3. *God will usher in his new creation.* The hope of all biblical prophecy will be completed when Christ returns, God makes all things new, and believers can dwell forever in God's presence on the new earth. The book of Revelation culminates with a vision of this new creation in chapters 21 and 22, but in Christ this new creation has already begun to manifest itself through Jesus Christ. Already, believers are new creations, and we wait eagerly for the consummation of God's promises in the entire created universe being made new (Romans 8:18-25).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Revelation 1:1 | The opening verse of the book describes this work as “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” “Of Jesus” means that it is both from Jesus and about him. What does chapter 1 reveal about who Jesus is and what he has done? How are these truths about Jesus comforting for those enduring suffering, persecution, or discrimination for their faith?

Revelation 2:1-3:22 | Through John, Jesus addresses seven historical churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Notice that like the other New Testament epistles that these letters are written to specific churches dealing with specific issues, but they also have a number of applications to the church in every age.

In particular, notice how at the opening of each letter to a church, Jesus describes himself with a different title. How do the descriptions of Jesus at the beginning of each letter correspond to his message to the church in that letter?

Which church in chapters two to three best describes who we are as a church? How does Christ call us to respond?

Revelation 4:8, 11 | What is the Lord described as worthy of worship in these verses? What about his character should be praised? What works of his are highlighted as worthy of honor? How can you incorporate this type of praise for God into your prayer life?

Revelation 5:6, 9-10 | How do verses 5-6 describe Jesus? What is surprising about these images? What do these descriptions teach us about Jesus? In versus 9-10, why is Jesus to be worshipped? How do we worship Jesus for his work?

Revelation 5:13-14 | Who is being worshipped in these verses? What is it remarkable for John as someone of Jewish background that he did not balk at the worship of both the one on the throne and the Lamb? How was he able to make sense of both of them being worshipped?

Revelation 6:10 | Why are people crying out for God’s judgment? Why are we sometimes hesitant to highlight God as a judge? Why is

his judgment a good thing? Why is his judgment necessary for the new creation to come?

Revelation 7:9-10 | From where do people come who gather around God's throne to worship him? How should this truth inspire us to send and to support taking the good news of Jesus around the world? "Pray earnestly for the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:38). Pray and ask God if you should go.

Revelation 8-9 | People seem to enjoy debating to what the images in these chapters correspond, but it is clear that great and terrible judgments are pictured. In 8:1, who opens the seventh seal? In chapters 8-9, who blows the trumpets? At whose command do you think they blew their trumpets? What do these truths convey about who is directing this judgment (and ultimately who is sovereign over history)? How should that encourage us in the face of difficulty?

Revelation 10:8-11 | Compare these verses in Revelation with two other prophetic commissions: Jeremiah 15:15-18 and Ezekiel 2:8-3:3. Why is there both bitterness and sweetness for these prophets? How is there both bitterness and sweetness for us when we testify to others about God's glorious grace in Christ?

Revelation 11:1-3 | Not the certainty of God's promise in that his new Temple can already be measured. How is what the Old Testament Temple looked forward to already being fulfilled in Jesus Christ? Consider John 2:19, Ephesians 2:19-22, and 1 Corinthians 3:10-17.

Revelation 12 | This chapter shows that Satan - the dragon of verses 3 and 9 - is behind all the evil in the world. Yet, Satan has been decisively defeated through the death and resurrection of Jesus (12:7-12). How should our the identity of our adversary awaken us to the seriousness of our spiritual lives? How should the sure outcome of this world (which is guaranteed by Christ's victory) motivate us to persevere?

Revelation 13 | Notice how the beasts of chapter 13 parodies the work of Christ. In 13:11-18, a second beast comes as a false prophet (see also: 16:13, 19:20) who deceives people into following the first beast. The history of the church has borne out that the false teaching

that is closest to the truth is often the most dangerous. How have you seen the danger of false teaching? How can you prepare yourself and others to face anti-gospel teaching that masquerades as the gospel of Jesus?

Notes on Chapter 13:

- 13:16-17 | The mark of the beast is a parody of the seal upon God's people in 3:12, 7:3-8; 14:1, and 22:4. In 22:4, the seal is God's presence with his people, and so it probably is best to see the mark of the beast as figurative for how worldly authorities monitor whether or not people submit to forced pagan worship. Clearly, there are economic advantages to associating with the beast. First and foremost, the mark identifies ones spiritually with the Satanic beast.
- 13:18 | The number 666 has caused much consternation in the study of this book. It seems most likely that John is not trying to identify a specific historical person. This is just not how he uses numbers in Revelation. Seven is repeated through the book as a number of completion. Likely, the importance of seven is connected with seven days in a week. By contrast, six is incomplete and imperfect, falling short of the divine seven. Like seven, three is also complete number, and three's significance is rooted in the fact that God is Trinity. The triple sixes of 666 point to the utter imperfection and failure of the beast. This reading fits best with the context of chapter 13 where the beast is contrasted with Christ.

Revelation 14:12 | How does 14:6-11 reinforce this call in verse 12 to endure in the faith? How does verse 13 encourage us to endure in the faith? How can we encourage one another to endure in our faith?

Note on Chapter 14:

- 14:1 | Who are the 144,000? This is a number that represents the completeness of God's people. One of the reasons we read this number not as only 144,000 distinct individuals is because the 144,000 of 7:4 is then called "a great multitude that no one could number" in 7:9. Combined with this earlier reference and the symbolic importance of 12 and 1,000 as numbers (144,000 = 12x12x1,000) of completeness, we read this 144,000 as symbolic of the complete people of God.

Revelation 15:3-4 | Compare 15:3-4 with Exodus 15:1-18. What is similar about these songs and their contexts? Different? Why is this song in Revelation also called ‘the song of the Lamb’? More broadly, why is it significant that the Lamb is praised alongside God throughout Revelation?

Revelation 16:5-7 | Why does the angel in these verses praise God? Do we every praise God for his judgments? Why is the fact that God is a judge actually good news?

Revelation 17:14 | How does the certainty of the Lamb’s victory give us confidence as believers to patiently endure whatever comes as his followers?

Revelation 18:9-18 | It is easy to think that we are not involved with pagan idolatry and the worship of false gods that John condemns in Revelation. Consider, however, John’s condemnation of those who associate themselves with these Satanic powers for their own economic gain. They will be punished together with the wicked (18:4).

Where are we tempted to put our faith to the side for economic gain? Where do we feel the pull to capitulate to the world in order that we might enjoy prosperity? How should we as Christians resist these temptations?

Revelation 19:6-10 & 19:11-21 | These two passages picture one King interacting with two different peoples. Why is a wedding party an apt pictures of our everlasting life with Christ? How does the image of Jesus in 19:11-21 compare with how we normally picture Jesus? Why is it important for us to remember that our King who saves is also the King who judges?

Revelation 20:11-15 | What do these verses describe? Why must we remember that there is a coming a judgment? How is anyone able to face this judgment?

Revelation 21:5-8 | 21:4 describes the New Heaven and the New Earth, and the Lord declares in 21:5 that he is making all things new. How is God’s title in 21:6 an assurance that these things will come to pass? Why does John include 21:7-8? Where has this conquering /

overcoming language been used before in Revelation? What message does this language convey?

Revelation 22:7 | Compare this verse with 1:3. Notice how the book begins and ends with a blessing. How can you keep these words of prophecy today? In other words, what is the main message of this book and how can you begin applying it to your life now?



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