

Revelation 6

1. There are many beautiful things about the world, but also much suffering, death and destruction. Brainstorm together a list of major 'disasters' experienced in the world in recent times. Think about – warfare, famine, disease, and other 'natural' disasters.

How might an atheist use this evidence to argue against the existence of God?

In Revelation 4 & 5 God gives us a vision of heaven – the 'control room' of all history. We see that God is on the throne, along with Jesus ("the Lamb") and all creation worship them. In chapter 5 God has a scroll with seven seals – which seems to be God's plan for the world, especially concerning his judgment of sin and the salvation of his people. The question arises - "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" (5:2) The answer comes that Jesus alone is worthy "because he was slain and with (his) blood has purchased men for God" (5:9).

2. Read chapter 6. What is your immediate overall impression?
3. The first 4 seals unleash the famous "four horsemen of the apocalypse" (remember that Revelation is sometimes called "the apocalypse", as this is the Greek word that opens the book, which the NIV translates "the revelation"). The impact of these 4 horsemen is felt "on earth" (consistent with the number symbolism in Revelation - 4 is associated with the earth).
 - a) From the text itself, what does each coloured horseman bring to the earth?
 - b) Who is in charge of these horsemen? From where do they get their ability to act?
 - c) Do you think the removal of the first 4 seals reveals God's plan only for the end of the world, or for the time in which we live? Why or why not? (See also Mark 13:5-13)
4. What do verses 1-8 teach us about why the world experiences continual suffering, death and destruction? How does this challenge common views about God and suffering?
5. In verses 9-11 the 5th seal is opened, revealing events in heaven.
 - a) Who is there and what are they longing for?
 - b) What encouragement is given to them? (Think about the significance of the white robe)
 - c) What do we learn here about what Christians can expect in this age?

Revelation 7

1. Many people long for the day when human suffering in war, injustice, disease and even natural disasters will be eliminated. In what different ways do people think this might one day be achieved?

Last week we saw from Revelation 6 that world history is under God's control, and that his plan is revealed as Jesus opens the seven seals. On earth we can expect suffering and death and destruction, along with the persecution of Christians. In heaven the martyrs cry out "how long?", but God's answer is to wait until his plan is complete. The 6th seal reveals the end of the world, the day of God's wrath. And the question is asked "who can stand?" In chapter 7 a "pause button" is pressed, and we see the answer to the question "who can stand" and the ultimate future for those who belong to God.

2. Read chapter 7. What is your immediate impression?
3. After John sees the final day of God's wrath (6:12-17), he also sees four angels holding back the destruction. Why does this happen?
4. Do you think the seal on the forehead of the servants of God is a physical mark? Why or why not?
5. What is the symbolism of 144,000? Do you think the "great multitude" in verse 9 are the same people as the 144,000 or a different group?
6. From the context, what is the "great tribulation" (v 13) from which these people have come out? Is this something at the end of time, or something happening now?
7. What is the answer to the question – "who can stand" (on the day of God's wrath)?
8. Beyond the judgement day, what is in store for those who share in the victory of the lamb (v 15-17)? (The imagery here picks up the language of the prophets. If time permits read some of the background to this in Isaiah 49:8-13, Psalm 23, and Isaiah 25:6-9).
9. To what extent do you look forward to what is described here? Is it real for you? If not – why do you think this is, and what could you do to align yourself with what God has revealed about the future?
10. What other implications does seeing this future have for our present lives?

Revelation 8-9

1. In your experience do warnings of punishment or other negative consequences of actions lead to changed behaviour? Why or why not?

After the opening of the seals in chapters 6 & 7, we come to another series - this time of 7 trumpets. As with the seals, the sequence seems to be split into the first 4 concerning everyone on earth, the next 3 moving to distinguish between Christians and Non-Christians, finishing with the final consummation of God's kingdom. Also similar is the inclusion of an important pause or "interlude" between the 6th and 7th in the sequence (we will focus on this section next week).

2. Read chapters 8 & 9, and also the account of the final trumpet in 11:15-19. What is your overall impression?
3. Do you think the seven trumpets are revealing something new, or essentially the same plan revealed in chapters 6 & 7 (like an action replay from a different angel)? What (from the text) leads you to think this?
4. The introduction to the seven trumpets is in 8:1-5. What do you think is the significance of...
 - a) The silence in heaven following the opening of the final seal?
 - b) Mention of the prayers of God's people (= "the saints") at this point?
5. In 8:6-12 the first four trumpets sound their blasts. How much of the earth is destroyed? Is this a picture of the end of the world? What then is pictured here? (What similarities are there with the "plagues" God sent on the Egyptians in Exodus 7-11? Why did God send those "plagues" and how effective were they? (See Exodus 7:1-5 & 9:22-35)).
6. In verse 13 we see that things will get worse! The fifth trumpet unleashes a frightening image of 'demonically-stirred mutant locusts'. Their work is pain and torture. The background to this is Joel 2:1-11 where locusts are an image of judgment before "the great and terrible day of the Lord comes". What is emphasized (in Revelation) about the character of these locusts – with whom are they associated? Who do they target? Who is spared?
7. The sixth trumpet unleashes 4 angels kept for the time of destruction with 200 million mounted troops! What do you make of the response in 9:20-21? The trumpets blast warnings of coming judgment, but people refuse to respond. What do they refuse to change?
8. What light does this cast on our understanding of how to respond to natural disasters? (See also Luke 13:1-5.) In what way does God use these for good?
9. These images are hard for us to understand and accept. How do we benefit from having this form of communication?

Revelation 10-11

1. What does the world around us think the church should be doing?

Most of chapters 10 & 11 are an interlude between the blast of the 6th and 7th trumpets. Just as the sequence of seal openings had an interlude (Ch 7) concerning the place of God's people in the unfolding of his plans of judgment, so also the interlude here (Ch 10-11). In the midst of the warnings of the trumpet blasts, and the refusal of unbelievers to repent, this passage deals with what life will be like for Christians, and what our task is to be.

2. Read chapter 9:20-10:11.

- a) What impression do you get of this mighty angel?
- b) What does he announce (v 6-7)? From the context, what do you think "the mystery of God" is?
- c) John must eat the scroll. Read Ezekiel 2:3-3:3. What is similar or different between Ezekiel's experience and task?
- d) In light of 9:20-21, in what way is prophesying to the nations the message of judgment and salvation a sweet and bitter task?

3. Read chapter 11:1-14.

This is one of the most difficult parts of the whole Bible! It seems to deal with what God's people can expect in the midst of a hostile world ruled by "gentiles" (the non-people of God). It seems to say...

1) God's people are secure (11:1-2)

Here the temple is an image of God's people. John is told to measure the inner court (reserved for God's people) and count the worshippers there. (It reminds us of Ezekiel 40:3-42:20 where the temple symbolises God's people restored after the exile). This is an encouragement about the security of God's people in a city over-run by unbelievers who will "trample the city for 42 months" (=1260 days = 3 ½ years = a time interrupted/cut short).

2) Our task is to be God's witnesses – to prophecy (11:3-6)

God gives great power to his 2 witnesses who prophesy in sackcloth (a sign of repentance). Who are these 2 witnesses? Some suggest they look a lot like Elijah and Moses – both of whom we're rejected, but faithfully bore witness and were given power by God. Another possibility is Joshua and Zerabbabel (priest and king) in Zechariah 4:1-14. They rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem – and although it looked weak and unimpressive, they served the purposes of "the Lord of all the earth". Earlier in Revelation (1:20) the lamp-stand is the church. That there are two witnesses could point to their reliability (based on the testimony of 2 witnesses – John 8:17-18), or perhaps to their missionary activity (cf. Mark 6:7, Luke 10:1) The point is that God's people of all ages are given power as they bear witness to Jesus in a hostile world.

3) Witnesses can expect to be killed (11:7-10)

The witnesses are attacked by evil forces, and follow Jesus in being rejected, scorned and humiliated. The world will rejoice over their demise because they "tormented" people with their preaching.

4) God will vindicate his people in the end (11:11-14)

Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so will be the witnesses – and like Jesus be welcomed into heaven. This signals that the time for final judgment has come. Finally those who survive give glory to God.

- a) To what extent does this passage describe the reality of the world we live in? Where do we see this being worked out – around the world and in our own lives?

- b) How does this passage challenge or comfort us as Christians in Sydney in 2011? To what extent are we fulfilling our task of bearing witness to the world? What distracts us from fulfilling our role, and how can we stay focused?

4. Read chapter 11:15-19

The seventh trumpet sounds and “the one who was and is and is to come” (cf 1:8) has now come! The prayers of his people have been answered – his kingdom has come! This is wonderful news for the persecuted saints, but the third “woe” (of judgment) for those who resist him (cf. Psalm 2).

- a) In light of verses 1-14, how would these words sound to persecuted Christians?

- b) When God’s kingdom comes, will you be among those who are rewarded, or destroyed?

5. Try and sum up the message of chapters 10 and 11 in your own words – in one or two sentences.

6. Pray for persecuted Christians around the world, that they (and we) would trust firmly in God and continue to bear witness. Pray that we would be faithful and willing to be rejected and even die for the sake of announcing God’s word to the world. Give thanks for the security and victory promised to God’s people.

Revelation 12-13

What do most people in our world think about Satan? What about in our church – do you think we are as aware of Satan’s activity as we should be? Why or why not?

After the 7 seals (Ch 6 & 7) and the 7 trumpets (Ch 8-11), and before the 7 last plagues (Ch 15-16), we find the revelation of a great spiritual battle (Ch 13-14). It is not made explicit, but we can see the battle unfold in 7 scenes (marked by “and I saw” or “and I looked”). This is yet another perspective to understand the world in which we live.

12:1-13:1	The woman, the child and the dragon
13:1-10	The beast from the sea
13:1-18	The beast from the earth
14:1-5	The lamb and the 144000
14:6-13	The three angels proclaiming God’s message
14:14-20	The harvest of the earth
15:1-4	The victory song

We will cover this material in 2 studies.

Read Chapter 12.

- a. From the text, who do you think the woman, the child and the dragon represent?
- b. How is the dragon conquered in heaven? What are the consequences for the earth?
- c. What significance do you think seeing the protection given to the woman would have for the first readers of Revelation? (eg. those in Smyrna – 2:8-11)
- d. Where do we Christians fit into this story? Is this something of which you are conscious?

Read Chapter 13:1-10

- a. What are the chief characteristics of this beast? How is he connected to the dragon? What does he have power to do?
- b. Many commentators identify this beast with political powers controlled by Satan. Does this make good sense of the passage?
- c. Through history and today, in what ways do we see political powers “make war on the saints and conquer them”.
- d. What therefore is required of Christians living on earth in this time? (See v 10) What does this really mean?

Read Chapter 13:11-18

- a. What are the characteristics of this second beast? What is his relationship to the first beast?

- b. Commentators identify this beast with false religion, especially that promoted with the power of the state. Does this make good sense of the passage?

- c. Through history and today in what ways do we see Satan at work through state sponsored false religion?

- d. What therefore is required of Christians living on earth at this time? (see v 18) (Don't become too distracted by the number 666 – as the text says it is symbolic of man).

In what ways have you heard this passage applied in an overly literalistic way? How might this distract us from the main ideas communicated?

What does the passage teach us about the present person and work of Satan?

In the next study we will see what happens next in this cosmic battle in which we are involved.

Revelation 14

1. In this study we will read of a great victory. When you think of “Great Victories” what springs to your mind? If you have experienced a great victory – how did it feel?

Last week we began reading of a cosmic battle that involves us. This is yet another perspective (in 7 scenes) to understand the world we live in. To recap, the seven scenes are...

12:1-13:1	The woman, the child and the dragon
13:1-10	The beast from the sea
13:1-18	The beast from the earth
14:1-5	The lamb and the 144000
14:6-13	The three angels proclaiming God's message
14:14-20	The harvest of the earth
15:1-4	The victory song

In chapter 13 we saw the enemy and his agents, and were warned of the strong Satanic opposition we can expect. In chapter 14 we see the outcome of the struggle.

2. **Read 14:1-5.** Who are these 144,000? What characterises them? How do they compare/contrast with those described in 3:16-18? (See other connections within the book – 5:9, 7:4, 7:9-12)
3. **Read 14:6-13.** Here we have three angels each proclaiming a message. What is the common theme of their messages? (Note – we will look in much more detail at the message about Babylon when we come to chapter 17).
 - a) How consistent is our thinking and preaching with “the eternal gospel” announced in v6-7?
 - b) What do we learn from verses 9-11 about “hell”?
 - c) What does this mean for Christians? (v 12-13)
4. **Read 14:14-20.**
 - a) What is on view here? (See 15:1) How does reading this make you feel?
 - b) Since the wrath of God is presented so clearly and starkly in the Bible, why do we so often “water it down”? What consequences might flow from us doing this?
 - c) How should what we see here deepen our appreciation for Jesus and his death on the cross?
5. **Read 15:1-4.** After being introduced to the enemies of God and their impact (Ch 13), being shown the secure people of God (14:1-5), hearing God's message announcing the coming judgment and calling for repentance (14:6-13), seeing the final wrath of God (14:14-20), we now come to the seventh and final scene – where the victorious people of God celebrate God's great victory.
 - a) How/why will God's people celebrate when so many have been destroyed?
 - b) Why is the song of Moses appropriate - see Exodus 14:29-15:18.
6. How should reading this chapter shape our prayers?

Revelation 15-16

What do people commonly think will happen at the end of the world?

These studies (from chapter 6 on) have focused our attention on the judgment of God. To date the judgment has been devastating, but limited and partial. The 7 opening of the seals saw the destruction of $\frac{1}{4}$ of the earth. That unleashed by the trumpets saw an escalation to $\frac{1}{3}$. Last week we began to glimpse the final 'victory'. Now we come to the last sequence...

Read 15:1-16:21 (Including the section studied last week). What is your initial overall impression?

There is clearly much "imagery" here. We need to be wary of an over-literal interpretation – trying to predict the precise course of world history. However, the main point is crystal clear – God will one day finally and completely destroy all evil and all opposition. In summary, as each of the seven bowls are poured out, who/what is impacted?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

From the text, why does this all happen?

What is the response of those who belong to God? (15:1-4, 16:7)

What is the response of those who have resisted God? (16:9, 10-11, 13-14, 21)

What does this passage teach us about the character of God?

How does it help us to understand appreciate what it means for us to be "saved from God's wrath"?

How must we be ready for the day? (See verse 15 and also 3:3-5, 3:18, and 7:14).

How has reading Revelation 6-16 impacted you? How does this revelation challenge or comfort you?