

REVELATION STUDY GUIDE

Chapter 1

“When Christ comes” is the ultimate encouragement to some and the extreme disappointment of others. For some there will be no more sorrow or crying or tears but for others there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. “When Christ comes” can be a focus about the timing of when He will come but misguided searches for the day and the hour are juxtaposed by those who make themselves ready by washing their robes in the blood of the Lamb and preparing their lamps with oil so they don’t miss the marriage supper of the Lamb. “When Christ Comes” is a terrible threat to some who are described throughout this book of Revelation as those who take the mark of the beast. “All the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him” is the reaction of those who have rejected Christ and His leadership in their lives and on the earth. They are not overjoyed or enamored by His return but frightened and ashamed when He returns on the clouds.

When Christ comes all will be revealed and every hidden thing will be made manifest. Every eye will see and every ear will hear and it will be unimaginable for all. It is the most polarizing event in human history where the entire goal will be separation between light and dark, sheep and goats, good and evil, named and unnamed, right and left, genuine and fake, heaven and hell, wheat and weed, elated and distraught. There will be no middle ground, no lukewarm answers, or 3rd party candidates. You will stand with Christ or you will not stand at all. This is the sobering reality of Revelation and the reason why it is so vital for all of us to know what it teaches so that we are prepared for the end – whenever that may be for any of us. And also the urgency to share the beauty of Christ with those who don’t yet know Him so that they are not on the wrong side of history.

V.1-3 In the very first verse of the book we see that this is the revelation of Jesus. Whether you understand that as the revelation from Jesus or the revelation about Jesus you are correct. Both are true and highlight the importance of the book because it is from the Savior of the world and about Him too. As we walk through the book of Revelation one of the most important questions that you can continue to ask is where is Jesus and what is He doing in this passage. I don’t know if you like the find Waldo books or not but finding Jesus in Revelation could be the difference between your consolation or your confusion. At least for those who follow Christ looking for Jesus and interpreting His actions will be of the utmost importance throughout this study. Where is Jesus when the seals are opened? Where is Jesus when the number of the beast is being revealed? Where is Jesus when the earth is harvested? Where is Jesus during the marriage supper of the Lamb? All these questions and more will reveal to us the purpose and results of the book of Revelation.

The term “soon” indicated in the very first verse is a repeated theme throughout this book as well and should be understood in the sense of suddenly happening and not as much in the precipice of time (but that may be the case as well). It is encouraging to the Christian follower or the slave of Christ as John refers to himself here to think of Jesus returning soon, but may not be as encouraging to think about Him returning suddenly. This may be a slight nuance in definition and interpretation, but may help you understand why it is repeated throughout the book. All of a sudden Jesus will be here and you don’t know when He is coming so don’t get caught with your pants down. It will be quick and sudden and soon. His return is imminent. All

of these terms imply ardent preparation instead of slothful inaction. Jesus is coming soon – get ready. (James 5:8; Philippians 3:20; Titus 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:6)

There are lots of things in the book of Revelation that are hidden or uncertain or unknown: the meaning of the number of the beast; who is the antichrist; is there really a millennium; will Jesus return be pre tribulation, mid tribulation or post tribulation; who are the 144,000; what is meant by Babylon. All of this and more is difficult and uncertain to understand even within the Christian church and by some of the most brilliant commentators in the world. Therefore, we will not focus in this study on what we disagree about, but instead what we can agree upon namely the victory and salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will certainly discuss and present the possibilities for understanding some of the difficult issues in Revelation but we will try and present options and probabilities rather than demanding adherence to issues that are peripheral and tertiary in their prominence and importance. It is much more important for me to prepare Christians for persecution and martyrdom than to argue and fight over our interpretive differences in non-essential issues. Although there is much that we don't know for sure and purposefully intended that way by God there are many things that we can know and much good that can be gained from reading, listening, and studying the book of Revelation (v.3)

V.4-8 In fact, I would suggest that the primary problem with the Western Church today is that its view of Jesus is incomplete. If we know and study the Jesus of the Gospels but do not study and know the Jesus of the Revelation then we will not have the entire picture of who He is. It is like putting a puzzle together and you're missing a few of the most important pieces but instead of looking for them or scouring every nook and cranny for them you just call it good. That is what it is like when we are content in the church to look at the Jesus of the Gospels as defined by the manger and the cross and neglect the Jesus of Revelation. If we determine in our hearts that Jesus is only a suffering servant and not also a reigning king then our picture of Jesus is incomplete. Yes, He did come as a lowly infant in a meager manger and He sacrificed His very life for the forgiveness of sins of the whole world, but when He returns He will not be lowly or meager. He will be the glorified and risen Christ with power and authority as described in the book of Revelation. Jesus is not coming to share His kingdom. He is not coming to compromise. He is not coming to make a peace treaty. He is coming to rule. That's why all of history is coming to a head because the enemy doesn't want to give up his ground. Think about Pharaoh and Egypt and his resistance to the freedom of the people of Israel. So will be the reluctance of the enemy to release God's people in the end of the age and thus why the wrath of the Lamb must come. It is not a matter of if but only when. If we keep these two pictures in our minds when reading the book of Revelation it will help us with the interpretation of difficult judgments and wrath that are released on the earth. Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords and also the enemy will be repeatedly reluctant to allow the release of God's people.

If you look at the descriptions given of Jesus in these few verses you will be amazed at the authority and power that is ascribed to Christ only in this brief introduction: who is and who was and who is to come; the faithful witness; the firstborn of the dead; the ruler of kings on earth; the Alpha and Omega; the Almighty. It is no wonder that if we ignore this book of the Bible that we fail to understand who Jesus fully is and we think Him lowly and mild and unable or unwilling to deal with sin, sinful people, and the devil. This Jesus does not exist and nor did He ever. He is God and man, servant and king, suffering and exalted. Do not mistake His kindness as weakness or His inactivity as indifference for He desires that all would come to repentance and

His patience is His kindness, but it will come to an end. This is where we pick up in the book of Revelation.

V.9-11 One of the difficulties in the understanding and interpretation of the book of Revelation even begins with determining an adequate outline or separation of its structure. One of the more common ways that commentators have defined these delineations is by the visions that are described by the apostle John. It is in this section that we see the first reference to John being “in the Spirit” (v.10) This reference by John is repeated four different times in the book of Revelation which give us the impression that there are four distinct visions that he receives. (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10) I imagine this similarly to how Paul indicated that he saw Jesus and said whether he was in the body or out of the body he did not know indicating that this is a heavenly vision while John is awake and not a dream.

Another obvious difficulty regarding the interpretation of the book of Revelation as we begin our study is how to define and view its language. Although we don't want to get bogged down in these types of distinctions rather than declaring the worth and beauty of the Lamb we will at least give a brief explanation of the different interpretive understandings in case it is helpful to your understanding of the Word. There are four basic interpretive methods for understanding the book of Revelation. The different interpretive perspectives are typically defined as: Idealist; Preterist; Historicist; and Futurist. For what I believe to be a good and fair evaluation of each of these methods you can see this article for further detailed information and study - [Four Views of Revelation – Evidence and Answers](#) The Idealist interpretation understands the book of Revelation primarily as symbolic language of good vs. evil and could often define the book of Revelation as an applicable allegory of God's triumph over Satan. The Preterist interpretation regularly defines the book of Revelation as historically completed largely in the events of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This view would be summarized as symbolic history as well as the next interpretation Historicist. The Historicist interpretation is similar to the Preterist understanding but instead of interpreting the book of Revelation as largely concerning one specific time frame and event it interprets all of Christian history since the resurrection of Christ through the lens of Revelation. These historic events typically include things like the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire, the events of the French Revolution, and the Protestant Reformation. The Futurist interpretation depicts Revelation as all future events that will transpire including the rapture, tribulation, and the millennium. This view interprets the book of Revelation in the most literal method. Throughout this study I will try and describe the various interpretive options depending on these views but without trying to dictate to you what is absolutely true because I also am uncertain. I will communicate our Lutheran doctrine where applicable and allow you to use your God given judgment and discernment to interpret these events as we study them together.

One other important discussion and understanding with regard to Revelation's interpretation has to do with how one understands prophecy. The book of Revelation by its own admission is prophecy as indicated in the introduction and the conclusion (v.1:3 & 22:18-19). There are two basic understandings of interpreting prophecy and it is worth at least mentioning them and allowing you the opportunity for further study if you so desire. The two primary ways of understanding prophecy are Typological and Rectilinear. For more information and further study about these interpretations of prophecy see this article - [Rectilinear or Typological Interpretation of Messianic Prophecy? \(csl.edu\)](#) Basically, a Rectilinear understanding of prophecy assigns one specific defined meaning and Typological interpretation of prophecy understands

that there are multiple fulfillments of prophecy. For instance, in the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” Rectilinear prophecy would say that this is a prophecy about Jesus (alone). Typological prophecy would acknowledge that the ultimate fulfillment came in the person of Christ, but also acknowledge that there was a real boy that was a sign to Ahaz during Isaiah’s life as well. How we think about the interpretation of prophecy will be determinative of our understanding of Revelation. If you think that prophecy is only Rectilinear then there can only be one intended antecedent and you are much more likely to view one of the historical interpretations as primary. But if you understand that prophecy is Typological then you can see how prophecy can be true about history and also going to be true about its ultimate future fulfillment.

Let’s be honest this is tough stuff because it hasn’t happened yet. If the events in Daniel chapters 2 and 3 hadn’t happened yet there would be widespread disagreement about their interpretation because it wouldn’t be clear. But because those events have transpired there is largely agreement about their interpretation. I would argue because the final events of Revelation haven’t transpired it is extremely difficult if not impossible without supernatural knowledge from God to interpret them. That shouldn’t stop us from studying them or from relegating our understanding to easily explainable historical accounts that do not leave room for God to close the pages of history. There is a reason why this book is the last book of the Bible and why the book itself indicates that it is the end of all things. (Rev. 1:7; 7:9-14; 10:5-7; 11:15-18; 14:6-7; 20:11-15; 21:1-4) God’s ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We should let Scripture interpret Scripture and not let our pre conceived notions limit our understanding of what God is communicating. We will attempt to do this throughout our study by referencing other New Testament passages about Jesus return as well as Daniel’s discussion about the time of the end. We will examine what Jesus himself said in the Gospels and how the Old Testament talks about the Day of the Lord, the Son of Man, and other important Revelation subjects. Two thirds of the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Christ are about His 2nd coming and only one third of those prophecies are about His first arrival. If His birth was extremely significant how much more His return.

V.12-16 This may be my favorite passage of Scripture in all of Revelation. If you are still unsure about the power and authority of the risen and glorified Christ then meditate on these verses even for a brief moment of time and you will understand the significance of who He really is. His description is beautiful and terrifying all at the same time. His eyes were like a flame of fire...His voice was like the roar of many waters...from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face like the sun shining in full strength! If you think you needed protective glasses to look at the eclipse how much more to see the Son of Man.

V.17-20 The first thing that we see in these verses is that this is Jesus appearing to John. There is no doubt that this is Jesus as we see John drop to his knees at His appearing. We will see throughout the book of Revelation that John is regularly overcome and drops to his knees, but when it is an angel they tell him to stop and get up. That doesn’t happen in this account because this IS the Son of Man. There is no recommendation to end his reverence and worship because it is Jesus. He says of himself... “I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” This is one of the most encouraging passages of Revelation as we look at the prospects of suffering, and death, and hell throughout this book. We are reminded at the very beginning of this study about his

sovereignty over everything including death and hell. He has the keys and no one is going there without His acknowledgement. What Jesus says to John about the vision He says to all of us as we read the book of Revelation and as we face the prospects of persecution and martyrdom – “Fear not”.

Another way that is suggested to divide the book of Revelation into a general outline is described by Jesus instructions to John in verse 19 “write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place after this.” Basically, breaking Revelation up into what has already happened, what is happening now (to John), and what will happen in the future. No matter how we outline or structure our study of Revelation we will find prophecy and apocalyptic literature are difficult to interpret, but that shouldn’t stop us from trying! I am so glad that we serve a God who is greater and higher than imaginable and whose ways are without understanding and whose mind is unsearchable. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” (Romans 11:33-36)