Alpha and Omega

REVELATION

18 lessons



Rejep and Layla Aydin

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Revelation: 18 lessons
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General Preface

For more than three decades Rejep and Leyla Aydin have been teaching God's word to Central Asians. Central Asia is an area with a rich historical heritage, a distinctive culture, and centuries-old traditions of moral upbringing. The history of the different peoples—along with their customs, traditions, and oral heritage—reflects values such as human dignity, honor, justice, compassion, responsibility, respect for elders, mutual aid, and service to society.

The Alpha & Omega publications offer studies of God's word within an educational and cultural-enlightenment context. The program of study takes into account the history, culture, and traditions of Central Asian people, while also exploring universal moral values and their relevance to modern society.

Special emphasis is placed on fostering a mature individual and a responsible leader—someone capable of harmonizing spiritual convictions with respect for history, cultural identity, civic responsibility, peace, and the common good.

The publications aim to encourage reflection on the question: what kind of person must one be for their faith, knowledge, and convictions to become a source of goodness, constructive action, and responsibility toward society and future generations?

They are tools that ordinary people can use as they gather together with those closest to them, so that together they can grow in their understanding and love of God's word. They supply background information and use questions to prompt the readers to look carefully at the text. Rejep and Leyla base their work on the truth of 2 Timothy 3:16: "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*."

Preface

Here are 18 lessons to help you to get to know the book of Revelation.

It is helpful to study the *Bible Overview Course* before you study this course.

Like the *Bible Overview Course*, each lesson has questions for you to answer. The number in square brackets after each question indicates the number of the answer at the end of the lesson. Try to answer the question before looking at the answer.

Each lesson has references to verses from other parts of the Bible. If they are in **bold**, it is important to find them and read them during the lesson. To complete a lesson in an hour, there is not usually time to look up the verses that are not in bold. They are given so that you can check the information given is truly from the Bible, and for you to explore the ideas more in your own time.

The book of Revelation was written in a time of persecution. It was written to encourage believers who were suffering persecution. To encourage us, each lesson begins with a story of one or more believers who died for their faith in Jesus. These are well-known people and their stories are true. Also, most lessons end with a true story from a believer in Central Asia. Their names have been changed to protect their identity.

At the end of most lessons there is a Commentary section. These sections are for those who want to explore a verse or a section further. They are for those who would like more information, and can be studied in your own time.

We pray that you will enjoy the wonderful book of Revelation, learning and sharing with others!

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Revelation lesson 1

Introduction and prologue



The book of Revelation is like a banquet. Everyone is invited to come, eat and drink! Let us gaze on Jesus in awe and wonder. Let him show us more of what he is doing and what he is going to do in the world!

At a banquet, some people like to know what the ingredients are in each dish. For these people we have included extra "Commentary" after each lesson. Others just want to enjoy the taste of the dishes without knowing what is in them. Even if a few of the details are strange or difficult to understand, you can still thoroughly enjoy the banquet!

Words that are important for everyone to understand are written in **bold letters,** with the verse and a short explanation. For example, see the explanation for the word "Christ" in the Prologue (below).

"*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near*" (Revelation 1:3).

What happened to three of the apostles

Under the Emperor Nero, the apostle Peter was crucified. Even though crucifixion was the most shameful death ever invented, he asked to be crucified upside down because he did not feel worthy to die in the same position as Jesus.

Also under the Emperor Nero, the apostle Paul was beheaded on the main road outside Rome. He was beheaded rather than crucified because he was a Roman citizen.

And under the Emperor Domitian, the apostle John was sent into exile on the island of Patmos. While he was there God gave him the visions that became the book of Revelation. It is thought that eventually he was released and he died naturally in his old age in the city of Ephesus.

Truly they were all given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

Prologue

Read **Revelation 1:1–6**.

(?) What people are mentioned in these opening verses? [1]

Christ (v.1): Christ is the Greek translation of the Old Testament word "Messiah". Messiah means a person anointed with oil, that is a high priest or a king (Exodus 29:7; 1 Samuel 10:1). Over time, the title "Messiah" became used for the special person whom God promised to send, the king who will rule for ever (2 Samuel 7:12–13). The New Testament tells us that this person is Jesus the Messiah!

John (v.1): was one of Jesus' twelve apostles. He also wrote the gospel of John, and the three short letters, 1, 2 and 3 John. These writings show us that Jesus is God's Son in a clearer way than the other writings of the New Testament. And in the book of Revelation we see this even more clearly.

Even though John was an apostle, he describes himself as God's **servant,** just as his readers and listeners are **servants of God** (v.1). Followers of Jesus, whatever their role in the church, should always see themselves as servants who follow the example of their Master, who himself came as a servant (Matthew 20:25–28).

(?) How did John receive this message (Revelation 1:1)? [2]

The message of Revelation comes to us like a chain that connects us to God himself. It is from God — to Jesus — to the angel — to John — to the readers/hearers, including us.

(?) Why did God give John this revelation (v.1)? [3]

In the first three verses of this book, there are three different words which describe the book of Revelation:

1. Jesus Christ's ***revelation*** (v.1): he is revealing to us what is going on "behind the curtain" of our physical world.

2. the ***testimony*** of Jesus Christ (v.2): Jesus will tell us more about what his death achieved.

3. and a ***prophecy*** (v.3): this book tells us that Jesus will soon come back to judge the world. Like the messages of the Old Testament prophets, it demands that we respond to what God is telling us through this book.

(?) What three words describe the book of Revelation in verses 1–3? [4]

So the book of Revelation is the apostle John's report of these revelations. The book gives us the most exalted descriptions of Jesus in the whole Bible. John shows us clearly that Jesus is truly God's Son. It is appropriate that this is the last book of the Bible.

Letter

As well as being a report of the visions that John saw, this book is also a letter that John wrote to the churches of the first century.

The letter starts and finishes like other letters in the New Testament.

> The beginning:
> Revelation 1:4–6 follows the usual form of beginning a letter in the New Testament:
> - author — "*John*"
> - recipients — "*the seven churches*"
> - greeting — "*grace and peace*"
>
> The end:
> Revelation 22:21 follows the usual form of ending a letter in the New Testament: "*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people*."

The believers needed encouragement to keep following Jesus the Messiah. It was the time of the Roman Empire, probably within fifty years after Jesus' death and resurrection. The Roman authorities were persecuting his followers. Many of them were put to death for their faith. Believers could easily have thought that their life would be easier if they didn't follow Jesus.

For many centuries the book of Revelation has been a blessing for those who are suffering from persecution. It encourages us to stand strong. It also challenges those of us who are starting to doubt that following Jesus really is better than what the world offers us. So this letter is also addressed to us today!

(?) Why is it important for you to study the book of Revelation? [5]

Visions

Read **Revelation 1:2** again.

(?) What does John tell us about in Revelation? [6]

In the book John describes the visions that he saw. They are filled with images and symbols. These are given in order to help us more fully grasp who Jesus is and what God is doing in the world.

All the books of the New Testament teach us about Jesus. But this book is very different from the other books. In his visions, John sees and hears strange things. This is not a history book, like the Acts of the Apostles. When we read something strange in this book, we should ask ourselves, "What does it mean?"

To answer that question we need to remember two things:

1. The Old Testament prophets had similar visions (e.g. the prophets Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah and Isaiah). We will be reading many verses from the Old Testament that will help us understand what the apostle John saw in his visions.

2. John lived at the time of the Roman Empire — a time when everyone worshipped pagan gods. Everywhere people looked they saw reminders of the mighty Roman Empire and of pagan religion. There were temples, coins, wall paintings and statues of emperors or pagan gods everywhere. In Revelation we read about God's temple, about images and statues.

(?) What two things do we need to remember in order to understand the meaning of John's visions? [7]

Images, symbols and numbers

The Bible often uses images, symbols and numbers to describe God and what is happening in the world. God is too big for our small minds to truly grasp. So these images help us to understand more about God and his world.

You will recall from the *Bible Overview Course* that numbers in the book of Revelation have their own meaning. They are symbols, not literal numbers. For example:

- **seven** represents perfection and completeness. In seven days, God created the whole world.
- **six** represents imperfection or incompleteness. Six is one less than seven. Anything that is not completely good, is bad. Think about how a little bit of dirt in a glass of water can make someone very sick.
- **ten** versus **1,000** — ten represents a small number. For example, ten days represents a short period of time (e.g. 2:10), but 1,000 years represents a long period of time (e.g. 20:2). Similarly, 1,000 represents a huge number of people (e.g. 5:11).
- **twelve** represents the complete number. Often it is used of people who belong to God (e.g. the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of Jesus).

As we read the book of Revelation, these numbers will tell us more about God, the world and the future.

(?) What do the numbers 7, 6, 10 and 12 represent? [8]

(?) What is in this book that the apostle John wrote? [9]

Nothing new!

All important ideas about God, people and the world are repeated throughout the Bible. We shall see that what is taught in Revelation is already taught in other places in the Bible.

So we must not teach any new ideas about God and his plan for the world, that are based on just one or two verses in Revelation.

(?) Will we find any new ideas about God and his plan for the world in Revelation that are not found in any other part of the Bible? [10]

Warning!

When people read Revelation, they often think that it is written specifically about their own time. Earlier in history, people thought that the beast described in chapter 13 was the Roman Emperor, or Napoleon or Hitler. But the book of Revelation was written for all times.

Sometimes people have thought that Revelation helps them to know or find out when Jesus will come back. They read the details in Revelation, and it seems to them they are reading about their own time. And they say that Jesus will definitely come in a certain year.

Jesus said that he himself did not know the hour when he would return to the earth (Matthew 24:36). Likewise, we cannot know. Let's not bring shame to Jesus by saying that he has said what he has not said.

However, the whole of the book of Revelation tells us that we need to be ready for his return! Maybe Jesus will return tomorrow. Are you ready for his coming?

(?) What does the book of Revelation tell us about Jesus' return? [11]

Knowing Jesus

Read **Revelation 1:3** again.

(?) Which two types of people are blessed? [12]

They are blessed because reading this book helps us to get to know Jesus. We do not read Revelation to learn facts about the future. We read it to get to know Jesus better. God wants us to feast on the banquet that he has prepared for us in this book, just like Yakub.

Yakub's story

In my hometown, I was active in many forms of ministry: ministry wasn't just part of my life, it was my whole life! I couldn't imagine myself without a team, without a community, without continuously moving forward for God. But everything changed when I moved to another city to study at university.

There, I was overcome with deep sadness. I felt like I'd lost my purpose. I had no team, no friends and no ministry. I often asked myself how I should live. During this time, I began to open up more to God and tell him everything: about my pain, my doubts and the emptiness in my heart. God spoke to me very quietly but clearly: he wanted me to spend time alone with him. I accepted this and began to pray more, seek his face, and simply be with him. And one day, during prayer, God said to me, "You need to start. It's time to start your own ministry."

At first, I didn't understand how this was possible. But step by step, the Lord revealed the way. I began to assemble a team. God himself brought us the right people. The ministry began to grow, and young students began to come to God. I was in awe at how the Lord transformed small things into great things. Today I know that ministry begins the moment we say "yes" to God.

Discussion

What did Yakub learn about Jesus?

Share with each other one thing that you have learned in this lesson. Is anything surprising to you?

Practise explaining to the person beside you, in your own words, what the book of Revelation is and why we should read it.

Pray for each other to hear all that the Lord wants to teach you through the book of Revelation.

Homework

Read the whole of **Revelation chapter 1** and write down what it says about Jesus. Be ready to share with the group one thing you have found out.

Answers

1 – *Jesus Christ, John*, the readers and the hearers.
2 – An angel came to him.
3 – *To show God's servants what must soon take place.*
4 – *Revelation, testimony and prophecy.*
5 – This book encourages us to stand strong in times of persecution. It also challenges us if we are starting to doubt that following Jesus really is better than what the world offers us.
6 – *Everything he saw.*
7 – The Old Testament prophets saw similar visions; John lived at a time when everywhere was under Roman rule and most people worshipped pagan gods.
8 – Seven represents perfection and completeness; six represents imperfection or incompleteness; ten represents a small number; 12 represents completeness, like the complete number of people who belong to God.
9 – The apostle John's report of the visions he saw. It gives us the most exalted descriptions of Jesus in the whole Bible, with lots of helpful images and symbols.
10 – No! But it helps us understand some things more clearly.
11 – The book does not say when it will be, but we need to be ready for it!
12 – Those who read this book aloud, and *those who hear it and take it to heart*.

Commentary

Jesus Christ (v.1): the whole of the Old Testament prepares us for Jesus. It prophesied many things about the coming Messiah. Examples include:

- he would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:34–35).
- he would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1).
- he would start his ministry in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1–2; Matthew 4:12–17).
- he would draw the Gentiles to himself (Isaiah 11:10; John 12:18–21).
- he would perform many miracles (Isaiah 35:5–6; Matthew 11:2–6).
- Jerusalem would rejoice as he came to her on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:7–9).
- he would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12–13; Matthew 27:3–10).
- he would be despised and rejected (Isaiah 53:3; Luke 4:28–30).
- everyone would abandon the Messiah (Zechariah 13:7; Mark 14:50).
- he would give up his life in payment for the sins of the world (Isaiah 53:5–6; 1 Corinthians 15:3).
- his suffering would include great thirst (Psalm 22:15; John 19:28).
- his thirst would be quenched with vinegar and gall (Psalm 69:21; Matthew 27:34).
- they would pierce his hands and feet (Psalm 22:16; Luke 24:39; John 20:25–27).
- they would cast lots for his clothing (Psalm 22:18; John 19:23–24).
- he would come back to life (Isaiah 53:11; Luke 24:6).
- he would be given authority, glory and sovereign power over all nations (Daniel 7:13–14; Matthew 28:18).

that must soon take place (v.1): "*soon*" here means sudden and unexpected. The same word is used in "*Quick, get up*!" (Acts 12:7) and "*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet*" (Romans 16:20). In the same way, Jesus said, "*So you must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him*" (Matthew 24:44).

the time is near (v.3): the New Testament has two Greek words for time.

- *Chronos* is about the time something happens (e.g. on Sunday morning I will go to a meeting).
- *Kairos* is about the right or appointed time for something. It is used for something we have been waiting for, for a long time. God does everything at exactly the right time. *Kairos* is the word used in verse 3.

At the beginning of Mark's Gospel, Jesus said, "*The time* (kairos*) has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!*" (Mark 1:15). The right time for Jesus to return in glory is indeed near!

who reads aloud (v.3): in those days, reading was usually aloud. So the idea is that the leaders of the churches should read this book to their churches, and the members of the churches should hear it and take it to heart. Then they will all be truly blessed!

Revelation lesson 2

King Jesus and his servants



Stephen's story (died around AD34, Jerusalem)

We can read about Stephen in the book of Acts. He was one of seven men chosen to make sure that food was shared fairly among the widows of the Jerusalem church. He was chosen because he was full of faith and the Holy Spirit. He went about doing great miracles and speaking about Jesus in the synagogues. His opponents could not answer the wisdom that God gave him. So they brought him before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. Stephen stood up and told the whole story of Israel, from Abraham to Jesus. He showed that God's people had repeatedly rejected God's messengers, and that they had now killed God's own Son. The crowd dragged him out of the city and threw stones at him until he died. As he died, he prayed for God to forgive the people who were killing him, just as Jesus had prayed for God to forgive those who had put him to death. Truly, Stephen was given a wonderful welcome into heaven (Acts chapter 7)!

Share one thing that you learned about the book of Revelation from lesson 1.

As we read the beginning of the apostle John's letter to the churches, let us think more about who God is, who John was and who the book of Revelation was written to. This will help us understand more about who we are.

Who is God?

Read **Revelation 1:4–8**.

(?) In verse 4 we are told that God "*is, and was, and is to come*". What does this tell us about God? [1]

(?) According to verse 4, what two things does God give believers? [2]

Grace and peace are wonderful Bible words! You find each of these words about 100 times in the New Testament, so it is important that we understand what they mean.

Grace is God's undeserved mercy. We deserved his wrath, and yet he has given us forgiveness for all our sins! He did this through the death of his Son, Jesus Christ, who was the one perfect sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10).

Peace is the end of hostility between people and God. Because of what Jesus has done on the cross, all people have the opportunity to enjoy a wonderful relationship with God (Romans 5:1).

(?) In the Bible, what do the words grace and peace mean? [3]

(?) In Revelation chapter 1 verses 4–5, where do grace and peace come from? [4]

(?) What are before God's throne in verse 4? [5]

The seven spirits (v.4): means the perfect Holy Spirit. Remember the significance of the number 7.

Grace and peace come from God the Father, God the Holy Spirit and God the Son. Throughout the book of Revelation, we will see how the glorious Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) works together as one to save us and bless us.

(?) In what three ways does John describe Jesus in verse 5? [6]

These descriptions are unique to Jesus — no one else can be described like this:

- **the faithful witness** (v.5): Jesus always told the truth about God and himself, even when he was facing death. We can be sure that all Jesus has said is completely true.

- **the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth** (v.5):
  - Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promise to King David: "*And I will appoint him to be my* ***firstborn****, the most exalted of the kings of the earth*" (Psalm 89:27).
  - Jesus is "*firstborn* ***from the dead***" because he rose from the dead. He guarantees eternal life for all who trust in him (1 Corinthians 15:20–22).
  - Although in John's day (and now), the kings and other rulers of the earth did (do) not recognize his rule (Revelation 17:1–2), at the end of the world they will indeed honour him (Revelation 21:24).

(?) What two things has Jesus done for us according to Revelation chapter 1 verses 5–6? [7]

- **freed us from our sins by his blood** (v.5b): we were once hopeless slaves to sin, but now Jesus has set us free to become slaves to righteousness (Roman 6:17–18). By the power of God's Holy Spirit in our lives, we do not have to sin any more (Ephesians 3:20–21; 2 Peter 1:3).

- **made us to be a kingdom and priests** (v.6): in the Old Testament, when God had saved the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, he told them that they would be "a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6). Through the blood of Jesus, we have been set free from sin in order to be the kingdom of priests! This is because he "*loves us*" (Revelation 1:5)!

In the Old Testament, the priests' role was to bring people to God through offering sacrifices and to teach them God's law (Leviticus 10:11; Hebrews 8:3). In the New Testament **all** believers are priests.

Read **Revelation 1:7** again.

(?) Who is verse 7 talking about (Matthew 24:30)? [8]

This verse is taken from two places in the Old Testament:

- "*Look, he is coming with the clouds*" reminds us of Daniel 7:13.
- "*And every eye will see him, even those who pierced him and all peoples on earth will mourn because of him*" reminds us of Zechariah 12:10.

This is talking about the second coming of Jesus. Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, God was already preparing his people for both the first and the second comings of Jesus. When Jesus comes again, it will be a terrible day for everyone who does not believe in him. We need to be ready for that day and tell others to get ready!

(?) What does Revelation chapter 1 verse 8 tell us about God? [9]

I am the Alpha and the Omega (v.8): the New Testament was originally written in Greek. Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This phrase was used in Roman and Greek religion about their gods. Again, God is telling us that only he is eternal and only he is God!

Read **Revelation 1:9–20**.

(?) Read **verses 13–18** again. Who is being described, and what does he look like? [10]

(?) What does John do when he sees Jesus? [11]

Although Jesus gives us grace and peace, he is still terrifying!

(?) But what is the first thing he says in verse 17? [12]

If we follow Jesus, we do not need to fear him. In verse 18 he says he holds the keys to death and Hades.

(?) So, what else do we not need to be afraid of? [13]

What a wonderful God we worship! God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He has sent his son Jesus to free us from the slavery of sin and make us a kingdom of priests. He gives us grace and peace. We do not need to be afraid of anyone or anything, not even death, because Jesus is all powerful.

We studied verses 12–20 in lesson 38 of the *Bible Overview Course*. So if you want to read more about this description of Jesus, look at that lesson.

Who was John?

Read **Revelation 1:9–11** again.

? How does John describe himself in verse 9? [14]

? Where was John when he wrote this letter (v.9)? [15]

? Why was John on this island (v.9)? [16]

Brother and companion (v.9): John wrote as the believers' brother and companion, in order to encourage them. He was walking alongside them, helping them to keep following Jesus. He wanted them to read this book of Revelation, so that they would cling to Jesus when life was hard and the opposition was intense. He did not make himself more important than them or seek his own honour.

Suffering and kingdom (v.9): suffering is the normal situation for those who follow Jesus in a hostile world (John 16:33; Acts 14:22). We should not be surprised when we suffer for following Jesus. Studying the book of Revelation will help us to stand firm. But we are also members of God's kingdom. We can come to God our Father at any time in any situation and he is ready to listen to our prayers and help us by his Spirit.

Patient endurance (v.9): these words come seven times in the book of Revelation. If we are in the kingdom, we will suffer, but Christians are people who endure patiently.

Patmos (v.9): Patmos was a little rocky island not far from Ephesus (which is on the west coast of Turkey). Look at the map and find Patmos.



Because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (v.9): this refers to persecution (Revelation 6:9). John was exiled on the little island of Patmos and was suffering because of his faith in Jesus. But God gave him a vision, which we can read in this book of Revelation!

Who was Revelation written to?

Read **Revelation 1:10–11** again.

(?) What did John hear (v.10)? [17]

(?) What was John told to do (v.11)? [18]

(?) Who was the scroll sent to (v.11)? [19]

A loud voice like a trumpet (v.10): in the Old Testament, trumpets were used to command people to gather or to worship. This is a voice of command. It is God's voice. John must obey.

Write on a scroll what you see (v.11): in lesson 1 we learned that the book of Revelation is a "*testimony*" (1:2). John testified to the churches about what he saw. Those who read this book will read about what is in the past, the present and the future (v.19).

Seven churches (v.11): we know that the number seven is a symbol of completeness. So this book is a message for all churches. The cities listed in verse 11 were all in the province of Asia (v.4). Look at the map above to see where they were located. But we also see that the churches are symbolized by seven lampstands (v.20). Jesus is standing among these lampstands (v.13) and holds "*seven stars*" in his hand (v.16). He is with all the churches in the whole world, and he holds them in his hand.

Maral's story

I dedicated my life to Christ at 19 years old. I shared the gospel with everyone around me, and many people responded. But my friend and neighbour argued with me about it. He said that my faith was foreign.

Time passed, and eventually my neighbour stole me from my family to become his wife. I couldn't return home, even though my parents were against the marriage, as that would be deeply shameful. In my new family, there was no peace, only constant arguments and shouting. But through God, I remained patient. I prayed, as I knew that on my own, I couldn't change my situation, but God can do anything.

My husband wouldn't let me go to church, so my bedroom became my new church. There I praised God and poured out my soul to him every day. It felt like nothing was changing, but I continued to believe that God was hearing my prayers.

Then, one day, the impossible happened. My husband met God. He dedicated his life to Christ. Not because of what I said, but what I did. He said later that he saw my faithfulness and the peace I felt, and this brought him to the Lord.

I was no longer alone in his family. Together, we could be a light in a home that had been so dark for me. When I stayed faithful to God, he made the impossible possible.

Challenge

The apostle John is "*our brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus*" (Revelation 1:9).

What difficulties are you facing right now? What will it mean for you to endure patiently?

Perhaps there is someone who you are finding it difficult to love. Remember that Jesus' love for us is more amazing than we can understand. Pray that you can show grace and peace towards that person, as Jesus has shown grace and peace to us.

Perhaps you are facing difficulties because you believe in Jesus. Remember that Jesus says "*Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last*" (1:17). He is coming soon, and "*every eye will see him, even those who pierced him*" (1:7).

Perhaps life is difficult because of illness or hardship. Remember that Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades. Nothing is too hard for him. He is among the churches and he holds us in his hands. Do not be ashamed to ask him for help. Ask others to pray for you too!

Share with each other one thing that you have learned in this lesson.

Practise explaining to the person beside you what grace and peace mean, and where they come from. Use your own words.

Homework

Read **Revelation chapters 2 and 3,** so you can be ready to study them in the next lesson. As you read, write down one thing Jesus says to the churches, that encourages or challenges you. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – God is eternal!
2 – *Grace and peace.*
3 – Grace is God's undeserved mercy. Peace is the end of hostility between us and God.
4 – God, the Holy Spirit and Jesus.
5 – The seven spirits.
6 – *He is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth!*
7 – *He... has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.*
8 – Jesus.
9 – He was there before the beginning of the world and he will be there at the end of the world. He is all-powerful!

10 – Jesus. He looks like a son of man: he is dressed in a long robe with a golden sash, his hair is white like wool, his eyes are like blazing fire, his feet are like glowing bronze, his voice is like rushing waters, and a sharp double-edged sword comes out of his mouth. His face is like the sun shining at its brightest.
11 – He falls down at his feet as though he was dead.
12 – Do not be afraid.
13 – Death and Hades (hell).
14 – *Your brother and companion.*
15 – He was on the island of Patmos.
16 – *Because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*
17 – He *heard a loud voice like a trumpet.*
18 – "*Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches.*"
19 – It was sent *to the seven churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.*

Commentary

Son of man (v.13): this was how Jesus often named himself (e.g. Matthew 9:6). The prophet Daniel once had an overwhelming vision of "*one like a son of man*" coming into God's presence for a heavenly coronation ceremony:

"*In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a* ***son of man****, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed*" (Daniel 7:13–14).

Jesus used the title "Son of Man" from the very beginning of his ministry. After his resurrection, Jesus told his disciples clearly, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...*" (Matthew 28:18–19).

a sharp double-edged sword (v.16): this is an image of the words that Jesus speaks. His words bring warning and judgment (Isaiah 49:2). The book of Hebrews tells us, "*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...*" (Hebrews 4:12). When we sin, we need to hear sharp, painful words from Jesus!

then he placed his right hand on me (v.17): when an important person places his right hand on someone else it is a sign of giving power and blessing to that person (e.g. Genesis 48:17–19). Jesus was restoring, blessing and preparing John for the revelations that he was going to see and hear.

the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches (v.20): in chapters 2 and 3, each of the messages to the seven churches are addressed to "the angel of the church in...". This most likely means that in the spiritual world, churches are represented by spiritual beings. Here they are called angels. This is like in Daniel 10:13, where heavenly beings representing Persia and Israel struggle with each other.

Revelation lesson 3

Messages to the seven churches (part 1)



Polycarp of Smyrna's story (died around AD155)

Polycarp was a church leader in Smyrna, in what is now Türkiye. He had known the apostle John personally. When the authorities arrested him for being a follower of Jesus, they told him that if he simply said "Caesar is Lord" and burned a pinch of incense, he would be set free. He refused. He said: "Eighty-six years I have served Jesus, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" They threatened him with being burned alive. He said: "You threaten me with a fire that burns for a short time. But you do not know about the fire of eternal punishment that is waiting for those who reject God." They tied him to a stake and lit the fire around him. As the flames rose, he prayed: "Lord, I bless you for counting me worthy of this hour, so that I may share the cup of Christ." Truly he was given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

In this lesson we will look at the first two of the seven messages to the seven different churches. We will see what encouragement and challenges Jesus wants to bring to us and our churches through them.

Although these seven messages are often called letters, they are not written like the other letters in the New Testament (see lesson 1: Letter). Rather, the opening phrases "*These are the words of [God]...*" are in the style of the prophets' proclamations in the Old Testament.

To help us study these messages we will ask four questions about each one:

1. What is written about Jesus and what does this mean?
2. What praise does Jesus give the church?
3. What does Jesus warn them about?
4. What reward will Jesus give to those who are victorious?

In each message there is a promise to those who are "*victorious*". This word reminds us that we are in a battle and that we need to fight (Ephesians 6:10–20). These messages teach us that if we stand firm and do not give up, we will be victorious.

The message to the church in Ephesus

Read **Revelation 2:1–7**.

(?) What is **written about Jesus** in verse 1? [1]

This was part of John's vision of Jesus (Revelation 1:13, 20). This vision is referred to again in all seven messages to the churches. Seven stars and seven lampstands mean the seven churches. Jesus holds the churches in his right hand, which means that he protects them. No one can snatch them out of his hand (John 10:28). Jesus walks among the churches, which means that he is present with the churches. He sees and knows what is happening!

(?) Why is this important? [2]

Even when people persecute the churches, Jesus is with them and is ready to help them!

(?) What **praise** does Jesus give them in Revelation chapter 2 verses 2, 3, and 6? [3]

Hard work (v.2): the apostle Paul uses the word "work" to refer to sharing the gospel and making disciples (e.g. 1 Corinthians 3:8).

Perseverance (v.2): in Greek, this is the same word as "*patient endurance*" in Revelation 1:9, and it is repeated in Revelation 2:3: "*You have persevered*". Those who have stood firm in their faith through difficulties become stronger and more resilient. This is a great encouragement to other believers. Perseverance is essential for all believers. There is a reward beyond anything we can imagine for those who persevere to the end.

Those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false (v.2): we must always check that those who teach us are teaching and living the truth.

How can we know if a teacher is teaching us the truth or not?

Here are three important tests:

1. **Bible test**: always check to see if their message fits with what God says in the other books of the Bible, including the New Testament. The more we read the Bible, the more we will know if a teacher is teaching God's word correctly or not.

2. **Character test**: What is this teacher's character like? Does their life show that God's Holy Spirit lives in them? (Matthew 7:15–16; Galatians 5:22–23; Titus 1:7–9).

3. **Other leaders test**: Does this person's teaching agree with what faithful teachers in other churches teach today?

(?) What are the three tests we need to know, to check if someone is teaching us the truth or not? [4]

You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6): this was a group of false teachers who promoted sexual immorality. They are also mentioned in the message to the church in Pergamum (Revelation 2:15).

(?) What does Jesus **warn** them about in Revelation 2:4? [5]

The main point of this message is: ***Don't lose your first love.***

All we do for Jesus is worth nothing without love (1 Corinthians 13:1). The church in Ephesus had begun around 20 years after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 18:19). John wrote the book of Revelation about 40 years later. Over those 40 years the church had lost its first love. It is easy for a church to stop loving Jesus and loving those around them. Every church needs to keep its passion for Jesus alive.

(?) What does God tell them to do in Revelation 2:5? [6]

Repent (v.5): is written twice for emphasis. Half-hearted following of Jesus is not following Jesus at all. Compare a husband and wife: if one of them only loves the other sometimes, it is not love at all. If the husband sometimes meets with other women, he is not loving his wife. If the wife often criticizes her husband, she is not loving her husband. They need to love each other all the time to have a good relationship. So if your love for Jesus is not full time, you too need to repent!

Ask yourselves, "What were we doing 10 years ago (or if your church is not that old, one year ago), that we are not doing now?" If all your stories of how God answered prayers are from a long time ago, it is time to seek Jesus once more.

(?) What will happen if they do not repent (v.5)? [7]

Remove your lampstand (v.5): tells us that it is possible for churches to stop meeting and disappear. It is also possible for a church to meet without the presence of Jesus. There are many churches around the world which are a social gathering or a great performance like a theatre. This is different from a community of those who meet to encourage each other to wholeheartedly follow Jesus.

Whoever has ears, let them hear (v.7): is similar to how Jesus finished his parables (e.g. Matthew 11:15). Are we really "*hearing*" what Jesus wants to say to us today?

The tree of life (v.7): was in the middle of the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9), which is here called "*the paradise of God*". The fruit of this tree gives eternal life. Ever since Adam and Eve first sinned, everyone has been sure to die. Now Jesus has removed the curse and so we will be able to eat from the tree of life! In the new Jerusalem there will be no more death (Revelation 21:4; 22:1–2).

(?) What **reward** does Jesus promise to those who are victorious in Revelation 2:7? [8]

(?) What is the main point of this message to the church in Ephesus? [9]

Challenge 1

Where do you look for your joy? Anything or anyone other than Jesus will always disappoint us!

Do you need to repent of loving other things, people or yourself, more than Jesus?

What will it look like for you to love Jesus more than anything else?

The message to the church in Smyrna

Read **Revelation 2:8–11**.

(?) What is **written about Jesus** in verse 8? [10]

(?) What does this mean? [11]

In the same way as God the Father, Jesus was there before the world began and he will be there at the end of the world! (John 1:1–2; Revelation 22:20). He has always existed. This means he knows everything that has happened in the world. We can trust him!

(?) What **praise** does Jesus give them Revelation 2:9? [12]

Jesus does not directly praise them, but he encourages them for their faithfulness.

Afflictions and poverty (v.9): afflictions are the normal situation for those who follow Jesus. Just as today, believers were often not able to make much money and often suffered financial loss for following Jesus (Revelation 1:9; John 16:33). But Jesus says they are rich! Jesus said, "*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God!*" (Luke 6:20). And the apostle Paul wrote, "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich*" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Our riches are in heaven. There is something far better coming!

One way that believers can show each other love is to be generous to those who have lost income or home because of their faith in Jesus (Acts 2:44–45).

Slander (v.9): when people slander us for following Jesus, we should remember that this is normal. It is what happened to Jesus (1 Peter 2:21–23).

Jesus loves us and knows what we are suffering. He also endured afflictions and poverty, and was slandered by those who claimed to serve God. We must never forget that Jesus is with us and understands us when we are suffering (Hebrews 4:15).

The main point of this message is: ***God's strength is enough for us.***

(?) What does Jesus **warn** them about in Revelation 2:10? [13]

Ten days (v.10): in Revelation, ten represents a small number. So ten days means a short period of time, not for ever. (Compare the 1,000 years of Revelation 20:3, which represents a very long time.)

? What does "*you will suffer persecution for ten days*" mean? [14]

Jesus does not warn them about any sin in the church, but warns them that persecution is coming to the church in Smyrna. But it will be only for a short time. Maybe some of them will follow Jesus' example and die for their faith. Jesus does not want us to be afraid of persecution.

? What **reward** does Jesus give to those who are victorious in verses 10–11? [15]

The believers in Smyrna were perhaps ashamed that their church was suffering and poor. Jesus promises them a glorious crown!

The word "crown" is the same as the wreaths made of leaves, which were given to winners at the athletic games. Those crowns didn't last very long and quickly withered. But our crown will last for ever! (1 Corinthians 9:24–25) Our perseverance will be richly rewarded!

Second death (v.11): is the terrible separation from God that follows physical death for those whose faith is not in Jesus (Revelation 20:11–15). Jesus saves his faithful followers from this. He can give life because he "*died and came to life again*" (2:8). So we do not need to be afraid of death.

? What is the main point of this message to the church in Smyrna? [16]

Yusuf's story

I'm a minister of a church. My church's registration was denied, and I couldn't understand why this had happened to us. It felt like our church had ended before it could begin. But God told me not to give up! Everyone began to pray even more and find out what God's will was for us. We began to meet at my home. But I noticed strange cars parked on my street, with people watching me, and people following me when I was out in public. We kept meeting, though only at night with the shutters closed tight. More and more people came, until we could no longer fit in the living room.

We used every birthday and holiday as another excuse to gather and hear the Word of the Lord. The greater the pressure, the more clearly we could see how God had helped us. He had helped us by giving us peace in our hearts, in the Word and in the people he sent to us. Now I understand what he was showing me through this loss: that the church is not documents or papers, but hearts that continue to trust him.

Challenge 2

Jesus said:

> "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it*" (Matthew 16:24–25).

> "*And whoever has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life!*" (Matthew 19:29)

The book of Revelation teaches that we should not be ashamed of persecution and martyrdom. These are an honour, not a shame.

Are you willing to keep following Jesus even if it costs you your relationships, your job, your money, your freedom and even your life?

What persecution have you experienced for following Jesus?

Share with each other what the Lord has been saying to you through his word today.

Pray for each other to love Jesus with your whole heart!

Practise explaining the three tests for true teaching, to the person beside you. Can you say them from memory?

Homework

Read **Revelation 2:12–3:6** so you can be ready to study it in the next lesson. As you read, note down one thing Jesus says to the churches that challenges or encourages you. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – Jesus *holds the seven stars in his right hand and he walks among the seven golden lampstands*.
2 – In any situation a church can trust in Jesus.
3 – They are doing good deeds. They are working hard. They are persevering. They don't allow bad people to teach in their church even if those people claim to be important Christian leaders. They have not grown weary. They hate immoral practices.
4 – Bible test, character test, other leaders test.
5 – They have forsaken their first love of Jesus and each other.
6 – *Repent and do the things you did at first*.
7 – Jesus will come and remove their lampstand from its place.
8 – Jesus gives *the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life, which grows in the paradise of God*.
9 – Don't lose your first love!
10 – Jesus is *the First and Last, who died and came to life again*.
11 – This means that Jesus is alive! He was there at the beginning and he will be there at the end.
12 – In spite of their afflictions and their poverty, they have continued to follow Jesus!
13 – Jesus didn't warn them of anything that they were doing wrong. But he warned them that they would be persecuted.
14 – The persecution will only last a short time.
15 – If they are faithful, Jesus will give them the *victor's crown* of life. The second death will not hurt those who are victorious!
16 – God's strength is enough for us.

Commentary

these are the words...let them hear what the Spirit says... (vv.1, 7, 8, 11): what Jesus says is also what the Holy Spirit says. In John's gospel, Jesus tells us that what he says is what the Father says (John 12:49–50)! Again, we see the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And their words are absolutely trustworthy.

who say they are Jews (v.9):

- in the Old Testament, "Jew" was the name that was used for God's people after the Exile, as those who returned were mainly from the tribe of Judah (Esther 3:4)
- Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, who came first to the Jewish people and then to the non-Jews — the Gentiles (Romans 1:16)
- John was also a Jew, and probably many believers in Smyrna were also Jewish. But sadly the members of the Jewish synagogue rejected the gospel and were slandering the believers to the Roman authorities. Even today, believers may face hostility and slander from people who reject the gospel!
- in the New Testament, true Jews are those who have had their hearts circumcised — that is, God has given them a new heart by removing their sin (Romans. 2:28–29). They may be any nationality (Revelation 7:9).

synagogue of Satan (v.9): those Jews who opposed God's people are now a community of those who are actually serving Satan. This theme will be emphasized later on in the book.

Revelation lesson 4

Messages to the seven churches (part 2)



Ignatius of Antioch's story (died around AD107)

Ignatius was a church leader in Antioch, in what is now southeast Türkiye. He was a friend of Polycarp, and like Polycarp he had known the apostle John personally. When the Emperor Trajan condemned him to death, Ignatius was taken from Antioch all the way to Rome, under the guard of soldiers, to be killed in the arena. Along the journey he was allowed to meet with groups of believers. He also wrote seven letters, to churches in Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, Smyrna, and to Polycarp. These letters became very important for the early church. In one of these letters, he begged the believers in Rome not to try to save him from death. He wrote: "I am God's wheat. I must be ground by the teeth of wild animals so that I may become pure bread for Christ." He saw his death not as a defeat but as the completion of a life of following Jesus. Truly he was given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

In this lesson we will look at the next three of the seven messages to the seven churches. We will see what encouragement and challenges Jesus wants to bring to us and our churches through them.

To help us study these messages we will ask four questions about each message:

1. What is written about Jesus and what does this mean?
2. What praise does Jesus give the church?
3. What does Jesus warn them about?
4. What reward will Jesus give to those who are victorious?

The message to the church in Pergamum

Read **Revelation 2:12–17**.

(?) What is **written about Jesus** in verse 12? [1]

The sharp, double-edged sword (vv.12, 16): is an image of the words that Jesus speaks — in chapter 1 verse 16 we read that this sword is coming out of Jesus' mouth. His words bring warning and judgment (Hebrews 4:11–12) to the church in Pergamum. When we sin, we need to hear sharp, painful words from Jesus!

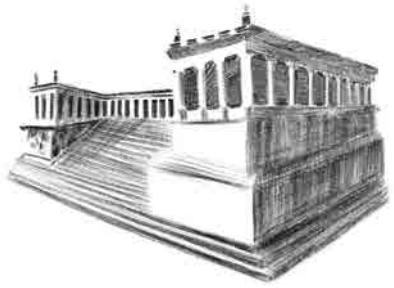
(?) What does it mean that Jesus "*has the sharp, double-edged sword*"? [2]

(?) What does Jesus **praise** them for in Revelation 2:13? [3]

You did not renounce your faith in me (v.13): when we are under pressure from the authorities, it seems easy to say that we are not believers. But the believers in Pergamum are an example to us, of faithfulness. If we stand firm, Jesus will reward us!

My faithful witness, who was put to death (v.13): the most powerful witness that a believer can give is if they are put to death for their faith in Jesus. Death is not the end for the believer, but the beginning of eternal life with Jesus.

Where Satan has his throne (v.13): Pergamum was the hardest city for Christians to live in. It had a famous altar to Zeus, the king of Greek gods, which was 12 metres high. Its base was over 30 metres wide and long. It was in the shape of a throne. This is why Jesus said that Pergamum was "*where Satan has his throne*"! It was a constant reminder of Satan's spiritual grip over the city. When you feel that this could be said of where you live, remember that your persevering will be richly rewarded!



(?) What does Jesus **warn** them about in verses 14–15? [4]

Balaam was a non-Israelite prophet. We read about him in Numbers 22–24. The king of Moab paid him to curse the Israelites. But God inspired him to bless the Israelites instead of cursing them. But having done this, Balaam then enticed them to be unfaithful to God (Numbers 31:16).

The **Nicolaitans** were a group of false teachers who promoted sexual immorality (see also Revelation 2:6).

So Jesus is warning the church in Pergamum that some of them are not staying holy, because they are following false teachers. Sadly, they were not like the Ephesians, who did not tolerate wicked people and tested those who wanted to teach them (Revelation 2:2).

The main point of this message is: ***Resist false teaching.***

Satan loves to deceive us. We should not accept everything an interesting or entertaining teacher says, in person or on the internet.

(?) What three tests can we use to see if a teacher is teaching us the truth (see lesson 3)? [5]

Following Jesus means living a pure life (no sexual relationships at all outside of marriage). Don't ever believe someone who says that Jesus doesn't care if we sin. Jesus hates sin because when we sin, we are not worshipping Jesus, we are worshipping an idol.

(?) What does Jesus say to those who say that sin is not a big problem (v.16)? [6]

These words should make us tremble! (Isaiah 66:2)

(?) What two **rewards** does Jesus give to those who are victorious in Revelation 2:17? [7]

Hidden manna: refers to the food that God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness so that they didn't die (Exodus 16). God gives us what is needed for us to live for ever!

White stone with a new name: in the time when John was writing, people would use white stones as entrance tickets to banquets. Jesus will give us the entrance ticket to his eternal banquet, which is so much better than any earthly banquet (Revelation 19:9). It will have our name written on it, showing that he has personally invited us!

The **new name** is **known only to the one who receives it**: Jesus gives us a new name, a new identity. "*If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!*" (2 Corinthians 5:17) But this new identity cannot be seen physically. It is hidden, like the manna. It is understood by faith. Paul wrote: "*your life is now hidden with Christ in God*" (Colossians 3:3).

(?) What is the main point of this message to the church in Pergamum? [8]

Challenge 1

Does the teaching that you listen to on the internet help you to grow in godliness?

At what times do you think that some sinful actions don't matter?

The message to the church in Thyatira

Read **Revelation 2:18–28**.

(?) What is **written about Jesus** in verse 18? [9]

Son of God: is the title of the emperor or the king. He has all authority.

Eyes like blazing fire: means that nothing is hidden from him, not even the deep secrets of Satan (v.24).

Feet like burnished bronze: means that he is permanent, nothing can move him. His judgment is inevitable.

(?) What six things does Jesus **praise** them for in verse 19? [10]

Deeds: do not earn anyone salvation. Rather, their deeds show that they have been saved and are living under the Lordship of Jesus (Ephesians 2:8–10). Do your deeds show that you have been saved?

Love: do you love your neighbour as yourself (Mark 12:31)? Do you love your enemies (Matthew 5:44)? "*Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love*" (1 John 4:8).

Faith: we should always remember that "*we live by faith, not by sight*" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Are you believing each day that Jesus is your Saviour, your Lord and your Shepherd?

Service: remember, "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45). Do you look for opportunities to serve your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Perseverance: once again, we are reminded how important this is. We have read this word already (Revelation 1:9; 2:2–3). In Revelation 2:24–25, Jesus says "*I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come*." Don't stop following Jesus, however hard it may be — he is coming back soon! Persevering is worth it!

Doing more than you did at first: following Jesus is not about staying the same (like a stone), but about growing (like a fruitful plant)! Can people around you see how you have changed?

(?) Which of these six characteristics do you think are true of you at this time? Which ones do you need to pray for? [11]

In view of all that the church in Thyatira is doing well, the next verses come as a shock.

(?) What does Jesus **warn** them about Revelation 2:20–23? [12]

Sadly, they also were not like the Ephesians, who did not tolerate wicked people and tested those who wanted to teach them to see if their teachings were right (Revelation 2:2). Instead, they tolerated false teachers and did not oppose them.

Satan's so-called deep secrets (v.24): sometimes false teachers say that they can tell us things that ordinary believers don't know. It appeals to our pride to know more than others. Jesus will punish those who promote false teaching.

(?) What do these verses tell us about what God thinks about false teaching and sin? [13]

The main point of this message is: ***Understand the seriousness of God's judgment.***

(?) What three tests can we use to see if a teacher is teaching us the truth? [14]

(?) What two **rewards** does Jesus give to those who are victorious (vv.26–28)? [15]

Authority over the nations (v.26):

- throughout the book of Revelation, we are told that believers will share in the reign of God and Jesus over the nations (e.g. Revelation 5:10)
- in a similar way, Jesus had told his disciples, "*When the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*" (Matthew 19:28)
- Revelation 2:27 quotes Psalm 2. This verse is describing the time when the Messiah will come to judge the world
- so those who endure to the end will judge those who have not believed. They will do this together with Jesus. What a privilege and a responsibility! Are you ready?

The Morning Star: in Revelation 22:16 we read that Jesus is the Morning Star. Jesus gives us the most precious gift of all — himself! The apostle Paul knew this when he wrote, "*I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better*" (Philippians 1:23).

(?) What is the main point of this message to the church in Thyatira? [16]

The message to the church in Sardis

Read **Revelation 3:1–6**.

(?) What is **written about Jesus** in verse 1? [17]

Jesus holds the Holy Spirit in his hand in order to send the Spirit to the church (John 15:26). The Spirit gives life, but sadly many believers in Sardis were spiritually dead.

(?) What does Jesus **praise** them for in Revelation 3:4? [18]

Jesus praises only those few people in Sardis who "*have not soiled their clothes*" (v.4). This means that they are following him faithfully. They were in the minority in the church. Most people had stopped actively following Jesus. Are you in a church like that? Do not give up following Jesus — he will reward you!

(?) What does Jesus **warn** them about in verses 1–3? [19]

Most of the Christians in Sardis were "*dead*". They had a "*reputation*" for being alive and active, but in fact they were no longer living for Jesus. They were deceiving themselves. Non-believers can see when Christians are just pretending to follow Jesus. It dishonours Christ. Jesus tells them to "*wake up*", and "*strengthen what remains*", otherwise his return will take them by surprise.

The main point of this letter is: ***Stay awake!***

(?) What two **rewards** does Jesus give to those who are faithfully following him in verses 4–5? [20]

They will walk with me, dressed in white (v.4): to walk with God is the privilege of those who obey God, like Enoch (Genesis 5:22). White clothes represent the purity that Jesus gives us (Revelation 3:18;

4:4; 6:11; 7:9, etc). If we are faithful, we will be able to experience life together with Jesus in eternity, as cleansed people with nothing to be ashamed of.

The book of life: is the register of names of those who will be in heaven (Daniel 12:1). Later in the book of Revelation this book is called "*the Lamb's book of life*" (Revelation 13:8; 21:27). In Roman cities there was a register of every citizen who lived there. When they died their name was removed from this list. However, the names of those who follow Jesus will not be removed from the book of life when they die. Instead, death is the doorway to eternal life with Jesus. Whatever happens in this life, God will keep his people safe into eternity!

(?) What is the main point of this message to the church in Sardis? [21]

Challenge 2

What evidence do you have that your fellowship is awake and alive?

How can you help yourself and others to "*wake up*" and "*strengthen what remains*"?

Discussion

What has God been saying to you through this lesson?

Practise explaining to the person beside you, what is the main point of the message to each of the three churches in Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis. Can you say all three from memory?

Pray for each other to put these challenges into practice!

Homework

Read **Revelation 3:7–22** so you can be ready to study it in the next lesson. As you read, note down one thing Jesus says to these churches that challenges or encourages you. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – Jesus has *the sharp, double-edged sword*.
2 – Jesus' words bring warning and judgment to sinners.
3 – They remained true to Jesus and did not renounce their faith in him, even when Antipas was put to death for his faith.
4 – Some of them held to the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
5 – The Bible test, the character test and the other leaders test.
6 – *Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth*.
7 – Jesus will give them some of the "*hidden manna*" and "*a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it*".
8 – Resist false teaching.
9 – "*the Son of God, whose eyes are like a blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze*."
10 – Jesus praises them for their deeds, love, faith, service, perseverance and doing much more than they were doing at first.
11 – Consider honestly which of these six characteristics — deeds, love, faith, service, perseverance, growth — are true of you now, and which ones you need to pray for.
12 – Jesus warns them about false teaching, immorality and idolatry.
13 – God is very angry about all false teaching and sin!
14 – The Bible test, the character test and the other leaders test.
15 – Jesus will give "*authority over the nations*" and "*the morning star*".
16 – Understand the seriousness of God's judgment.
17 – Jesus "*holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars*".
18 – There are a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes.
19 – They may look like they are alive, but in fact they are dead! They need to wake up and strengthen what remains. Their deeds are unfinished. They need to remember and hold fast to what they have received. If not, Jesus will come like a thief.
20 – They walk with Jesus dressed in white; Jesus will never blot out their name from the book of life but he will acknowledge them before his Father and his angels!
21 – Stay awake!

Commentary

the sharp, double-edged sword... I know where you live — where Satan has his throne (vv.12–13): Pergamum was known for its emperor worship. The emperor had "the right of the sword", that is, he had power over people's life and death. To refuse to worship the emperor was to be a traitor. Antipas, one of the leaders of the church, was put to death by the authorities (v.13). However, these verses make it clear that it is Jesus who has power over life and death, both physical and spiritual! Those who refuse to worship him will be punished eternally.

hidden manna (v.17): in the book of Exodus, God's people wandered around in the wilderness for 40 years. They relied for food on the miraculous manna that God sent them every day. God told Moses to put a jar of this manna into the ark (the special chest in the tabernacle) as a reminder of how God had fed them in the wilderness (Exodus 16:32–34). Afterwards, no one was allowed to see or eat this manna.

In John 6:35, Jesus said, "*I am the bread of life*" He wanted the people to understand that he was like the manna in the wilderness. Just as God had fed the Israelites each day so that they didn't die, Jesus has

come to feed us: he has come to satisfy our desperate need to know God. He has come to give us life! So, the "*hidden manna*" that Jesus promises is a promise of eternal life that only Jesus can give us!

Son of God (v.18): Jews understood the coming Messiah to be God's Son (Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:13–14). Roman emperors called themselves a "son of god". But unlike Roman emperors, God himself declared that Jesus was his Son (Matthew.3:17). From the very beginning, Christians called Jesus the Son of God (Galatians 2:20).

Jezebel (v.20): this is not the name of someone in the church. It is comparing a false teacher with Jezebel the wife of king Ahab in the Old Testament. She prompted people to worship other gods and she tried to kill off all God's prophets (1 Kings 16:30–33; 1 Kings 18:4). Her name became a symbol of false teaching and evil.

food sacrificed to idols (v.20): Thyatira was known for producing many goods, for example, wool, dyes and leather. In the book of Acts, Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth who came from the city of Thyatira (Acts 16:14). In those days, people who produced a particular product in a city had to join the union that looked after all those selling that product. Members of this union had to join in their pagan religious activities, including going to the feasts where they ate meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. This showed their loyalty to the pagan god, who they expected to bless their business.

commit adultery with her (v.22): just as in the Old Testament (e.g. the book of Hosea), in the book of Revelation committing adultery is a picture of spiritual unfaithfulness. Worshipping other things or other gods is just as shocking and painful to God as someone committing adultery is shocking and painful to their spouse.

I will strike her children dead (v.23): her spiritual children, that is, those who have followed her teachings, will suffer eternal separation from God. But this may also mean sudden death (see Acts 5:1–10; 1 Corinthians 11:29–30).

then all the churches will know (v.23): the purpose of punishment is to lead believers to repentance. Other churches will hear about it and will be encouraged to take God's judgment seriously.

morning star (v.28): the morning star is the planet Venus, which shines brightly in the sky before dawn each morning and is one of the brightest "stars". In the book of Numbers, Balaam prophesied that "*A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel*" (Numbers 24:17). This ruler would one day crush his enemies. Stars sometimes represented gods. Some Roman coins had stars around the head of the emperor, to symbolize he was a god. Like the morning star, Jesus faithfully shines in the darkness. He encourages us that soon it will be sunrise. Soon he will come back in glory!

Revelation lesson 5

Messages to the seven churches (part 3)



Justin Martyr's story (died around AD165)

Justin was a Greek philosopher who lived in Palestine in the second century. He had studied the great Greek philosophers but found that none of them gave him the answers he was looking for. Then he met an old man who explained to him the words of the prophets in God's Word. Justin became a follower of Jesus. He continued wearing the cloak of a philosopher and travelled around the Roman world teaching about his new faith. In Rome he opened a school and wrote two letters to the emperor, patiently explaining what Christians believed and why the charges against them were not true. A rival philosopher named Crescens felt threatened by Justin's teaching and reported him to the authorities. Justin was arrested with six companions. The judge asked him to sacrifice to the gods. He refused, saying: "No right-thinking person turns away from true worship, to worship false gods." He was beheaded together with his companions. Truly he was given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

In this lesson we will look at the last two of the seven messages to the seven different churches. We will see what encouragement and challenges Jesus wants to bring to us and our churches through them.

To help us study these messages we will ask four questions about each message:

1. What is written about Jesus and what does this mean?
2. What praise does Jesus give the church?
3. What does Jesus warn them about?
4. What reward will Jesus give to those who are victorious?

The message to the church in Philadelphia

Read **Revelation 3:7–13**.

? What is **written about Jesus** in verse 7? [1]

The believers of Philadelphia had been thrown out of the synagogue (the Jewish meeting place). The doors were closed against them. This was a big disgrace for them in their community. But Jesus is the one who can open and close the far more important doors — the doors of heaven and hell!

? Which doors can only Jesus open and shut? [2]

? What does Jesus **praise** them for in verses 8 and 10? [3]

? Does he **warn** them about any sin? [4]

Like the church in Smyrna (Revelation 2:8–11), Jesus does not rebuke the church in Philadelphia in any way. They are both facing great difficulties and opposition. He writes to encourage them to endure to the end. Our persevering will be richly rewarded!

Instead of a warning, Jesus encourages them.

? What two things does Jesus promise to do for them (Revelation 3:9–10)? [5]

Synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not (v.9): those Jews who opposed God's people are now a community of those who are actually serving Satan (see lesson 3 Commentary).

This is not an invitation to take action against Jews. Tragically, over the years, many who have called themselves Christians have been very hostile to Jewish people. Jesus and his disciples were Jewish. It was through the Jewish people and their guarding of God's revelation that the gospel came to us (Romans 9:1–5). So we should pray for the Jewish people to realize that the Messiah they are waiting for has already come! (Romans 10:1).

To test the inhabitants of the earth (v.10): God sends trials to show the genuineness of our faith (1 Peter 1:6–7). But in the book of Revelation, unbelievers are sent punishments to show them that they need to repent (9:20). Disasters are a foretaste of God's coming punishment. So whenever we hear of a disaster, we should pray that people see this as a challenge to repent.

? What is the purpose of difficulties for believers and unbelievers? [6]

? What does Jesus tell them to do in Revelation 3:11? [7]

Holding on to what we have does not refer to physical things. We are to hold on to our faith in Jesus. Even if we feel as if we have nothing, if we have faith in Jesus, we have the greatest treasure! So we need to hold on to the good news about Jesus.

The main point of this message is: ***Hold on to what you have.***

No one will take your crown (v.11): we will soon be presented with our victor's wreath (like those presented to the winners of athletic games). This will show that we have been faithful to the end — that we did not give up!

(?) What two **rewards** does Jesus give to those who are victorious in verse 12? [8]

Pillar in the temple of my God (v.12): instead of being excluded, they will be permanent members of God's people. No one can shut them out. This is also true for us: even though we may be ridiculed or excluded for following Jesus, we will receive great honour when Jesus returns!

I will write on them the name of my God... and... my new name (v.12): this will show that they belong to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! (Revelation 19:16) Notice again how God the Father and Jesus work as one.

The new Jerusalem (v.12): where we shall live with God himself. We shall learn more about this glorious future in chapters 21 and 22.

(?) What is the main point of this message to the church in Philadelphia? [9]

Challenge 1

When people reject you for following Jesus, what do you need to remember?

The message to the church in Laodicea

Read **Revelation 3:14–22**.

(?) What is **written about Jesus** in verse 14? [10]

The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation (v.14): "Amen" is an Old Testament word that means faithful or true. Jesus is the completely trustworthy ruler of the whole world! In contrast to Jesus' true words, the Laodiceans were deceiving themselves.

(?) What does Jesus **praise** them for in verse 15? [11]

Although Jesus does not praise the church in Laodicea, in verses 19–20 Jesus tells them that he loves them and wants them to repent. Until Jesus returns, it is never too late to turn back to him.

(?) What does Jesus **warn** them about in verses 15–16? [12]

Laodicea

The city of Laodicea was situated between two other cities. One of these cities was **Colossae**, where there was a big spring of cold, clean water that was refreshing and nice to drink. In the New Testament we have a letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians. The other city was **Hierapolis** (mentioned in Colossians 4:13). In Hierapolis there were hot springs that were good for health. Today, people still go to sit in these springs, at Pamukkale, especially if they suffer from arthritis.

But **Laodicea** didn't have its own spring. So they got their drinking water from Colossae travelling 16 km through a pipe! By the time it got to Laodicea, the water tasted terrible — it was lukewarm and not clean at all.

Jesus said to the church in Laodicea that their deeds showed that they were neither cold nor hot. There was no evidence of Jesus in their lives. They were deceiving themselves. People should be able to see evidence of Jesus in our lives. If there is none then it shows that we are lukewarm. We do not love Jesus the way we should. If we do not repent, then Jesus will "spit us out". We will not be able to enter heaven. Jesus warned his disciples about this in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31–46).

(?) What did Jesus mean when he said, "*because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth*"? [13]

You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." (v.17): the believers were rich (Laodicea was a famous financial centre). Nobody was persecuting them, and they were proud of their wealth. But Jesus told them that in fact, in his eyes, they are "*wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked*"!

The main point of this message is: ***Don't deceive yourselves. Show Jesus in your lives.***

Many Laodiceans were businessmen. So Jesus gives them some business advice.

(?) What does Jesus advise them to buy in Revelation 3:18? [14]

(?) Who should they buy these things from? [15]

They have been spending their money on the wrong things and buying from the wrong merchants. They need to do business with Jesus. They need to spend their money in such a way that:

- they can become rich in good deeds (1 Timothy 6:18)
- they can cover their shame
- they can see and understand spiritual truth.

Only Jesus can cover our sin and shame and clothe us in his righteousness. There is no sin that he cannot wash clean! (1 John 1:7) Only Jesus can open our eyes so that we can see the truth! (John 9:39)

Challenge 2

In what ways do our lives show that we love Jesus? Do we spend our money on worthless things, or on the things that last for eternity?

What ideas do you have about how to do this more?

? How does Jesus show that he loves the church in Laodicea Revelation 3:19–20? [16]

Be earnest and repent (v.19): in all the messages where Jesus has rebuked them, he invites his people to repent. The rebuke is a sign of his love (Hebrews 12:5–6). He is inviting his people to receive his grace again. The first step is repentance!

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me (v.20): in the Roman Empire the city gates were usually not locked at night. But in Laodicea there was a lot of wealth, so they did shut the gates at night.



Jesus is saying that he has been locked outside the church of Laodicea! He is knocking at the door. He is waiting for them to let him in. This was very shocking for the church to hear. It is so easy to deceive ourselves that we are following Jesus, when in fact we are not following him at all.

Jesus is patient. He does not force himself on us. He knocks at our door and waits for us to let him into our hearts, our homes and our churches.

To "*eat with*" someone shows that you trust and respect that person. Jesus wants a relationship of trust and respect with his people.

Challenge 3

Has Jesus really been allowed in, to be in charge of your life, your home and your church? Or is he still knocking at the door?

Do you trust him? Does your life show that you honour and respect him?

Don't leave him outside! Let him in so you can enjoy wonderful fellowship with him!

? What **reward** does Jesus give to those who are victorious Revelation 3:21? [17]

Like Zeus's huge altar throne in Pergamum, the picture of Jesus' throne is not just a seat, but more like a wide, raised platform. Jesus invites us to share his throne with him! Jesus will honour us in a way that repays us a thousand times for any way that we may have suffered for him in our lives now. Eternal life with Jesus will be more wonderful than we can imagine!

(?) What is the main point of this message to the church in Laodicea? [18]

Maryam's story

My husband Murat and I once owned a business. We worked hard to bring the money in, and it became successful. But money changed Murat. He became addicted to drugs and spent everything on them. We lost everything: stability, peace and confidence for the future. Our debt rose to the point where we had to sell our house.

My life became filled with tears and despair. But it was during this darkest time that the Lord found us. Our whole family came to Jesus, and on that very same day, a miracle occurred: Murat was freed from his addiction — not by any human effort, but through God's power and grace.

After that, Murat went to a rehabilitation centre. I was left alone with our three children, and we were still greatly in debt. But we continued to pray, believing that if God had performed one miracle, he could help us again.

And he did! In my loneliness, he became my support and protection. He blessed our business and met all of our needs. Today, my husband and I serve God together, leading a ministry whilst also running a business. Our one desire is for the Lord to use both our ministry and our business for the glory of his name.

Discussion

What did Maryam learn in the story?

Share with each other what Jesus has been saying to you through these seven messages to the seven churches. What do you think Jesus is saying to your church through them?

Practise explaining to the person beside you, what the main point is in the message to Philadelphia, and what the main point is in the message to Laodicea? Try to say both from memory.

Pray for each other and for your church.

Homework

Read **Revelation chapter 4** so you can be ready to study it in the next lesson. As you read, write down one thing that strikes you about God or his throne. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – Jesus is holy and true; he holds the key of King David. What he opens, no one can shut and what he shuts, no one can open.
2 – Only Jesus can open and shut the doors of heaven and hell.
3 – They have kept Jesus' word and have not denied his name. They have kept Jesus' command to endure patiently.
4 – No, Jesus doesn't warn them about any sin.
5 – He will make *those who are of the synagogue of Satan* come and fall at their feet and acknowledge that he has loved them. He will keep them from *the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth*.
6 – Believers are tested to show the genuineness of their faith. Unbelievers are sent punishments to show them that they need to repent.
7 – *Hold on to what you have*.
8 – Jesus will make them a *pillar in the temple*. Also, Jesus himself will write on them God's name, new Jerusalem and his new name.
9 – Hold on to what you have!
10 – Jesus is *the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation*.
11 – Jesus doesn't praise them for anything!
12 – Jesus warns them that they are *neither cold nor hot*. He is about to spit them out of his mouth!
13 – There was no evidence of Jesus in their lives. If they did not repent, they would not be able to enter heaven.
14 – He advises them to buy "*gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see*".
15 – Jesus himself!
16 – He shows he loves them by rebuking them and disciplining them.
17 – He gives the right to sit with him on his throne!
18 – Don't deceive yourselves. Show Jesus in your lives!

Commentary

holy and true (v.7): in the Old Testament, "Holy" and "True" are titles of God himself (Isaiah 1:4; Jeremiah 10:10). In the gospels, they are also titles of Jesus (Mark 1:24; John 14:6). Revelation gives "Holy and True" as titles for Jesus here in chapter 3 and for God in chapter 6 (Revelation 6:10). So John continues to show us that Jesus is fully God just as the Father is. Jesus is the only man who ever lived a sinless, perfect life. He is the only man whose every word was true. Jesus really is God's Son! So we must pay careful attention to what he has to say!

key of David (v.7): God promised King David that his descendant would reign for ever (2 Samuel 7:16). The prophet Isaiah prophesied about the authority of a leader of God's people: "*I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open*" (Isaiah 22:22).

The person with the keys, the steward of the household, had authority both to allow, and to prohibit, entry to the house. So Jesus is the descendant of David who has the authority to allow people to enter the new Jerusalem and, even now, the very presence of God (Hebrews 10:19).

I will keep you from the hour of trial (v.10): this is similar to what the prophet Daniel was told — "*At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people — everyone whose name is found written in the book — will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt*" (Daniel 12:1–2).

So this may be a promise that those who are faithful to Jesus will escape the hour of trial. However, the Greek can also mean "I will keep you **through** the hour of trial", in which case, this is a promise that God will sustain them in their trials and protect them from Satan (see John 17:15). If this is a promise that God will keep us "through" the trials to come, then this is similar to the ten days of persecution that Jesus warned the church in Smyrna about (Revelation 2:10). This refers to the relatively short time of suffering in this world, compared with spending eternity with Jesus in the problem-free new Jerusalem!

white clothes to wear (v.18): people in Laodicea produced clothes made from black wool. Jesus tells them to buy white clothes that symbolize purity, which only Jesus can give (e.g. 7:14).

you are... blind... buy... salve to put on your eyes (vv.17–18): in Laodicea they produced ointments for eyes. The people there were proud of their famous eye ointments. Jesus says to them that, although they think they can see, in fact they are blind. So they need to buy eye ointment from him so that they can see.

Revelation lesson 6

A glimpse of heaven's throne room



The martyrs of Lyons and Vienne (AD177)

In second-century Gaul, hatred of followers of Jesus grew in the Roman cities of Lyons and Vienne (modern-day France). Rumours spread that Christians were committing incest and cannibalism in their meetings. Slaves were tortured until they gave false evidence against their Christian masters. Then the emperor gave an order: believers who held to their faith were to be executed, but those who denied their faith would be released. Roman citizens who remained faithful were to be beheaded. Those without citizenship were to be tortured before they were killed. Altogether, forty-eight believers died in these two cities in one year. Truly they were all given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

This lesson will encourage us to look away from our difficulties and look up at the God who is in sovereign control of all that is happening. He is working to bring everything in the world to a glorious conclusion!

At the time when John was writing the book of Revelation, Rome was the greatest city on earth. Everyone thought it would last for ever. It called itself the Eternal City. But in AD410, Goths (German tribes) attacked and defeated Rome. It was not eternal at all! Since that time it has seemed that many empires and regimes would last for ever but they have all come to an end.

Only the kingdom of God is eternal and invincible! In chapter 4, John sees a vision of heaven's throne room. It is more beautiful and awesome than can be put into words. John tries to give us a taste of what he saw — there is light and beauty, sparkling and shining, with constant colour and joy and the most glorious music. Wouldn't you be open-mouthed with wonder?

This vision is similar to the visions that Isaiah and Ezekiel saw (Isaiah chapter 6; Ezekiel chapter 1). In all these visions, we see God exalted in splendour and holiness! Let us lift our eyes to the Creator and ruler of the universe today! Let us worship him because he is worthy. God made us to worship him so, when we worship him, we are filled with joy.

(?) Why do we worship God? [1]

Read **Revelation chapter 4**.

(?) What did the voice say to the apostle John in verse 1? [2]

In the following chapters, God is going to show John what will happen in the future. He will also show John that God is sitting far above all the efforts of Satan and his evil forces to rebel against him! God wants us too to lift our eyes to him and not focus on the difficulties we are facing.

(?) What does John see in verses 2–3? [3]

"Throne" is an important word in the book of Revelation. God's throne symbolizes his absolute sovereignty over the whole world. In a similar way, the Psalmist said, "*God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne*" (Psalm 47:8). Also, the prophet Isaiah wrote, "*I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne*" (Isaiah 6:1).

(?) What surrounds the throne (Revelation 4:3)? [4]

This reminds us of God's promise to Noah — God promised that he would never bring another flood to destroy all life again (Genesis 9:13–16). The rainbow is a symbol of God's mercy.

Shone like an emerald (v.3): God's appearance was dazzling! In a similar way, the apostle Paul described God, "*who lives in unapproachable light*" (1 Timothy 6:16).

So the throne and the rainbow represent God as all-glorious, all-powerful and yet wonderfully merciful! God's glory, power and wonderful mercy are themes that run through the whole of the Bible.

(?) What do the throne and the rainbow represent? [5]

(?) What is written about the elders who also surround the throne (Revelation 4:4)? [6]

God's people in the Old Testament started with twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob. God's people in the New Testament started with twelve apostles. Therefore, the twenty-four elders represent all God's people. They already enjoy what has been promised to all those who are faithful: they are seated on thrones (Revelation 3:21), dressed in white (3:4) with crowns of gold (2:10).

(?) What comes from the throne (4:5)? [7]

This reminds us of when God appeared to the Israelites on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16). The presence of God is terrifying! He will never allow sin to defile his presence.

And yet this unapproachable God is extraordinarily merciful. For many people it is easier to understand that God is angry with sin, but much harder to appreciate the extent of God's mercy towards those he has made. As the apostle Paul wrote, "*But because of his great love for us, God, who is **rich in mercy**, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions*" (Ephesians 2:4–5)!

Jesus told us that we must forgive others just as God has forgiven us. "*But if you do not forgive others their sins, your father will not forgive your sins*" (Matthew 6:14–15).

(?) When people sin against us, what do we always need to remember? [8]

(?) What did the creatures around the throne continuously say in Revelation 4:8? [9]

These are the same words used by the flying seraphim, that the prophet Isaiah saw, as they worshipped the Lord in the temple (Isaiah 6:2–3).

Important word: holy

Holy means different and set apart. It describes all God's other characteristics: he is more perfect, pure, wise, just, loving, powerful and glorious than anyone else! He is completely different and set apart from his creation.

Holiness is the opposite of uncleanness and sin. The Holy God cannot be in the same place as unclean and sinful people. God's holiness is like fire, and if unclean people come into his presence they will be burned up (Exodus 19:18–22).

In the New Testament, Jesus was revealed to be "*the Holy One of God*" (John 6:69). His holiness purified others (Luke 5:13). But when Jesus "*became sin*" for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) and died on the cross, the Holy God turned away from him (Matthew 27:45–46). Jesus became unholy for our sakes.

However, because Jesus possessed the holiness of God, death could not hold him and he came back to life! After he ascended back to heaven, he sent his Holy Spirit to those who put their trust in him. So he made his people holy! This means that they are made clean and set apart for God's glory. They have become different.

(?) What does holy mean when we are describing God? [10]

(?) What does holy mean when we are describing people? [11]

Repetition was an Old Testament way to emphasize a word. So "*Holy, holy, holy*" means very, very holy. In the same way, 666 means very very evil. This is the number that represents the beast in Revelation 13:18.

God is completely separate from all created beings and he is more perfect than we can imagine! He is too pure to tolerate any evil and sin in his presence. Do you sometimes forget how much your sin offends our holy God?

The Lord God Almighty (v.8): this title occurs seven times in the book of Revelation. John wants us to know for sure that God is **all**-powerful!

(?) What does "*Who was, and is, and is to come*" mean? [12]

There was never a time when God did not exist and there will never be a time when he will not exist! We also read these words in Revelation chapter 1 (vv.4, 8).

How long do presidents stay in power? How long do you expect a mortal person to rule? No one rules for ever. Only God rules for ever! Believers who are facing persecution need to keep reminding themselves of who God is. Singing God's praises is a great way to do this!

(?) What are the living creatures doing in Revelation 4:9? [13]

How often do we spend time giving God glory, honour and thanks?

(?) What do the elders do in verse 10? [14]

Fall down (v.10): throughout the book of Revelation, the elders are shown to be humbly falling down before God in worship (Revelation 4:10; 5:14; 11:16; 19:4). They understand who God is and all that God has done!

Lay their crowns before the throne (v.10): this shows that the elders do not hold on to their important position. They are ready to surrender it for God's glory. Likewise, leaders of God's people must also not hold on to their "high" position. However successful their ministry is, they should be humble, not proud. They should give all the glory to Jesus. When we worship God, we are saying that he is important, and we are his servants.

(?) What do the elders say in verse 11? [15]

(?) According to verse 11, why is God worthy to receive glory and honour and power? [16]

As their Creator, **all** people owe God glory, honour and power! We worship God by living each moment of each day for his glory. Worship is not just singing God's praise, it is also honouring him by what we do (Romans 12:1–2).

(?) What is worship, according to this chapter? [17]

Dilfuza's story

From a young age, Dilfuza loved books and learning. She was an excellent student and she could retell stories beautifully.

One day, Dilfuza became seriously ill. The doctors gave her an injection, but this caused her to have a seizure. Her arms and legs stopped working completely.

Three years later, Dilfuza's family began believing in Jesus. They told Dilfuza about Jesus, and she repented and accepted him into her heart. She glorified God from that day on.

When I spoke with Dilfuza, she would tell me to have a pen and paper. She had a gift for writing worship. The words would come to her, she would speak and I would write them down. She wrote many songs this way.

But as the years went by, it became harder for Dilfuza's mother to care for her, so she was sent to a centre for women with illnesses. Believers continued to visit her, but nurses often sat nearby during our conversations, listening to everything.

One day, the doctor told me, "Dilfuza has cancer. But you can't tell her." I prayed and didn't know what to do. When I came to see her, I wanted to talk about God and encourage her, but the nurse was there again. Then for the first time, the nurse suddenly left on urgent business. We were left alone. I told Dilfuza "Prepare to meet God. We don't know what tomorrow will bring." She began to cry, but she opened her heart. I went home and she died two days later.

For all of us, Dilfuza was an example of faith to the end.

Challenge

How did Dilfuza worship God?

When you are talking with family members or friends, do you spend more time complaining about your difficulties, or praising God for his goodness?

When do you sing God's praises with those you live with each day? Some families sing before or after the evening meal.

Remember: When we praise God, we are joining in with what is going on in heaven!

What else has God been saying to you through this lesson?

Practise explaining to the person beside you, what the word "holy" means when describing God, and what it means when describing people. Try to say both from memory.

Pray for each other to be focusing on God's glory more than your difficulties. Pray for each other to find joy in worshipping God **every** day!

Homework

Read **Revelation chapter 5** so you can be ready to study it in the next lesson. As you read, write down one thing that Jesus has done that makes him worthy of worship. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – Because he is worthy. Worshipping God gives us joy.
2 – *Come up here and I will show you what must soon take place after this.*
3 – *A throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.*
4 – *A rainbow that shone like an emerald.*
5 – They represent that God is all-glorious, all-powerful and yet wonderfully merciful.
6 – There are 24 of them. They are sitting on thrones, dressed in white and wearing crowns of gold.
7 – *Flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.*
8 – We must forgive others, just as God has forgiven us.
9 – *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.*
10 – He is more perfect, pure, wise, just, loving, powerful and glorious than anyone can ever be.
11 – It means that they are made clean and set apart for God's glory.
12 – God is eternal!
13 – They are giving God *glory, honour and thanks*.
14 – They *fall down* in worship and they *lay their crowns before the throne*.
15 – *You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.*
16 – Because he is our Creator!
17 – It is honouring God in everything we do.

Commentary

the appearance of jasper and ruby (v.3): this tells us of unspeakable beauty. Also, some people in those days, just like some people today, believed that these precious stones protected people. But it is only God who can protect us! The Creator of the stones is to be trusted, not the stones themselves!

what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal (v.6): in those days, glass was usually opaque and dark. Only very expensive glass was clear. The heavenly sea perfectly reflects and radiates God's holiness and glory.

the **four living creatures** (v.6): these are a mixture of the "*four living creatures*" that the prophet Ezekiel saw (Ezekiel 1:10–11) and the "*seraphim*" that Isaiah saw (Isaiah 6:2–3). They are:

- **covered with eyes**: they are watchful and nothing escapes their notice
- **like a lion**: the noblest created being
- **like an ox**: the strongest created being
- **like a man**: the wisest created being
- **like a flying eagle**: the swiftest created being
- equipped with **six wings** they can go anywhere and carry out God's will quickly
- constantly praising God (Revelation 4:8)
- like the worship group in heaven (4:9–10). They call all of creation to worship God!
- going to appear again in Revelation in various places, including 5:6 and 14:3.

Glory, honour and thanks (v.9): These are three essential elements of praise.

- **Glory** (v.9): The Old Testament word for **glory** was a picture word meaning weight or significance.
  - "*The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle*" (Exodus 40:34).

- "*The heavens declare the glory of God*" (Psalm 19:1).
- "*I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols*" (Isaiah 42:8).

- **Honour** (v.9): means to recognize God's glory:
  - "*Those who honour me I will honour*" (1 Samuel 2:30).
  - "*Honour him, for he is your lord*" (Psalm 45:11).
  - "*Hallowed be your name*" (Luke 11:2).

- **Thanks** (v.9): means declaring our gratitude:
  - "*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures for ever*" (Psalm 107:1).
  - "*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*" (2 Corinthians 9:15)
  - "*Give thanks in all circumstances*" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

You are worthy (v.11): this is what people called out to the Roman emperor when he came in triumphal procession. But only God is worthy of our worship!

our Lord and God (v.11): this is what people said when worshipping the Roman Emperor Domitian, who was ruling when the apostle John wrote this book. But we have only one God and one Lord (1 Corinthians 8:6).

to receive power (v.11): all honours that are given to human powers and authorities really belong to God. No one rules without being given that power by God (Romans 13:1–2). So, if any human power demands that we obey them rather than God, they are denying and insulting God who gave them their power. We are to obey the authorities in our country until they ask us to do something that is against what God has said (Acts 4:19; 5:29).

Crowns: given to those who had earned them. In Revelation chapter 4, the crowns that the elders wear are wreaths, which signify triumph. These crowns were given to those who won athletic games (1 Corinthians 9:25).

Revelation lesson 7

The scroll and the Lamb



Blandina's story (died AD177, Lyons)

One of the forty-eight believers who died in Lyons was a slave girl called Blandina. Her mistress was afraid that Blandina would not be able to hold out under torture. She was wrong. Blandina was tortured from morning until evening. The torturers took turns because they grew tired. But Blandina would not give in. She kept saying: "I am a Christian. We do nothing that we need to be ashamed of." Then she was tied to a stake as food for wild animals. But the animals did not touch her. She was whipped and burned on a metal grill. Finally, she was thrown into a net and a bull gored her until she died. Her companions, who watched from the stands, said that as they watched Blandina, they saw in her a picture of the one who was crucified for them. Truly she was given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

In lesson 6 we learned about the importance of worship. In this lesson we will learn more about worship. We worship because we have been saved from our sins by "the Lamb".

The problem of the scroll

Read **Revelation 5:1–7**.

(?) What is in God's right hand (v.1)? [1]

Sealed scrolls

Before there were books, people wrote on scrolls. Wealthy men wore a small metal cylinder on a cord around their neck, which had markings that were unique to them. Important documents like letters or wills were rolled up and sealed with a wax seal. To seal a document the writer pressed

their cylinder onto some melted wax over the edge of the scroll. This proved who had written it. It also showed that no one had changed the document before it got to the recipient.

At the time when the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, formal, secret documents like wills were sealed with seven separate wax or clay seals. Only an authorized person could open these seals and reveal the contents of the will.

The scroll in Revelation 5:1 contains God's will, to be put into effect after the death of his Son. It contains his perfect plan for the judgment of the world and for its redemption.

(?) What is the difficulty in verses 2–3? [2]

(?) What did John do in verse 4? [3]

Unless someone can open the scroll, we can never know what is God's plan for the world. We cannot make any sense of the suffering and pain that we experience and that is all around us. But there was no one worthy to open the scroll and reveal God's plan. This is why John wept.

The Lion and the Lamb

Then we read that there **is** someone who is worthy to open the scroll! There **is** someone who can make sense of the world and give us hope.

(?) Who does verse 5 say this person is? [4]

(?) What is the name of this person? [5]

The Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David (v.5): before he died, the patriarch Jacob (Abraham's grandson) blessed his twelve sons, one of whom was called Judah.

- In Genesis 49:9 we read "*You are a lion's cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness — who dares to rouse him?*"

- In Genesis 49:10, Jacob continues his blessing of Judah with these words: "*The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his*."

According to Jacob's prophecy, one of Judah's descendants would rule over all the nations, as powerful and terrifying as a lion. Jesus, who was from the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:1–3) is the fulfilment of this prophecy. He was from the "root of David", that is, King David's descendant (see Commentary below).

According to Revelation 5:5, why is the Lion from the tribe of Judah worthy to open the scroll? [6]

John goes on to show how Jesus has triumphed.

(?) What did John see in verse 6? [7]

At the time of the exodus, each family had to sacrifice a lamb to protect them from the angel of death (Exodus 12:1–13). This significant event was to be commemorated each year by the Passover festival, which included the sacrifice of a lamb (Exodus 12:25–27).

The prophet Isaiah described the Messiah as a lamb (Isaiah 53:5–7,11):
- he would be "*led like a lamb to the slaughter*" (Isaiah 53:7)
- he would die to take the punishment that we deserved (Isaiah 53:6)
- he would come to life again! (Isaiah 53:11)

(?) What is the name of this Lamb? [8]

So the perfect plan of God for the world included the death and resurrection of Jesus, for you and for me! We deserved to suffer and die, but Jesus died in our place. He has conquered death and is alive today. This is why he is worthy to open the scroll. He is worthy to be worshipped.

(?) Where is the Lamb standing in Revelation 5:6? [9]

(?) How else is he described in verse 6? [10]

In the Bible, horns are a symbol of strength and authority; eyes show that Jesus sees and knows everything. He is at the centre of the throne. He sees and knows everything that is happening today, and has all authority over it. He is the ruler. We can trust him.

(?) What did the Lamb do in verse 7? [11]

Only Jesus was worthy to take the scroll and open it. He is the Lord over all that happens on earth.

Worship the Lamb!

Read **Revelation 5:8–14**.

Now the Lamb has taken the scroll, the heavenly throne room is overwhelmed with praise for the one who can reveal God's plan of salvation! In verses 8–13, we see three different groups of worshippers.

(?) What three groups do we see (vv.8, 11, 13)? [12]

1. The Elders

The 24 elders symbolize the universal church, all God's people who have ever lived and who will ever live. They are all worshipping the Lamb.

(?) What do the elders have in their hands (v.8)? [13]

Incense

Incense was used to worship God in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 33:10).

The early followers of Jesus did not use incense to worship God. They understood that Jesus' death was the perfect, once-for-all-time sacrifice. This meant that sacrifices and offering incense to God were no longer needed.

David wrote: "*May my prayer be set before you like incense*" (Psalm 141:2). David knew that our prayers are like a pleasing smell to God!

Describing prayers as incense (Revelation 5:8) shows how much God delights in hearing our prayers.

A new song (v.9): the prophet Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah, telling us that God is going to do new things, so his people must sing a new song:

> "'*See, the former things have taken place,*
> *and new things I declare;*
> *before they spring into being*
> *I announce them to you.*'
> *Sing to the Lord a new song,*
> *his praise from the ends of the earth!*"
> (Isaiah 42:9–10)

(?) What new thing has Jesus done (Revelation 5:9–10)? [14]

Purchased for God (v.9): just as in the Roman world slaves could be set free by paying a price, Jesus has set us free from slavery to sin!

(?) According to verse 9, what price did Jesus pay to set us free? [15]

It was not easy for Jesus to save us! He had to give everything he had and suffer an agonizing death on the cross. This is why we worship him!

From every tribe and language and people and nation (v.9): this phrase, and variations of it, occur seven times in the book of Revelation. God wants to emphasize that, although once his covenant was with just the Israelites (Exodus 19:5), now it is with peoples from **every nation** on earth, including your nation!

Kingdom and priests (v.10): God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to make them a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5–6). This means that they were a nation of priests under the rule of God, the King. In the same way, Jesus is our king and we are his priests! In the Old Testament, priests were the only people who could come into God's presence in the temple. But now we can all come directly to the living God, by the blood of Jesus. We don't need other people to be priests to bring us to God. Rather, we are all priests whose job it is to bring others to God. We do that by preaching the good news!

They will reign on the earth (v.10): God created people to rule over the creatures he had made (Genesis 1:26). In the new creation we will reign with Jesus. Anything we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory that is awaiting us! (Romans 8:18)

(?) If we are believers in the Lord Jesus, who are we according to Revelation 5:9–10? [16]

Next, John saw a much bigger group worshipping the Lamb.

2. The Angels

(?) How many angels are there (v.11)? [17]

In the book of Hebrews we read, "*You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly*" (Hebrews 12:22). Let us never forget that when we worship, we are joining in with what is already happening in heaven.

(?) What seven words in Revelation 5:12 describe how Jesus is worthy of our worship? [18]

There are seven words: seven is the number that symbolizes completeness. This shows how the worship of the angels is complete and perfect. Jesus is completely worthy to receive this kind of worship.

Finally, John sees the biggest group of all.

3. Everyone and everything!

(?) What does every creature say in verse 13? [19]

The followers of Jesus in those days were facing difficult challenges. It was often very dangerous for them to refuse to join in with the worship of the emperor and pagan gods.

But here in Revelation chapter 5 they and we are given the opportunity to join in with countless angels and with the whole of creation in worshipping the Lamb. This worship helps us see to whom the power and glory truly belong. It helps us to see that God is in control of all that is going on.

So, when we are feeling that it is too hard to follow Jesus, we also should look up and worship the one who is worthy of **all** praise!

Farida's story

My husband and I lived without God for a long time. Many years of our lives were spent in pain, waiting to have a child. We underwent treatment, visited doctors and clung to hope. But again and again came the same response: infertility.

My husband's father was ill with tuberculosis, and he dreamed of holding his grandson in his arms at least once. Finally, he said to my husband: "You must leave her and marry another woman." This broke me. In utter despair, I tried to end my life. I threw myself into the river, three times. But three times, the same man saved me. I couldn't understand then, but today I know that God was protecting me with his angel.

I returned to my parents' house, but my husband remained faithful. We kept meeting secretly. We sought help everywhere, even in cemeteries and rituals.

One day, a friend gave my husband the address of a church, saying, "They'll help you." He went, and they prayed for him. He repented that day. The next Sunday, he invited me. During worship, I saw a vision of Jesus holding out a child for me. I sobbed, not understanding, but my heart opened and I also repented.

Later, our doctor suddenly cried out when she saw the foetus. There was joy, surprise and tears. I gave my son a name meaning "Jesus the King". After that, God gave us two daughters. My children are living testimony that nothing is impossible for God.

Challenge

What did Farida learn about God?

How much time do you spend praying and praising God each day?

How much time do you spend on social media or watching films each day?

Which is more important to you?

Which brings more joy to God and to you?

Let us not be so busy with our lives on earth that we have no time to join the heavenly choir!

Write down what you will start doing from today to devote more time to the Lord. For example, I will get up 15 minutes earlier each day to spend time with God and read my Bible.

Discussion

What has God said to you through this lesson?

Practise explaining to the person beside you why Jesus — and only Jesus — is worthy to open the scroll. Can you give at least two reasons from this lesson?

Homework

Read **Revelation chapters 6–7** so you can be ready to study them in the next lesson. As you read, write down one thing that surprises or encourages you. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – *A scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.*
2 – No one was worthy to break the seals and open the scroll.
3 – He *wept and wept.*
4 – *The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.*
5 – Jesus.
6 – Because he *has triumphed!*
7 – *A Lamb, looking as if it had been slain.*
8 – Jesus.
9 – He was *standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.*
10 – *The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes.*
11 – *He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.*
12 – The elders, the angels, every creature in heaven and on earth.
13 – *Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.*
14 – With his blood, he has purchased persons for God from every tribe, language, people and nation. He has made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve God!
15 – His own blood.
16 – We are priests!
17 – Too many to count!
18 – *Power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!*
19 – *To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!*

Commentary

a scroll with writing on both sides (v.1): this is like the scroll that the prophet Ezekiel was given — "*On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe*" (Ezekiel 2:9–10).

the Root of David (v.5): through the prophet Isaiah, God promised that there would be an ideal king, descended from David, who would judge with righteousness and bring in an age of peace (Isaiah 11:1–9).

- in Isaiah 11:10, the ideal king is called "*the Root of Jesse*". Jesse was King David's father (1 Samuel 17:12). God had promised David that one of his descendants would rule for ever (2 Samuel 7:12–13).
- the direct descendants of David stopped ruling when King Jehoiachin was taken into exile in Babylon, and his uncle King Zedekiah was also deposed (2 Kings 24–25). The "tree" of the line of David was cut down.
- but Isaiah prophesied that from the stump of this tree, a shoot would come up — "*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit*" (Isaiah 11:1).
- Revelation 5:5 tells us that Jesus is the fulfilment of that prophecy.

seven horns and seven eyes (v.6):

- in Old Testament poetry, horns symbolize the strength and power of a ruler. But as this is not obvious to people today, "horn" is usually translated as "strength" or "power" (e.g. Psalm 75:4–7). Seven horns show us that the Lamb has absolute power to triumph where no one else could. He has the power to fulfil God's plan of salvation!
- in Zechariah 4:10, we read that God has seven eyes. He knows everything!

- here in Revelation 5:6, the seven eyes are "*the seven spirits of God, sent out into all the earth*". This is the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). So the "*seven eyes*" in Revelation 5:6 tell us something about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Revelation lesson 8

The seven seals and the seven trumpets



Cyprian of Carthage's story (died AD258)

Cyprian was a wealthy teacher who lived in Carthage in North Africa in the third century. He had lived a sinful life, but at the age of thirty-five he became a follower of Jesus. Almost immediately, the church chose him to be their leader. When a great persecution began under the Emperor Decius, Cyprian chose to go into hiding rather than face execution. He wrote many letters to encourage the believers who were suffering. Some other church leaders criticized him for going into hiding. The persecution also divided the church, because many believers denied their faith to avoid punishment. There were heated arguments about what should happen to those who wanted to come back to the church later. Cyprian wrote about the importance of church unity and the meaning of dying for Christ. He said that to die for Christ was not a defeat but the crown of a faithful life. Years later, under the Emperor Valerian, he was summoned, sent into exile and then beheaded. He refused a blindfold. His executioner was so nervous that Cyprian gave him twenty-five gold pieces so that he would do his job. Truly he was given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

In this lesson we will think about why there is so much suffering in our world.

In Revelation chapters 6–16 John writes about seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls of God's wrath. Through the Holy Spirit, John is showing us the same truth in three different ways. That truth is that **God is showing his wrath against the world that has rebelled against him**. But God's people are kept safe.

Just like in the rest of the book, some things are described in a similar way to what is written in the Old Testament books of prophecy.

Suffering

The book of Revelation teaches two truths that seem to contradict each other: that God has absolute authority and power, and that he allows suffering to happen.

Chapters 4 and 5 showed us that God is the supreme ruler and Redeemer of the world. Now, as we read about the chaos that is unleashed on the world, we see that Jesus is in control. He is the one who is opening the seals, and he limits the punishments that are allowed to happen (e.g. Revelation 6:8b). Jesus is allowing people to taste the consequences of their rebellion against God, so that they will repent before it is not too late. God is not vengefully inflicting punishment in this life. He longs for all people to repent (Acts 17:30). If they do not repent, their eternal suffering will be far worse than anything they have suffered in this life (Revelation 20:15).

One way of understanding the suffering in the world is to see that God is allowing rebellious people to do what they are naturally inclined to do. It is clear that people who do not submit to God will easily inflict suffering on each other. For example, famines are often caused by warfare or the decisions of corrupt rulers. But the worst form of rebellion against God is the persecution of God's people (Revelation 6:9–11). Persecuting the church is the same as persecuting Jesus himself (Acts 9:4). Revelation shows that God will avenge all injustice and persecution. He will bring all suffering to an end (Revelation 21:4).

(?) What is the theme of chapters 6–16? [1]

In this lesson we will learn about the seven seals and the seven trumpets.

The seven seals

Read **Revelation chapter 6**.

In this chapter, we read about six of the seals we saw on the scroll in Revelation chapter 5. The seventh seal is opened only in chapter 8. After each of the first six seals is opened, John sees something terrible. The white, red, black and pale horses (6:2–8) are similar to those that the prophet Zechariah saw in his vision. God was warning that he will bring judgment to the nations (Zechariah 6:1–8).

The six seals are:

1. *Conquest* (v.2)
   - **Crown**: a victor's wreath of triumph, not a sign of authority.
   - **he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest**: like all empires, the Roman Empire grew more and more powerful as it conquered more and more countries.

2. *Bloodshed* (v.4)
   - **to make people kill each other**: conquest and oppression usually causes more wars and violence. People become used to killing other people.

3. *Famine* (v.6)
   - **two pounds of wheat for a day's wages**: was over ten times the normal price.
   - **do not damage the oil and the wine**: in the ancient world, invading armies often devastated the crops like wheat and barley, but they usually did not damage the vines and olive trees because they took much longer to regrow. But people cannot survive on olives and grapes alone, so they starve.

4. *Death* (v.8)
   - **by sword, famine and plague and by the wild beasts of the earth**: this what God warned the people of Jerusalem through prophet Ezekiel if they did not repent (Ezekiel 14:21). Such suffering is a foretaste of the punishment God will one day bring when he judges his rebellious world.

5. *Persecution* (vv.9–11)
   - **under the altar** (v.9): symbolizes the fact that they are in heaven because of Jesus' sacrifice for them.
   - **because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained** (v.9): this was the same reason that the apostle John was on the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9).
   - **then each of them was given a white robe** (v.11): a symbol of Jesus' gift of complete forgiveness (Revelation 7:13–14). They are being honoured. But they must wait "*a little longer*".
   - If we are experiencing persecution, we will be honoured. But we must wait for God's vengeance, and not try to avenge ourselves on our persecutors (Romans 12:19).

6. *End of the world* (vv.12–17)
   - **the sun turned black... the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars fell to earth** (vv.12–13): the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel and Joel all wrote that these are the signs that will show everyone that God's judgment and the end of the world is coming. We do not know that this is what will literally happen. This might be picture language for the frightening events that will occur when Jesus returns (Matthew 24:29–30).
   - **then the kings of the earth,** etc (v.15): John names seven different types of people, and so this is referring to all people.
   - **[they] hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne..."** (vv.15–16): this is also how the prophet Isaiah described the horror of God's judgment (Isaiah 2:19, 21).
   - **from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!** (v.16): just as the Lamb (Jesus) shares God's throne, he also shares God's role in judgment.

(?) Which of these six judgments are happening in the world today? [2]

(?) What is the question Revelation 6:10? [3]

(?) What is the answer to this question (v.11)? [4]

(?) Six seals have been opened. What do the six seals represent? [5]

John presses the "pause" button before he tells us about the seventh seal in chapter 8. But in chapter 7, he wants to comfort us and give us hope. He wants to show us that God is faithful and will protect all his people even though they face terrible persecution.

The sealing of God's people

Read **Revelation chapter 7**.

The four winds (v.1): this is like the prophet Zechariah's vision when he saw four horses pulling chariots, which represented the four winds of heaven (Zechariah 6:1–5). In Jewish thinking, winds brought harm (e.g. Mark 4:35–41).

(?) What does the angel coming up from the east have (Revelation 7:2)? [6]

This is God's own stamp to show who belongs to him.

(?) What does this angel tell the other four angels in verse 3? [7]

Before the angels bring punishment to the earth, they put a seal on the foreheads of all those who follow Jesus. God's people are completely safe from the coming punishment!

(?) What does John hear in verse 4? [8]

Notice that he does not see them, he only hears the number.

(?) How many people are sealed with a seal on their foreheads (v.4)? [9]

Twelve represents the complete number of people who belong to God and 1,000 means a huge number.

(?) What does 12 times 12 times 1,000 (that is, 144,000) symbolize? [10]

All the believers who ever were and all the believers there are now in the world and all those who will believe will be sealed. This means God will protect each and every follower of Jesus, and there will be more than we can ever count!

From the tribe of Judah, 12,000 were sealed... (vv.5–8): this is like an army census. It reminds us of the census that Moses took of the Israelite army (Numbers chapters 1–2). The Israelites had to be ready for warfare. In the same way, we are in a time of warfare between Jesus' death and resurrection, and his second coming. Ours is not physical warfare, but spiritual (Ephesians 6:12).

(?) What does John see in Revelation 7:9? [11]

There before me was a great multitude that no one could count (v.9): John heard their number in verse 4 but when he saw them, he saw that they were a vast army! In a similar way, the prophet Ezekiel was shown "*a vast army*" of God's people who had risen from the dead (Ezekiel 37:10). This is the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham: "*Look up at the sky and count the stars — if indeed you can count them... So shall your offspring be*" (Genesis 15:5). If no one else around you is following Jesus, remember that you are a member of a great multitude that no one can count!

(?) If we are being persecuted, what does Revelation 7:1–9 remind us? [12]

(?) What do the huge crowd of believers, the angels, elders and living creatures all do in verses 10–12? [13]

The seven words in verse 12 show that God is worthy of **all** our praise (see 5:12)! In spite of all the suffering and persecution in the world, God is still worthy to be praised.

(?) What promises do we read for those who have endured suffering in verses 15–17? [14]

If we are suffering, we need to look forward to that day when these promises will be fulfilled. Read **verses 15–17** out aloud again and enjoy them!

(?) What should we remember if we feel alone or are being persecuted or are suffering in another way? [15]

Read **Revelation 8:1**.

(?) Jesus opens the seventh seal. The end of the world has come. What happens in verse 1? [16]

In this picture of a throne room there is silence before the judge as he gives his final judgment. In the Old Testament the prophets called people to come and be silent before the judge of all the earth. For example, "*The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him*" (Habakkuk 2:20).

The seven trumpets

Read **Revelation 8:2–6**.

(?) A new vision begins, this time of seven trumpets. What are the angels given in verse 2? [17]

Just as six seals were opened and then there was a pause, so in chapters 8 and 9 six trumpets are sounded and then there is a pause before the seventh trumpet (8:7–9:19).

(?) What was the other angel given to offer in verse 3? [18]

When we pray, our prayers are like sweet-smelling incense to God. God hears our prayers for justice! One day he will judge all those who have persecuted his precious people!

(?) What does the angel hurl to the earth in verse 5? [19]

The angel hurls fire from the altar down on the earth in judgment (v.5). Fire symbolizes God's anger. After each of the first six trumpets is sounded, John sees something terrible. People on earth experience suffering that shows God's anger at sin and rebellion.

Read **Revelation 9:20–21**.

(?) What do people not do when these disasters happen? [20]

God permits disasters so that people repent of their sins. When we hear of more disasters in our world, we need to pray that people will repent and start to follow Jesus.

Jesus is coming back soon! Stand firm and don't give up! Your reward will be incomparable with what you have suffered! "*To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God!*" (Revelation 2:7)

If you want to study more detail about chapters 8–10, read the Commentary below.

Aziz's story

I turned to Jesus when I was quite young, and my faith became the most precious thing in the world to me. But despite reading about persecution, I didn't understand what it looked like in real life.

Several years ago, my mother's sister was diagnosed with cancer, and the doctors said she had seven months left to live. We prayed together until the very end.

After her death, the persecution began. They refused us burial land, stopped us from holding a wake, and turned neighbours and relatives against us. My mother became ill because of the pressure and died two weeks later. Before I could grieve for my aunt, I had lost my mother too. I wasn't allowed to be with her and say goodbye. Broken down by pressure, my father signed burial documents for a place that was considered cursed. He began to fade under the weight of pain.

My family said I was the cause of all the troubles, that I was an unworthy son, and tried to force me to renounce Christ. But I refused. My father died a month after my mother, and my family kicked me out of the house before I could say goodbye. For the first time, I was left truly alone.

It was then I realized I was not alone. God was with me, and he had not turned away from me. He was still my Father, even though my earthly parents were dead. He had kept faith even through the deepest pain.

Discussion

What did Aziz realize? How do these chapters of Revelation help us to remember that?

How can you help each other to stand strong when you are suffering?

Practise explaining to the person beside you, what 144,000 symbolizes and why it is an encouragement to believers who are suffering? Try to say it in your own words.

Pray for each other to stand strong in your difficulties and to keep trusting in the one who brings us salvation and eternal life.

Homework

Read **Revelation 8:6–9:21** and **11:15–18**, which tells us about each of the seven trumpets, and the terrible punishments they bring. If you want to know more, read the Commentary below. As you read, write down one thing that strikes you. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – God is showing his wrath against the world that has rebelled against him.
2 – The first five: conquest, bloodshed, famine, death and persecution.
3 – "*How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?*"
4 – They must wait a little longer *until the full number of their fellow servants... were killed as they had been* (see Commentary below).
5 – Conquest, Bloodshed, Famine, Death, Persecution, the End of the world.
6 – *The seal of the living God.*
7 – "*Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.*"
8 – *The number of those who were sealed.*
9 – 144,000.
10 – The complete number of believers (12 x 12) is very large (1,000)!
11 – *A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language!*
12 – We are in a spiritual battle. But we are part of a vast army that no one can count.
13 – They worship God.
14 – *... he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.*
"*Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,*" *nor any scorching heat.*
For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd;
"*he will lead them to springs of living water.*"
"*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*"
15 – Remember that you are members of a great multitude. Remember that the only one to fear is God himself. He will wipe away every tear from your eyes.
16 – *There was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*
17 – Trumpets.
18 – He was given *much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people.*
19 – The censer with fire from the altar.
20 – Repent!

Commentary

The sealing of God's people (Revelation 7:1–8:4)

until the full number of their fellow servants... were killed as they had been (6:11): followers of Jesus will continue to be persecuted right up until the return of Jesus. Persecution will only stop when Jesus returns.

the seal on the forehead (7:3):

- this is similar to what happened in the prophet Ezekiel's vision — the Lord told the man clothed in linen to "*put a mark on the foreheads*" of those who were faithful. In this way they would not have to face God's judgment on Jerusalem (Ezekiel. 9:3–6)
- it is also similar to the exodus, when people put the blood of a lamb on their doorposts to protect them from the angel of death (Exodus 12:12–13)
- but the book of Revelation tells us God will not judge just one city or nation, he will judge the whole earth!

- so this verse shows how God waits until all his people are sealed, before allowing harm to come on the earth.

palm branches (7:9): waving palm branches was a way of honouring the king, especially after a military victory.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey the week before he died, the crowds greeted him with palm branches and called out, "*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" (John 12:12–13) The crowds recognized that Jesus was the coming King who brings salvation.

the great tribulation (7:14): this is something that the prophet Daniel warned would happen before the end of the world: "*There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people — everyone whose name is found written in the book — will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt*" (Daniel 12:1–2).

Jesus also warned of this very difficult time (Matthew 24:21). But we will see in Revelation chapters 11 and 12 that **this is the time that we are living in** — it is the time between Jesus' death and resurrection, and his second coming. So it is not some future time that we should be afraid of. The book of Revelation is for our encouragement, to stand firm to the end!

they are before the throne of God (7:15–17): in the Old Testament, only specially appointed people could serve as priests in the temple. Now all those who have stayed faithful to Jesus are given the privilege of priestly worship of God.

These precious verses reflect words from the prophet Isaiah (4:4–6; 25:8; 49:10) and from Psalm 23:1. They also remind us that Jesus said, "*I am the Good Shepherd*" (John 10:11). Again, we see how Jesus cares for his people.

In Revelation chapter 6, those who had rebelled against God called on the mountains to fall on them and hide them from God's wrath (v.16). In chapter 7, those who have been faithful can confidently stand before God's throne (7:9)!

the prayers of God's people (8:4): our prayers are combined with God-given prayer ("incense"). When we suffer and when we see others suffer, we do not know what to pray. As the apostle Paul wrote: "*We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans*" (Romans 8:26). When we pray, we should remember that the Holy Spirit is helping us to pray!

The first six trumpets (Revelation 8:6–9:21)

1. Punishment of the earth (8:7)
   - **hail and lightning** (v.7): was the seventh of the ten plagues against Egypt (Exodus 9:22–26) and was a sign of God's judgment (Isaiah 30:30).
   - **a third**: unlike in Egypt, these disasters are all partial — they are all warnings to people on earth.

2. Punishment on the sea (8:8–9)
   - **sea turned into blood**: is like the first of the plagues against Egypt (Exodus 7:20).
   - **ships**: the loss of so many ships would have been a disaster for cities like Rome, that needed food from other countries to feed their people.

3. Punishment on the rivers (8:10–11)
   - **a great star fell from the sky**: in the ancient world, a meteor was always a sign of the gods' anger.
   - **wormwood**: is a bitter substance that was thought to be poisonous (similar to the waters at Marah in Exodus 15:23).

4. Punishment on the sun, moon and stars (8:12)
   - **turned dark** (v.12): resembles the ninth plague against Egypt (Exodus 10:21–23). This was also a sign of God's judgment (Isaiah 13:10; see also Matthew 27:45).

5. Punishment of the "locusts" (9:1–11)
   - **a star that had fallen from the sky** (v.1): this is like the prophet Isaiah's description of the fall of the Babylonian king (Isaiah 14:12–17). In a similar way, Jesus said, "*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven*" (Luke 10:18). God uses Satan and his forces for his own purposes. But even Satan's activities are limited and God protects his people.
   - **Abyss** (v.1): is the place where all evil comes from (Luke 8:30–31; Revelation 17:8; 20:1, 3).
   - **locusts** (v.3): the eighth plague on Egypt was locusts (Exodus 10:12–15). But here the "locusts" harm people and not the plants. This is similar to the prophet Joel describing the coming "day of the Lord" as involving a frightening army of locusts who come as God's punishment (Joel 1:4, 6; 2:1–10).
   - **those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads** (v.4): these are the unbelievers, who will suffer the torments of Satan, just as the people of God suffer persecution from unbelievers (Revelation 7:2–3).
   - **five months** (v.5): is how long a swarm of locusts usually lasts. Their power to torment was only for a "brief" time.
   - **the locusts** (v.7–10): represent people:
     - **on their heads they wore something like crowns of gold... their hair was like women's hair**: they had distinctive long, blonde hair like the northern barbarian tribes who were always a threat to the Roman Empire.
     - **they had lion's teeth and the sound of their wings was like... chariots rushing into battle**: they are also like the fearful army that the prophet Joel wrote about (Joel 1:6; 2:5).
     - **tails with stingers like scorpions**: this sounds like the "manticore", a mythical creature with a human head, the body and teeth of a lion and the tail of a scorpion.
   - **the angel of the Abyss** (v.11): is a servant of Satan.
   - **Abaddon** (v.11): is a word for destruction, often linked with death (e.g. Job 26:6).
   - **Apollyon** (v.11): is the Greek word for destroyer, and was a favourite way to describe Roman emperors, including Domitian.

6. Punishment from the angels of death (9:14–21)
   - **release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates** (v.14): this was the Eastern border of the Roman Empire. The Parthian people living across this border were always a threat to the Roman Empire.
   - **twice ten thousand times ten thousand** (v.16): was 1,000 times the size of the Roman army — a number too big to count!
   - **horses... lions... fire out of their mouths... tails like snakes** (v.17–19): this sounds like the chimaera, a mythical creature that breathed fire, had a lion's head and a tail that ended with a snake's head.

The punishments that will come on those who continue to rebel against God are described in increasingly frightening ways. God is angry with them!

the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent (9:20–21): the sins listed in verses 20–21 were all widespread in the Roman Empire and are still very much a problem today! Do not be surprised when people refuse to repent of them. But pray for them that the Lord will save them!

The angel and the little scroll (Revelation 10)

seal up (10:4): Daniel was told to "*seal up the vision, for it refers to a time many days from now*" (Daniel 8:26). So this vision that John has in Revelation 10 refers to the future, in contrast to the events of the trumpets and seals, which are set in the present.

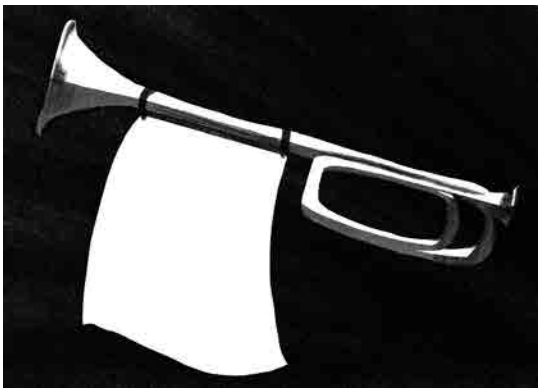
delay (10:6): the apostle Peter wrote: "*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9). God is giving time for the good news to reach every person. But that time will soon come to an end.

take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but "in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey" (10:9): These words are a quotation from Ezekiel 3:3. God told the prophet Ezekiel to eat a scroll (Ezekiel. 2:9–3:9). It was sweet to eat but the words written on it were full of sadness. The good news about Jesus is both sweet and sour because it is wonderful to know about God's plan of salvation, but it's hard (sour) to know that we will suffer persecution.

you must prophesy (10:11): just as John needed to make known that now is the opportunity for the rebellious world to repent, so we too need to make this known to those around us.

Revelation lesson 9

God's witnesses



Perpetua's story (died AD203, Carthage)

Perpetua was a young noblewoman who lived in the city of Carthage in North Africa. She was twenty-two years old and had a baby she was still breastfeeding, when the Roman authorities arrested her for being a follower of Jesus; her father begged her many times to give up her faith to save her life. She refused. In prison she wrote a diary recording her dreams, her conversations with her father and her refusal to deny Christ. In one dream she saw herself climbing a tall bronze ladder past a great dragon into a garden where a shepherd was waiting to welcome her. She understood that Jesus was preparing her to die for him, and that he would welcome her into heaven. She and her companions were sent into the arena naked to be attacked by wild animals. When they were badly injured but still alive, gladiators were sent in to kill them with the sword. Perpetua helped those around her to face death with courage. Truly she was given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

As God's people, we are called to be his witnesses, and shine in the dark world (Philippians 2:14–16). But we will face opposition and persecution. So we must fix our eyes on Jesus, so that we will not grow weary and lose heart.

The temple is measured

Read **Revelation 11:1–2**.

(?) What is John told to measure and count in verse 1? [1]

In the Old Testament, after the destruction of the temple and the exile of God's people to Babylon, God gave the prophet Ezekiel a series of extraordinary visions. In one of them, he saw an angel measuring the restored temple of God (Ezekiel chapters 40–42). God was promising to restore his people! God was giving his people hope, in what seemed to them like a hopeless situation.

After the exile, the temple was rebuilt. But the Romans destroyed it in AD70, nearly 40 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. John was writing after its destruction. Since that time, it has never been rebuilt. So the temple that John is told to measure is not a physical one but a heavenly one!

(?) How was John's situation similar to the prophet Ezekiel's? [2]

In 1 Corinthians 3:16 Paul wrote, "*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives among you?*" The church, that is the gathering of all those who follow Jesus all over the world, is God's dwelling place on earth!

By commanding John to measure the temple, the altar and the worshippers, God shows that he knows exactly who belongs to him. God will keep his people safe! God wants to give us hope in what may seem to us like a hopeless situation.

(?) Who is the outer court given to in Revelation 11:2? [3]

"*The Gentiles*" here means the people who are hostile to God. Their area is not measured as God is not protecting them.

outer court (v.2): The temple in Jerusalem had an outer court which was called "the Court of the Gentiles". Those who were not Jewish were allowed to go into this courtyard but no further into the temple area. But Revelation chapter 11 describes these nations, as having become hostile to God's people, instead of wanting to join them.

trample (v.2): just as the Romans had trampled Jerusalem in AD70, so God's people will be trampled by "the nations", that is, those who oppose them. Jesus spoke about this in Luke's gospel: "*Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*" (Luke 21:24).

(?) In Revelation 11:2, how long will enemies trample on God's people? [4]

(?) How many years is 42 months (v.2)? [5]

The number 7 represents completeness and eternity, so 3½ , half of seven, years means a limited period — not for ever. God assures us that his people will not be persecuted for ever.

(?) What does this length of time represent? [6]

The Bible is clear that God's people will face persecution. But God assures us that we will not be persecuted for ever.

The two witnesses

Read **Revelation 11:3–14**.

(?) In verse 3, who is going to prophesy? [7]

Two witnesses (v.3): represent all those who follow Jesus. In Deuteronomy we read that in a court case one witness is not enough, you need two witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). Two witnesses are more likely to be speaking the truth. In the same way, the followers of Jesus should work together to "*prophesy*" — to declare God's truth to a hostile world.

(?) Who do the two witnesses represent? [8]

(?) How long will they prophesy for (Revelation 11:3)? [9]

This is also 42 months, that is, 3½ years. The time for preaching the gospel is limited. It will not last for ever.

(?) How are the witnesses described in verse 4? [10]

This reminds us of the prophet Zechariah's vision of a "*lampstand*" and "*two olive trees*" who are "*anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth*" (Zechariah chapter 4). They symbolized the governor of Jerusalem and the high priest. God was calling them to continue to rebuild the temple, in spite of many challenges and much opposition. They would do it "'*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit' says the Lord Almighty*" (Zechariah 4:6). In a similar way, in the New Testament, God calls people to continue to build the new spiritual temple, made up of those who follow Jesus (1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Peter 2:5). They "*stand before the Lord of the earth*" (Revelation 11:4). God is protecting them.

(?) When we are facing many challenges and much opposition as we seek to build God's spiritual temple, what do we need to remember? [11]

(?) What happens to those who want to harm the two witnesses (v.5)? [12]

This reminds us of the prophet Elijah. He asked for fire to come down from the sky and consume the soldiers who had come to arrest him, and they died (2 Kings 1:10). Just as God protected Elijah, God also protects his church as they declare God's truth.

(?) Which two people in the Old Testament does Revelation 11:6 remind us of? If you do not know, see 1 Kings 17:1; Exodus 7:14–21. [13]

They were the two greatest prophets of the Old Testament. God spoke through them both when his people were under terrible threat. God protected them both from those who did not like their messages.

(?) What disaster happens in Revelation 11:7–10? [14]

(?) What wonderful thing happens next in verses 11–12? [15]

Throughout history there have been times when the church has been terribly persecuted, and even seemed to stop proclaiming the gospel. But then God has raised up believers elsewhere, or the persecuting power has been destroyed. We should always be ready for persecution.

(?) What other disaster happens and what is the result in verse 13? [16]

Persecution and God's protection

We feel sad and discouraged when Christians are put to death for their faith, and when people rejoice over their death.

The day Jesus was crucified was the most terrible day for Jesus' followers. The Messiah and all their hopes had died. But two days later (the third day) was the most wonderful day in the history of the whole world!

Sometimes we feel the same despair that the disciples felt on the day after Jesus died. Persecution can leave us feeling confused and hopeless. But when followers of Jesus die, it's not the end of their story. Our death is the doorway to a wonderful eternal life in the presence of Jesus! Our perseverance will be richly rewarded!

In the book of Revelation, we are told that God's people may suffer and even die for their faith, but God will bring us all safely to the new Jerusalem.

John also suffered but he knew that it was only for a short time. He knew he would soon be in Jesus' eternal glorious kingdom. That is why he described himself as "*your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus*" (Revelation 1:9).

In this chapter, John was told to measure God's temple. This shows that God knows who belongs to him. He is with them and he will protect them. As we spend time with God each day, he reminds us of his presence and protection. So when we see or hear about persecution, or if we experience it ourselves, we should fix our eyes on the reward that Jesus has promised. We should continue to declare God's truth to the world.

The seventh trumpet

Read **Revelation 11:15–19**.

(?) What happens in verse 15? [17]

The first six trumpets were described in chapters 8 and 9 (see lesson 8). After the bad news about persecution, there is the good news of Jesus' victory over all the world!

(?) What do the voices from heaven in verse 15 say? [18]

The kingdom of the world means the world that does not submit to God and is under the power of Satan (John 12:31). But in the end, the kingdom of the world will be replaced by the kingdom of God. Satan will no longer be lord of the earth! Of course, he was never really in control. His authority was already restrained by God, but sometimes it seems to us as if he has all the power.

Persecution lasts only a short while. Jesus will return and reign for ever!

According to Revelation 11:15, God will rule and there will be no opposition! This will be the time of justice! He will more than compensate us for all we have suffered for him!

Read **Revelation 11:16–18** again.

(?) What will Jesus do when he returns (v.18)? [19]

Jesus will return to destroy his enemies and reward his people! He will soon take us to be with him for ever! Although we are now shamed and persecuted, soon God will honour and reward us. So let's fix our eyes on Jesus and not lose heart! (Hebrews 12:1–2)

Aisha's story

I used to work at the market in my village. It was a good, honest job. But when people found out I was a Christian, everything changed. It began with cold stares, whispers behind my back. Then after a while, my job was taken away. I was deeply afraid and I realized I couldn't stay any longer, and so I left for the city.

One day, I was walking to a brother's house, when I felt the Lord telling me not to go. I stopped in the middle of the market, confused, but then two brothers called me, telling me not to come because the police were looking for me. In the middle of the bustle of the marketplace, I tearfully asked God, "What should I do now?"

God sent an answer — a woman I knew offered me a house. She wouldn't let me pay a penny, as she just wanted me to be able to share the Word. One day, as I was speaking about Christ, her son repented! My heart was filled with gratitude.

But that same day, the police arrived, carrying guns. They took us away and questioned us endlessly. We were convicted and sentenced to two weeks in prison. During this time, we were beaten and humiliated, but after fifteen days they had to release us.

Even after that, they still watched us. But I still thank the Lord, because he filled me with courage, when I used to be afraid. The more intense the persecution, the stronger my faith became.

Discussion

What persecution have you faced for Jesus? What does this chapter teach you about that experience?

One day we will have no more opportunity to share the good news. Are you making the most of the opportunities that God is giving us? Share with each other who you have shared the gospel with in the last month.

Pray for each other to fix your eyes on Jesus so you will not grow weary and lose heart!

Homework

Read **Revelation chapter 12** so you can be ready to study it in the next lesson. As you read, note down one thing that surprises or encourages you. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – *The temple of God and the altar with its worshippers.*
2 – They both lived in a time when the temple of God had been destroyed.
3 – The outer court is given to *the Gentiles.*
4 – For 42 months.
5 – 3½ years.
6 – It means a limited time, not for ever.
7 – God's two witnesses.
8 – The two witnesses represent all those who follow Jesus.
9 – 1,260 days.
10 – *Two olive trees and the two lampstands.*
11 – God is protecting us.
12 – *Fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies.*
13 – Elijah and Moses.
14 – The witnesses are killed and their bodies are left out in public for everyone to gloat over them.
15 – The witnesses come back to life and ascend to heaven.
16 – There was a terrible earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to God.
17 – *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven.*
18 – *The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah, and he will reign for ever!*
19 – Jesus will judge the dead, reward his servants and destroy those who destroy the earth.

Commentary

persecution and 42 months (11:2): The number "forty-two" months is symbolic of the period of suffering for God's people in the last days prophesied by the prophet Daniel (7:25; 9:27; 12:7, 11–12).

Forty-two is a significant number in the Old Testament. It was the number of places where God's people camped during their journey through the wilderness (Numbers 33). The Israelites' time of wandering in the wilderness after they had been saved from slavery and before they entered the promised land was a difficult time. In the same way, God's people today have been saved from slavery to sin (Revelation 1:5). They now live in difficult times. The final "seven" is not over yet! But soon they will enter God's eternal promised land where they will live in the full presence of God! All through the book of Revelation, John wants us to keep looking towards this glorious future that is awaiting us!

The two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth (11:4): After the exile, God gave the prophet Zechariah some visions about restoring the worship of God in Jerusalem. In one vision he saw two lampstands and two olive trees. The olive trees represented the governor Zerubbabel and the priest Joshua, who were the leaders of the first group of Jews to return from exile in Babylon. They had to rebuild the temple and then keep the olive oil lamps in the temple burning. God told them that they were "*anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth*" (Zechariah 4:3,14).

the beast (v.7): this represents earthly rulers, whom Satan uses to keep people from obeying God. We will learn more about him in Revelation 13.

the Abyss: The place where all evil comes from.

he will attack them, and overpower them and kill them (v.7):
- this is similar to the "*little horn*" (king) in the book of Daniel who "*was waging war against the holy people and defeating them until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment*" (Daniel 7:21–22).
- we have seen this before in the book of Revelation — faithful believers were put to death for their faith, but God brought them safely to glorious eternal life (2:13; 7:14–15).
- we know that people do sometimes die for their faith in Jesus. When this happens they are following the example of their Saviour.

their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city... some from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial (vv.8–9):
- in Rome at the time Revelation was written, the bodies of criminals, traitors and Christians were often left displayed on a street near the main market place.
- the horror of execution is made worse by the horror of the insult that they didn't bury them straight away.

The great city (v.8): This is Rome. But writing "Rome" would have been dangerous for John, so later in the book of Revelation this city is called Babylon (18:10). Both Rome and Babylon at different times had destroyed the city of Jerusalem and its temple.

Sodom (v.8): famous for being a very immoral and violent city that deserved God's judgment (Genesis 18:20; 19:24; Isaiah 1:9–10). Soon "Babylon", the great city, will face the same judgment as Sodom had faced.

Egypt (v.8): where God's people were enslaved and oppressed (Exodus 20:2). Egypt continued to be Israel's enemy long after the Israelites had left Egypt, and could not be relied upon to save Israel from her other enemies (Isaiah 31:1).

In the same way, Rome was not able to save people. It was immoral, violent and not to be trusted.

where their Lord was crucified (v.8): although Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem, that city was within the Roman Empire, and he was crucified by the Romans. In this sense, Jesus was crucified "in Rome".

three and a half days (v.11): this reminds us of the "*middle of the 'seven'*" (Daniel 9:27). The prophet Daniel used the words "days" and "years" interchangeably. So this again is talking about the time before Jesus' return. It is not seven days or years, it is only half of that. This means that this time will not last for ever! (See also Revelation 12:14; 13:5).

the breath of life entered them and they stood on their feet (v.11): the raising of the witnesses after 3½ days reminds us of Jesus' resurrection "on the third day" (Matthew 16:21). Just as Jesus was faithful even to death and then was raised up to a life more wonderful than before, so God's witnesses will rise again!

terror struck those who saw them (v.11): God's enemies will one day be shocked and terrified when they see that those they have been persecuting were in fact God's precious children. There will be no hope for them. They will have to face the full extent of God's wrath (2 Thessalonians 1:6–10). But God's people will enjoy the full extent of his love for them!

they went up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies looked on (v.12): the book of Revelation tells us many times that God's people who have suffered persecution will be publicly vindicated (e.g. 3:9).

there was a severe earthquake (v.13): like the sixth seal (6:12), this is God's final warning before the final judgment.

a tenth of the city collapsed (v.13): Seven thousand people were killed. Rome had over a million inhabitants, so this number is too small to be a tenth of the population. It is a symbolic number (7 times

1,000), indicating that a very large number of people would die, and that it was a complete number. With this huge number, the destruction is finished.

the second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon (v.14): the first woe was when the fifth angel sounded his trumpet, the second woe was when the sixth angel sounded his trumpet (Revelation 9:1, 12–13). The third woe is when the devil is cast down to earth (12:12) — this is the time we are living in, and it will be finished when Jesus returns to judge the world.

the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah (v.15): this reminds us of Psalm 2, which speaks about the Messiah (the anointed one) who will one day reign over all the earth.

he will reign (v.15): after speaking of both the Lord and his Christ, we read "*and he will reign*". God the Father and God the Son together share the throne. Together they reign as one person.

for ever and ever (v.15): it is not Rome, but God's kingdom, that will last for ever!

the nations were angry and your wrath has come (v.18): this again reminds us of Psalm 2. In this psalm we read, "*You will break them with a rod of iron*" (Psalm 2:9), which is quoted three times (Revelation 2:27;12:5; 19:15).

the time has come (v.18): As we saw in the Commentary to lesson 1, the New Testament has 2 Greek words for "time":

- "*Chronos*" is about the time something happens (e.g. on Sunday morning I will go to a meeting).
- "*Kairos*" tells us about the right or appointed time for something. It is used for something we have been waiting for a long time. This is the word used in Revelation 11:18: "*The time has come for judging the dead and rewarding your servants*". God does everything at exactly the right time.

the ark of his covenant (v.19): was a special box covered in gold, with two golden cherubim statues on the top. It contained the two tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them (Exodus 25:10–22). The ark of the covenant was the symbol of God's presence and his holiness. It stood behind a curtain. No one could look at it. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter behind the curtain and sprinkle blood on it to atone for the sins of God's people. The ark was lost when the Babylonians destroyed God's temple in 585BC. In this revelation (11:19) John sees the temple open and he sees the ark of the covenant. The way to God is open. God's covenant with his people will never be lost!

Revelation lesson 10

The heavenly war



Pusay's story (Persia, died around AD341)

Persecution in the Roman Empire mostly stopped when Constantine became emperor in AD312. But it continued in the east, outside the Roman Empire. Pusay was a well-known craftsman at the court of the king of Persia. One day he saw a Christian being publicly tortured to renounce his faith. Seeing that the Christian was beginning to waver, he loudly exclaimed before the assembled crowd, "Do not be afraid! Close your eyes to this brief suffering and you will see the light of Christ!" When the authorities heard that he had said these words, he was arrested and was offered his life and position if he retracted his words and offered a sacrifice to the fire. However, he refused. So they tore out his tongue and then executed him. Truly he was given a wonderful welcome into heaven! The story of his faithfulness to the end was a special encouragement to Christians who lived along the Silk Road from Persia to Central Asia.

Revelation chapters 12 to 14 tell us about the war that is going on between God and Satan. It is a war that has been going on ever since the garden of Eden. This war will soon end when Jesus returns in glory! Then there will be a new heaven and a new earth, where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain! (21:1–4)

In this lesson we will learn about the defeat of Satan.

The Messiah is born

Read **Revelation 12:1–6**.

In these verses we read about the birth of the Messiah, and Satan's attempts to destroy him. We read about two characters — a woman and a dragon. The woman symbolizes God's people. The dragon symbolizes the devil.

(?) What do the woman and the dragon symbolize? [1]

Clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head (v.1): in the book of Genesis, Joseph had a dream in which the sun, moon and eleven stars represented his father Jacob, his mother and his eleven brothers (Genesis 37:9–10). So the sun, moon and twelve stars mean the whole family of Jacob, later called Israel — that is, the whole people of God.

(?) In the Old Testament, who had a dream about the sun, moon and stars? [2]

(?) What do the sun, moon and twelve stars symbolize? [3]

In Revelation 12:1, the woman represents God's people of the Old Testament who "*gave birth to*" the Messiah (v.5). Without God's people of the Old Testament, there would be no Messiah! Once the woman has given birth, she symbolizes God's people of the New Testament (v.6).

(?) What are we told about the dragon in verse 3? [4]

(?) Let's think about what these details symbolize.

- **red**: is the colour of war (Revelation 6:4). The dragon is always at war against God's people
- **seven heads**: symbolize the apparent completeness of Satan's power. For the first readers of this book, who lived under the Roman Empire, it could appear that Satan's power was unstoppable. Since Satan can even appear as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), his deceptions can be incredibly convincing
- **ten horns**: symbolize the limited number of evil kings who will rule. The rulers who are Satan's servants will not continue for ever
- **seven crowns**: each emperor claimed to be a god who would live for ever. The devil always deceives people into believing that real power belongs to our earthly rulers.

The devil is frightening and wants us to believe that he is more powerful than anyone else.

(?) What did the dragon want to do at the end of Revelation 12:4? [5]

Throughout the Bible we see how Satan has tried to hinder God's plan for the world. He tries to do this in two different ways: he either encourages God's people to rebel against God, or when this fails, he tries to destroy them. For example, he encouraged Adam and Eve to rebel against God (Genesis 3:1–6). In the book of Esther, he used Haman to try to destroy the people of God. In the gospels we read how Satan tempted Jesus to rebel against God (e.g. Matthew 4:1–11) and then tried to destroy him by inciting people to crucify him.

(?) What are the two ways that Satan tries to hinder God's plan for the world? [6]

(?) What are we told about the child who is born in the first part of Revelation 12:5? [7]

These words are from Psalm 2:9. In this Psalm King David prophesied that God will establish his Son as King of the whole earth. Those who rebel against his righteous rule will be punished, but those who submit to his rule will find refuge (Psalm 2:7–12).

(?) What happened to the child in the second part of Revelation 12:5? [8]

We do not read much about Jesus' life, death and resurrection in the book of Revelation. John had already written about these things in his gospel. Verse 5 tells us about Jesus' exaltation as the rightful ruler of the world (Ephesians 1:18–21). Jesus is now ruling with the Father in heaven. When persecution and suffering come, we should fix our eyes on him (Hebrews 12:1–3).

(?) What should we do when persecution and suffering come? [9]

In Revelation 12:6 we learn what happens to the woman, who now represents the New Testament people of God.

(?) In Revelation 12:6, where does the woman flee to? How long is she there? [10]

wilderness (v.6): the Old Testament people of God were in the wilderness (v.6) for 40 years, where God protected them and fed them. In the same way, he will protect his people today. Life can be very hard, just as living in the wilderness is hard. We need to remember that this world is not our home; we are on a journey to the eternal promised land!

1,260 days is the same as 42 months, which is the same as 3½ years. We have already seen this number in Revelation 11:2–3 (lesson 9). The number 7 represents completeness. 3½ is half of 7, so 3½ years means a limited time — not for ever. Life in the wilderness is hard, but it will not last forever.

(?) How many years is 1,260 days? What does this represent (v.6)? [11]

Although life is hard, God is caring for us. Jesus is coming back soon!

What do we need to remember when life is hard? [12]

Satan is thrown down to earth

Read **Revelation 12:7–12**.

Michael (v.7): is an archangel who fights together with the other angels in their warfare against demons. He is the "*great prince*" who protects God's people (Daniel 12:1).

(?) What happens to the great dragon and his angels in verse 9? [13]

On the cross, Jesus defeated Satan, and Satan was thrown down from heaven to earth!

(?) What is Satan called (v.9)? What does he do (v.10)? [14]

Until Jesus' death and resurrection, Satan had unceasingly been accusing God's people to God. Sadly, all he said was true: they really had failed in every way to obey God's laws. But now he can no longer accuse God's people, because "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). So, "*there is now no condemnation for those who are*

in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Satan can no longer rightly accuse God's people, because Jesus shares his righteousness with us!

We must never listen to the lies that Satan whispers in our ears! We are God's much-loved children. However much we may fail God, we can always repent and come back to him. He will always show us his love and compassion!

(?) What do we need to remember when Satan accuses us of sin? [15]

(?) In the first part of Revelation 12:11 how do God's people triumph over Satan? [16]

by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (v.11): On the cross, Jesus took God's just punishment for the whole world on himself. Our sins have been atoned for! So God's people triumph over Satan when they trust not in their own good works but in Jesus' death for them, and when they testify to others.

They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (v.11): every day people around the world are put to death for their faith in Jesus. They live on in God's glorious presence, free from all pain and sorrows (Rev 20:4). This is more blessed than the longest and most prosperous life on earth!

(?) How can we triumph over Satan (v.11)? [17]

Challenge

Are you speaking boldly about Jesus?

If we listen to Satan's lies, we will not be able to speak about Jesus. The best way to protect yourself from Satan's lies is to immerse yourself in the truth.

Don't let a day go by without meditating on God's word! We should daily thank God for what Jesus did for us on the cross and share encouragement from God's word with other believers. Then we will shine like stars in this dark world (Philippians 2:15).

Read **Revelation 12:13–17**.

We must not forget that God is caring for us and protecting us. God enables his people to escape Satan and is looking after his people in the "*wilderness*".

(?) How did Satan try to destroy God's people in verse 15? [18]

In the Old Testament, a flood is an image of overwhelming threats. For example, "*The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me*" (Psalm 18:4).

(?) What does the earth do to help the woman in Revelation 12:16? [19]



God gives us this wonderful promise: "*When you pass through the waters, I am with you; when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you*" (Isaiah 43:2). We can hold on to this promise when we feel we are being overwhelmed.

The dragon was enraged (Revelation 12:17): Satan is angry that he is failing. He is waging war against all who believe and trust in Jesus. We are in a spiritual battle against Satan and his angels (Ephesians 6:10–20). This helps us understand what is happening when life is hard and painful. Satan wants us to stop following Jesus.

(?) According to verse 7, what are the two signs that someone is a follower of Jesus? [20]

Jesus says to us that the kingdom of God is coming. His reward will be greater than we can imagine. He loves us. His angels are serving us. He has given us the Holy Spirit so we can overcome the devil.

Hamza's story

One day, I was holding a house meeting, a simple fellowship of young brothers and sisters. Suddenly, the door opened and an inspection team entered my home. Their goal was clear: to see who was meeting and to find Christian materials. I knew that if they found anything, we could be fined or jailed for at least two weeks.

When they started searching, my heart sank. They opened cabinets, checked shelves, and questioned everyone. In my cabinet, not hidden at all, were disks of sermons, books and audio materials. This was the evidence they needed to send me and my brothers to prison for a long time.

They stayed for three hours. Three hours that seemed like years. The whole time, we were all praying. I whispered to God, "Lord, close their eyes. Protect us." And God heard! They searched hard, turning everything over, but it was as if they couldn't see what was right in front of them. The disks remained totally invisible to them. I saw how the Lord protected us. He knows how to perform miracles so quietly that it is impossible to explain in human words.

Discussion

What did Hamza learn about God?

What lies does Satan tell you? Give some examples. What are the answers you should give to him?

Share with each other what God has been teaching you through this lesson.

Practise explaining to the person beside you, the two ways Satan tries to hinder God's plan, and how God's people can triumph over Satan (v.11). Try to say both from memory.

Pray for each other to remember these things and to stand firm, whatever happens in the weeks and years ahead.

Homework

Read **Revelation chapter 13** so you can be ready to study it in the next lesson. As you read, note down one thing that helps you understand what is happening in the world today. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – The woman symbolizes God's people. The dragon symbolizes the devil.
2 – Joseph.
3 – Again they symbolize the whole people of God.
4 – It has seven heads, ten horns and seven crowns.
5 – He wanted to destroy the child as soon as it was born.
6 – He either encourages them to rebel against God or, when this fails, he tries to destroy them.
7 – He *will rule the nations with an iron sceptre.*
8 – He *was snatched up to God and to his throne.*
9 – We should fix our eyes on Jesus.
10 – She flees *into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.*
11 – Three and a half is half of 7, the perfect number. So 3½ years means not for ever.
12 – We need to remember that this world is not our home: we are on a journey to the eternal promised land and Jesus is coming back soon!
13 – They are *hurled to the earth!*
14 – *The accuser of our brothers and sisters.* He accuses believers.
15 – *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God!* (2 Corinthians 5:21) *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!* (Romans 8:1) So however much we may disobey God, we can always repent and come back to him. He will always show us his love and compassion!
16 – *By the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.*
17 – We too can triumph over Satan when we believe that Jesus' death has atoned for all our sins and when we tell others about him.
18 – From *his mouth, the serpent spewed water like a river to overtake the woman.*
19 – *The earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.*
20 – They *keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.*

Commentary

Satan tries to destroy the Messiah:

- King Herod tried to kill Jesus when he was a baby (Matthew 2:13–15).
- Satan tried to tempt Jesus to submit to him rather than God (Luke 4:1–13).
- Satan entered Judas Iscariot. Judas then agreed to betray Jesus to the Jewish leaders (Luke 22:1–6).
- Satan thought he had achieved what he wanted as the Messiah was crucified. But he rose to life again on the third day (Luke 23:33, 46)!

cried out in pain (12:2): the prophet Micah describes the sufferings of God's people as being like the pain of a woman in labour (Micah 4:10; 5:2–3). These sufferings eventually would result in the arrival of the Messiah.

the woman fled into the wilderness to... be taken care of for 1,260 days (12:6): 1,260 days equals 42 months which is 3½ years. John says the woman is taken care of for "*a time, times and half a time*" (v.14). This phrase refers to the same time period (also in Daniel 7:25; 12:7). Forty-two is an important number (in Revelation chapters 11–13 it is mentioned seven times); this number is also significant because the people of Israel stopped at 42 places during their 40 years in the desert (Numbers 33). God was taking care of his people in the desert during that time.

the great dragon... that ancient snake, called the devil or Satan (12:9): on top of the name "*dragon*", John lists these different names of God's enemy to emphasize that this is the defeat of **all** evil!

- "*the great dragon*" is a powerful and frightening heavenly creature
- the word "*devil*" is from the Greek word meaning "slanderer"
- the word "*Satan*" is from the Old Testament word meaning "accuser"
- the "*ancient snake*" who "*deceives the whole world*" — in Genesis chapter 3, Satan appeared to Eve as a snake and deceived her into disobeying God.

We may think that dragons are fire-breathing creatures with wings. But in the ancient world, they were usually thought of as giant snakes. Snakes are cunning, but dragons are frightening! Satan is both cunning and frightening.

In the garden of Eden, God told the snake that Satan and the "*offspring*" of Eve would always be enemies. But one day, the offspring of Eve would destroy Satan (Genesis 3:15). Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, God's people had been waiting for the person who would destroy Satan. The prophets of the Old Testament often spoke about the child who would be born to fulfil this promise (e.g. Isaiah 9:6–7; Micah 5:2–4).

Joy and woe (Revelation 12:12)

rejoice you heavens: those who follow the Lamb take part in this heavenly rejoicing (Revelation 19:6).

woe to the earth: the earth means those who follow the beast (Revelation 13:8).

and the sea: in the Old Testament the sea is a picture of chaos and opposition to God.

he knows his time is short: the Greek word is *kairos*, so it is not talking about years, but rather that God has decided the right time for Satan's complete destruction. Even so, he continues to fight with all his might.

Rescue (Revelation 12:14)

the two wings of a great eagle: in the same way, God carried his people from Egypt "*on eagles' wings*" (Exodus 19:4). This is a beautiful picture of God's care and power to take his people to where they need to be.

Revelation lesson 11

The two beasts



Yazdin's story (Persia, died around AD420)

Yazdin was from a well-known family. He was a wealthy court official in Persia who held a high government position. When persecution against Christians began again, the king of Persia personally tried to persuade him to renounce Christianity. He was promised that he could keep all his possessions, his position and his honour if he formally renounced Christ. However, he replied that he could not betray his faith for worldly gain. He was then stripped of his position, his property was confiscated and he was held under guard. Relatives and friends urged him to give in, at least outwardly, to spare his life but Yazdin refused to give in. After lengthy interrogations and torture, he was executed. Truly he was given a wonderful welcome into heaven! The story of his faithfulness to the end encouraged many other Christians who lived in Persia and Central Asia.

In this lesson we will see who is truly in control of this world — and who we should worship. Revelation chapter 13 reveals the powers that persecute God's people. It shows that behind every earthly empire stands the dragon himself. Persecution has a spiritual source. But that also means it is under God's ultimate control.

To understand this chapter, we begin with a dream the prophet Daniel had — a dream that God gave him to prepare his people for exactly what we face today.

Daniel's dream of four beasts

Read **Daniel 7:2–7**.

In his dream, Daniel saw four terrifying beasts rise from the sea. Each beast represented a powerful kingdom that would come. Let us look at what Daniel saw.

(?) What were the four beasts that Daniel saw? [1]

(?) What do the **ten horns** on the fourth beast represent (See Daniel 7:24.)? [2]

Later in Daniel chapter 7, the fourth beast grew another horn that "*looked more imposing than the others and... was waging war against the holy people and defeating them... The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time*" (Daniel 7:20–21, 25).

(?) What does "*a time, times and half a time*" represent? [3]

God was warning his people that there would be a **limited time** of suffering under a **limited number** of kings. In the book of Revelation, God gives us the same warning so that we are not surprised when we suffer. It will not last for ever — but we have a glorious future awaiting us if we stay faithful!

(?) What do we learn from Daniel's dream? [4]

The first beast

Read **Revelation 13:1–10**.

(?) Who does the dragon represent (Revelation 12:9)? [5]

(?) Where is the dragon standing? [6]

(?) What did John see rising out of the sea (Revelation 13:1)? [7]

A beast (v.1): symbolizes a powerful kingdom or empire. For John's readers, this was the Roman Empire. For us today it represents any powerful earthly power that opposes God's people.

The sea (v.1): in the Bible, the Israelites were not good sailors and generally feared the sea. So the sea represents danger, chaos and evil. But God has authority over both land and sea (Revelation 10:2, 5, 8). Satan and his powerful earthly empires can do no more than God allows — and then only for a short time.

(?) What does the beast look like in verse 1? [8]

This creature is not meant to be drawn — it is a symbol of the situation we live in! Let us look at each detail:

- **ten horns**: symbolize that God will allow only a **limited** number of kings to rule
- **seven heads**: symbolize that when we live under a powerful ruler, it can *appear* as if their power is absolute
- **ten crowns on its horns**: symbolize that the beast's power is limited. Compare with the true King who has **many** crowns! (Revelation 19:12)
- **blasphemous names**: when Roman emperors claimed to be gods, they were blaspheming the one true God.

(?) In what ways is this description of the beast encouraging to us? [9]

(?) What three animals is the beast like in Revelation 13:2? [10]

This beast is like all of Daniel's four beasts combined into one. It is as terrifying as all the evil empires in history combined! And like Daniel's visions, John's vision is about the time between Jesus' ascension and his return — the time we are living in right now. So we should not be surprised when we suffer for following Jesus.

Satan not only tries to **destroy** God's people. His other strategy is to **deceive** them into worshipping false gods. In this way, people end up worshipping Satan himself (v.4). To claim to be neutral is already to be on Satan's side.

(?) What does the dragon give the beast in verse 2? [11]

Just as God gave his power, throne and authority to Jesus (Revelation 12:10), so Satan gives his power, throne and authority to the beast. Satan always imitates God — but what God gives is life, and what Satan gives leads to death.

(?) What happened to one of the beast's heads in verse 3? [12]

(?) Who does this remind us of? [13]

Satan tries to deceive people by imitating God so that they will worship anything other than God himself.

(?) How does Satan try to deceive people today? [14]

(?) How can we resist Satan's attempts to deceive us? [15]

Whenever we see persecution happening, we know that Satan is at work behind it!

(?) For how long does the beast have authority (v.5)? [16]

Remember: 42 months is the same as 3½ years, which is half of 7 the perfect number. So it means a limited time, not for ever.

(?) What does this period represent? [17]

(?) God has set a boundary on the beast's power. How wide is the beast's authority (v.7)? [18]

(?) There is no person in the world who has not been influenced by Satan's lies in some way!

(?) Who are the only people who do not worship the beast (v.8)? [19]

Those who do not submit to Jesus' rule are actually worshipping the beast. We must not believe that there is any way to God except through Jesus. Read **John 14:6**.

The second beast

Read **Revelation 13:11–18**.

The first beast represents the Roman Empire — the great earthly power that oppressed God's people. The second beast represents the local rulers who served under Rome and pressured people to worship the emperor.

(?) What do the first and second beasts represent? [20]

(?) What does the second beast look like in verse 11? [21]

Notice how deceptive the second beast is: it looks like a lamb but speaks like a dragon. It appears gentle, religious, even good — but it is serving Satan. We must not be deceived by persuasive people or religious leaders who demand absolute obedience to themselves rather than to God.

The three tests we learned in lesson 3 are vital here. How can we know if a teacher is speaking truth?

Three tests for true teaching

1. **Bible test:** does their message agree with the whole Bible? The more we read God's Word, the better we can recognize false teaching.
2. **Character test:** does their life show the fruit of the Holy Spirit? (Matthew 7:15–16; Galatians 5:22–23)
3. **Other leaders test:** does their teaching agree with what faithful teachers in other churches also teach?

Satan imitates the Trinity — the dragon imitates God the Father, the first beast imitates God the Son, and the second beast imitates the Holy Spirit. But where God gives life and freedom, Satan gives only slavery and death.

(?) What is the number of the beast in verse 18? [22]

Six represents imperfection and evil because it is one less than seven, the perfect number, and anything that is not completely good is bad. So 666 means completely evil — the fullest possible expression of rebellion against God.

? What does the number six represent? [23]

Just as "*Holy, holy, holy*" means completely holy in Hebrew, the number 666 means completely evil. But remember that the beast's power is limited. His time is short.

God is still on the throne

Revelation chapter 13 is not the end of history! Let us return to Daniel chapter 7. Right in the middle of Daniel's terrifying vision of earthly beasts, God shows him a vision of heaven itself:

"*As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat... Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened*" (Daniel 7:9–10).

Then, as Daniel watches, the terrifying beast is destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire (v.11). This is what happens in Revelation 20:10.

And then Daniel sees something magnificent:

"*One like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed*" (Daniel 7:13–14).

In the gospels, Jesus referred to himself as "*the Son of Man*", pointing his followers back to this very vision. He is the one Daniel saw! He has been given all **authority, glory and sovereign power**. He is the one who will reign for ever — over every empire, every beast, every ruler.

? In what ways do these verses from Daniel chapter 7 encourage us? [24]

Everyone must choose — will they be faithful to the Son of Man, or will they follow a false god under the influence of Satan? Those who say they worship nothing are deceiving themselves — there is no neutral position (Matthew 12:30). The beast demands our worship. So does Jesus. But only Jesus conquered death. We must worship him!

Challenge

Are you speaking boldly about Jesus?

If we listen to Satan's lies, we will not be able to speak about Jesus. The best way to protect yourself from Satan's lies is to immerse yourself in the truth of God's Word.

Don't let a day go by without meditating on God's Word! Share encouragement from Scripture with other believers every day. Then you will shine like stars in this dark world (Philippians 2:15).

Jannat's story

In the years after my husband and I came to faith, the Lord led us out of many difficulties. But serious tests of our faith also came.

One day, my husband was taken to prison. They questioned him over and over: why had he abandoned his former faith and become a believer? For me, it was a time of great uncertainty and pain. While my husband was in prison, I had to return to my parents' home, afraid of what they would say. My father was an atheist and only believed in himself, while my mother was Muslim. When my father learned what happened, he scolded me: "You chose your God — look at what he's done to you." With tears in my eyes, I said: "Perhaps God allowed this so that I could be a witness." Enraged, my father kicked me out, but my mother supported me. She came with me to visit my husband in prison, waiting while they interrogated me, afraid I might be imprisoned too.

I was constantly watched. My relatives accused me of being *haram*. Even fellow believers were afraid to support us. I often asked, "God, where are you?" One day, they told me that if I renounced my faith, my husband would be released. I refused.

Later, I learned that many people in prison had repented because of my husband. After many months, he was released. God preserved our faith — and our family.

Discussion

What did Jannat learn about God?

Share with each other how Revelation chapter 13 helps you make sense of your own situation. What have you learned?

What lies does Satan tell you? What answers does God's Word give to those lies?

Practise explaining to the person beside you what the first and second beasts represent and what the three tests for true teaching help us to do? Try to say all of this from memory.

Pray for each other to faithfully follow Jesus and not to be deceived!

Homework

Read **Revelation chapter 14** so you can be ready to study it in the next lesson. As you read, note down one thing that gives you hope or courage. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – The first was like a lion. The second was like a bear. The third was like a leopard. Daniel does not compare the fourth beast to any animal — it was very powerful and simply terrifying, with ten horns.
2 – Ten horns means a limited number of kings who will rule.
3 – This is the same as three and a half years (Revelation 11:2–3), which means not for ever, but a limited time.
4 – We should not be surprised when we suffer. Our suffering will not last for ever — but we have a glorious future awaiting us if we stay faithful!
5 – Satan.
6 – On the shore of the sea.
7 – A beast coming out of the sea.
8 – It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.
9 – Although the beast may appear to have absolute power, its power is actually limited. God is in control!
10 – A leopard, a bear and a lion.
11 – His power, his throne and great authority.
12 – One of its heads seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed.
13 – Jesus, who died and came back to life on the third day (Luke 24:1–8).
14 – Examples:
- persuading people that it is too dangerous to meet for worship;
- encouraging people to follow man-made religion;
- encouraging people to go to folk healers instead of trusting God;
- drawing people into addictions (social media, drugs, money).

15 – Examples:
- encouraging each other to read the Bible every day;
- calling each other on the phone;
- sharing what the Lord is teaching us;
- testing all teaching by the three tests.

16 – Forty-two months.
17 – This is not for ever — it is a limited time.
18 – Over every tribe, people, language and nation — the whole world.
19 – All whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.
20 – The first beast represents the Roman Empire (and any other earthly empire that opposes God's people). The second beast represents the local rulers who serve under the empire and enforce its demands.
21 – It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon.
22 – 666.
23 – Six is one less than the perfect number seven, so it represents imperfection and evil. So 666 means completely evil.
24 – God is the all-powerful judge! Satan will be destroyed! Jesus has been given all authority, glory and sovereign power. One day all nations and peoples of every language will worship him!

Commentary

Seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed (v.3): this mirrors "*the Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne*" (5:6). The Roman Empire looked as if it might fall after the evil Emperor Nero in AD68, when civil war broke out. But it came back stronger than before. Satan always imitates God — but it is only imitation.

the whole world followed the beast (v.3): in spite of this, there will be believers from every nation who follow Jesus (7:9). Today, over two billion people in the world call themselves Christians!

who can wage war against it? (v.4): See Revelation 12:7–8. Michael fights with the authority of Jesus the Messiah and will overpower the beast and the dragon. This conquest will be complete when Jesus returns as the rider on the white horse (Revelation 19:11–15).

proud words and blasphemies (v.5): this mirrors the little horn in Daniel's vision that spoke boastfully against the Most High and oppressed his holy people (Daniel 7:8, 11, 25). The same spirit of proud rebellion against God appears in every age.

from the creation of the world (v.8): God chose us for his kingdom since the very beginning (Ephesians 1:4) and as soon as he created it, he planned to redeem the world! (Matthew 25:34)

it performed great signs (v.13): these signs are a direct challenge to the miracles God performs through his servants. Even in the Old Testament, false prophets could perform miraculous signs (Exodus 7:22; Deuteronomy 13:1–3). See also Matthew 24:24. We must not be deceived by miracle workers who only draw attention to themselves. If they do not preach that Jesus is the only way to God the Father, then we should not follow them.

an image in honour of the beast (v.14): images have always been used by those in power to reinforce their authority. King Nebuchadnezzar made a colossal gold statue that everyone was required to worship (Daniel 3:1). The Roman Empire had statues of the emperor everywhere. The same principle of forced loyalty operates in many systems of power today.

to receive a mark on their foreheads (v.16): this imitates the seal God puts on his people's foreheads in 7:3. Satan has no power to create — he can only imitate God and corrupt the good that God has made. We must remember this and be alert to his schemes.

causing fire to come down from heaven (v.13): this is like the prophet Elijah calling down fire in 1 Kings 18:38. The second beast's apparent miracles are designed to deceive — they are counterfeits of God's genuine power.

Revelation lesson 12

I saw the Lamb



The story of Mar Shimon Bar Sabba'e (Persia, died AD341)

In the early fourth century, the Roman Empire under Constantine began to support Christianity. The Persian Empire was at war with the Roman Empire. So the Persian authorities began to suspect that Christians were on the side of the enemy. The head of the Persian Church was Mar Shimon Bar Sabba'e. The king demanded that Shimon collect a double tax from Christians to finance military campaigns against Rome. Shimon refused, considering it unfair to impose an additional burden on believers. He was then arrested and brought to trial. The king then offered to spare his life and position if he worshipped the sun and recognized the supremacy of the Zoroastrian religion. Shimon replied that he would not worship creation instead of the Creator.

After several months of imprisonment, he was led out to execution along with many other church leaders. Before his death, Shimon was forced to watch as his companions were killed one by one. Many could have saved their lives by renouncing their faith, but none did. When his turn came, he calmly prayed for the church and his brothers in the faith. Then he was beheaded. Truly they were all given a wonderful welcome into heaven! The story of his faithfulness to the end encouraged many other Christians who lived in Persia and Central Asia.

Share one thing that you learned from lesson 11.

The last two chapters showed us the terrible battle between God and Satan. At the end of chapter 13, it seemed as if Satan was winning. But chapter 14 begins with these wonderful words: "*Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion!*" When life feels very difficult, we must do what John did — stop and look up at the Lamb!

The Lamb and his people

Read **Revelation 14:1–5**.

(?) Who is the Lamb in verse 1, and what do we know about him? (See Revelation 5:6, 9 and 12.) [1]

(?) Where is the Lamb standing (14:1)? [2]

Mount Zion

Jerusalem was built on Mount Zion, where the temple stood — the place where God chose to dwell with his people (Psalm 74:2). God had promised to send his deliverer, the Messiah, to Mount Zion (Isaiah 62:11). But when God sent his Messiah, his people rejected and crucified him there. So in AD70, God allowed the Romans to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. Now John sees the heavenly new Jerusalem, which will never be destroyed!

(?) In the Old Testament, what was on Mount Zion? [3]

(?) How many people are standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion in Revelation 14:1? [4]

We have read about this number in Revelation 7 (lesson 8). The number 12 represents the complete number of God's people (twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles). One thousand is a very large number. $12 \times 12 \times 1{,}000 = 144{,}000$. This is not a literal count but a symbol: it represents all the believers who have ever lived, all who are alive now, and all who will ever believe — a vast and complete multitude belonging to God.

(?) Who is standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion? [5]

God's people in the New Jerusalem includes **all** who love Jesus! In chapter 13, the beast came out of the sea — a place of danger and evil. But in chapter 14, the Lamb stands on Mount Zion — a holy and safe place. Instead of persecution, there is peace and security.

(?) What is written on the foreheads of believers (14:1)? [6]

This shows that believers belong to God the Father and to Jesus Christ. The Lamb and the Father cannot be separated!

(?) How does John describe the sound he hears in verse 2? [7]

(?) What does this tell us about worship in the new Jerusalem? [8]

Does this describe your worship? When we gather with other believers, we raise our voices to join in the worship that is already going on in heaven! In some circumstances it is not possible to sing loudly, but we can praise God loudly in our hearts! (Ephesians 5:19–20)

(?) What is the new song about (Revelation 5:9–10; 14:3)? [9]

Only those who have been redeemed can truly understand the wonder of redemption (1 Corinthians 1:18). Even now on earth, we proclaim this truth: Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him! (John 14:6)

(?) How are believers described in Revelation 14:4–5? [10]

Let us think carefully about each description:

- **they remained virgins**: meaning they were faithful to Jesus. Believers are the bride of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9). They were not unfaithful to Jesus with their words or actions.
- **they follow the Lamb wherever he goes**: believers follow their master, whatever it costs them (Matthew 16:24).
- **purchased from among mankind**: Jesus set us free from slavery to sin, just as a slave could be set free in the Roman world (Romans 6:17–18; 1 Corinthians 6:20).
- **first fruits**: the Israelites offered the first part of the harvest to God, trusting that a much greater harvest would follow (Deuteronomy 26:1–11). Followers of Jesus are part of that great harvest, and we should offer ourselves to God (Romans 12:1).
- **no lie was found in their mouths**: followers of Jesus must be known as those who speak the truth and explain the truth about Jesus (Ephesians 4:25).
- **they are blameless**: the church is the bride that will one day be presented to Christ as holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:27). Do our lives show the purity of Jesus?

Three angels and their messages

Read **Revelation 14:6–13**.

(?) Who is the first angel's message for (v.6)? [11]

(?) What is the first angel's message (v.7)? [12]

(?) What is the second angel's message (v.8)? What does this mean? [13]

The second angel announces Babylon's fall as something that has **already** happened — not something still to come. Satan was defeated when Jesus died on the cross and rose again. This is why we do not need to be afraid of those who persecute us.

(?) What is the third angel's message (vv.9–11)? [14]

(?) What does verse 12 tell us that believers must do? [15]

God is offering every person in the world the opportunity to escape his coming judgment. We must tell people now, before it is too late! (John 3:16)

For their deeds will follow them (v.13): Jesus knows our deeds, our love and faith, our service and perseverance (Revelation 2:19). Our service for him will be richly rewarded when he returns (Matthew 16:27).

Two harvests

Read **Revelation 14:14–20**.

(?) How is the judgment on the world described in verse 15? [16]

Jesus described the end of this age as a harvest of the good and the bad (Matthew 13:38–39). In Revelation 14:14–20, we read about two harvests:

1. The **grain harvest** of the faithful (vv.14–16). See also **1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**.
2. The **grape harvest** of those who have opposed God (vv.17–20).

(?) What will happen to those who have opposed God (vv.19–20)? [17]

God's judgment will be a terrible time. But God is offering all people the opportunity to escape it now. We must tell others before it is too late.

Challenge

Jesus bought us with his own blood, taking us away from slavery to sin. How does belonging to Jesus affect the way you live each day?

Pray about the descriptions of believers in Revelation 14:4–5. Ask Jesus to help you grow in the areas where you find it most difficult.

Ibrahim's story

I was born to believing parents in a small village. As I grew up, my whole family prayed and read God's Word together. The other people in the village saw that we were different: my father did not drink and our home was always open, with hospitality and kindness, to others.

Inspections were frequent. Officials would enter our home, throw things on the floor, and search through our belongings. When I was young, I did not understand why this was happening. But I saw that other children would not play with me. It became worse at school — my classmates looked at me as if I were a criminal. I began to ask God, "Why is this happening to me? Are you really

there?" I looked at my father, who suffered more than I did, but never turned away from God. His faith gave me the strength to continue.

One day, my father and I went to the city. There I saw something I had never seen in our village: a large group of believers, praising God and praying together. There were even many young people my age. I understood that we were not alone — there were many others who loved the Lord as we did. The Lord showed me that he was always near. He changed my heart, so that I could forgive and love people, even those who treated me badly.

Discussion

What has God been saying to you through this lesson?

Share with each other what makes it difficult to tell others about God's judgment and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Practise explaining to the person beside you the six descriptions of believers (vv.4–5). Which of these are you finding most difficult at the moment?

Pray for each other to make the necessary changes in your lives.

Homework

1. **Pray** about the characteristics of believers in verses 4–5. Ask Jesus to make you the follower he has called you to be.

2. Read **Revelation chapters 15–16** so you can be ready to study them in the next lesson. As you read, note down one thing that strikes you about God's judgment. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – Jesus the Messiah, who was slain, and *with his blood purchased for God persons from every tribe, language, people and nation*. He now reigns in heaven, worthy of all praise.
2 – On Mount Zion.
3 – Jerusalem and the temple — the place where God dwelt with his people.
4 – 144,000 believers.
5 – All the believers who have ever lived, all who are alive now, and all who will ever believe — a complete and vast multitude belonging to God.
6 – The Lamb's name and the Father's name.
7 – The sound of rushing waters, thunder, and harpists playing their harps.

8 – It is loud, powerful and beautiful!
9 – Jesus the Messiah died to redeem us from our sins.
10 – They did not defile themselves; they remained faithful. *They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.*
11 – To every nation, tribe, language and people.
12 – We must fear and worship God alone, because he is going to judge the world.
13 – Babylon has fallen. This means Satan's empire is already defeated!
14 – Those who are on Satan's side will suffer eternal punishment.
15 – Believers must endure patiently, keep God's commands and remain faithful to Jesus.
16 – As a harvest of the people of the world.
17 – They are thrown into *the great winepress of God's wrath.*

Commentary

his name and his Father's name written on foreheads (v.1): this reminds us of the high priest's clothing, which included a gold plate on his turban with the words "*Holy to the Lord*" written on it (Exodus 28:36–37). In the New Testament, all those who follow Jesus are consecrated to God in the same way. We are all God's priests! (1 Peter 2:9)

the new song (v.3): only those who have been redeemed can fully understand the wonder of what Jesus has done for them (see notes on Revelation 5:9).

redeemed from the earth (v.3): believers are not removed from the earth, but they are different from the "*inhabitants of the earth*" (Revelation 13:8). They now live as citizens of heaven, even while the beast attacks them on earth (Revelation 13:7).

the eternal gospel (v.6): the word "gospel" means an announcement of good news. In the time of the Roman Empire, a gospel was an announcement by the emperor — of a victory, a holiday or a gift to the people. The gospel of Jesus Christ is far more wonderful than any of these rewards. God wants everyone to know that Satan has been defeated (1 John 3:8), that Jesus has risen from the dead and is Lord (Acts 2:32–36), and that God is inviting all people to receive the Holy Spirit and have eternal life (Acts 2:38; John 3:16).

"***Fallen is Babylon the great***" (v.8): Babylon was a symbol for Rome (1 Peter 5:13). But Rome was not the real enemy — it was only an instrument of Satan. So Babylon represents the whole kingdom of Satan. Although it is easy to think of a government that persecutes God's people as the real enemy, we must remember that the real enemy is Satan. Our struggle is not against people (Ephesians 6:12). Our task is to stand firm in God's strength and pray (Ephesians 6:13–18). Satan was defeated when Jesus died and rose again. His kingdom will soon fall completely.

the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever (v.11): this echoes the prophet Isaiah's description of the destruction of Edom (Isaiah 34:8–10). The image speaks of a punishment that has no end.

rest (v.11): this is God's gift to those who obey him (Matthew 11:28). Those who worship the beast will never find rest. But those who die in the Lord will rest (Revelation 14:13).

great winepress of God's wrath (v.19): this image comes from the prophet Joel's description of God's judgment (Joel 3:12–13; Isaiah 63:3). The crushing of grapes to produce wine was a familiar picture of judgment in the Old Testament.

blood flowed out of the press (v.20): this is an image of terrible destruction. The prophet Ezekiel used it when speaking of God's coming judgment (Ezekiel 32:6). It shows how serious God's judgment on sin truly is. Yet Jesus himself took that judgment upon himself on the cross, dying outside the city. "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Revelation lesson 13

The seven bowls of God's wrath



The story of Shmuni and her sons (Persia, died about AD341–344)

During one wave of persecutions in the Persian empire, a Christian woman named Shmuni was seized together with her sons and brought to trial.

Persian officials decided to take advantage of Shmuni's motherly love. They promised Shmuni freedom, safety, and the survival of her entire family if she convinced her sons to renounce Christ and worship the sun. The authorities were certain the mother would not be able to bear to see her children suffer.

But the opposite happened. Shmuni began to strengthen her sons in their faith. She reminded them that earthly life is temporary, but God's kingdom is eternal. Then the executions began. The sons were taken out one by one. After the death of each, the next was again offered life in exchange for renunciation. Each time, the answer remained the same: they refused to betray their faith. Although they were supposed to kill Shmuni too, it appears that she died of a broken heart before they were able to. Truly they were all given a wonderful welcome into heaven! The story of their faithfulness to the end encouraged many other Christians who lived in Persia and Central Asia.

Share one thing that you learned from lesson 12.

In this lesson we will read about the seven bowls of God's wrath (Revelation chapters 15–16). These chapters teach us to be ready for Jesus' return in glory. He calls out to anyone who will listen: "*Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed*" (Revelation 16:15).

"For You Alone Are Holy!"

Read **Revelation chapter 15**.

Chapter 15 is an introduction to the seven bowls. Before the final judgments fall, John sees the people of God worshipping. This is important: the song comes before the bowls of God's wrath. God's people are called to worship even when judgment is near.

(?) How many angels and how many plagues are there (v.1)? [1]

(?) What do the seven plagues represent (v.1)? [2]

(?) Who does John see in verse 2, and what does this mean? [3]

Those who had been victorious over the beast (v.2): These are those who refused to worship evil rulers or join in the evil they promoted. Instead, they remained faithful to Jesus. In each of the seven letters to the churches, we read about the wonderful rewards awaiting those who are victorious (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). Whatever we suffer now, the reward will be far greater!

(?) What are these victorious people standing beside (15:2)? [4]

The sea of glass represents God's holy presence. A floor made of glass the size of a sea would have been unimaginably beautiful to John's first readers. This tells us that all God's people — not only priests — now enjoy the glory of his presence!

(?) Whose song were the victors singing in verse 3? [5]

This is a song praising what God has done through both Moses and the Lamb. Through **Moses**, God saved his people from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 20:2). This was a picture of a much greater rescue to come. Through **the Lamb**, Jesus the Messiah, God saved his people from slavery to sin and death! (Romans 6:22–23)

(?) What is the difference between God's rescue through Moses and his rescue through Jesus? [6]

(?) What do we learn about God from this song (Revelation 15:3–4)? Find eight things. [7]

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Challenge

The victors sing this song *before* they enter the new Jerusalem, still close to the suffering they have endured. They do not wait until their difficulties are over before they worship God.

Do you praise and worship God even in difficult times? This week, try using Psalm 138 as a basis for praising God each day. Notice how the writer praises God in the middle of difficulty, not only after it has passed.

(?) What is opened in heaven in Revelation 15:5? [8]

In the Old Testament, the Most Holy Place in the temple represented the presence of God. Only one priest could enter it, and only once a year (Leviticus 16:11–14).

(?) When Jesus died on the cross, what happened in the Most Holy Place (Matthew 27:51)? [9]

(?) What does this tell us? [10]

The heavenly temple is now open — and all who trust in Jesus can come into God's presence! (Hebrews 10:19–22)

(?) How are the angels clothed (Revelation 15:6)? [11]

(?) Who gives the angels the seven bowls of God's wrath (v.7)? [12]

The seven bowls

Read **Revelation chapter 16**.

In Revelation chapters 6–11 we read about the seven seals and the seven trumpets. Like the seven bowls, these all describe the same truth: God is sending judgments on a rebellious world to warn people and call them to repentance. The seals and trumpets showed **partial** calamities. But the bowls are **total and final**: "*with them God's wrath is completed*" (15:1).

(?) What do the seven seals, trumpets and bowls all describe? What is the difference between the seals and trumpets, and the seven bowls? [13]

The seven bowls are similar to the plagues God sent on Egypt when Pharaoh refused to free his people (Exodus chapters 7–10). Those plagues were a warning to a people who would not repent. These bowls are far worse — they are the final expression of God's wrath on a world that has persistently refused to turn to him.

Let's look at each bowl and what it brings:

1. **First bowl, on the land**: people who had the mark of the beast get painful sores on their bodies (16:2).
2. **Second and third bowls, on the sea and rivers**: the waters turn to blood, fish die and there is nothing to drink (vv.3–4).
3. **Fourth bowl, on the sun**: people are scorched with intense heat (v.8).
4. **Fifth bowl, on the throne of the beast**: darkness covers his kingdom and people are in agony (v.10).
5. **Sixth bowl, on the River Euphrates**: the river dries up and evil spirits gather the kings of the whole world for battle (vv.12–14).
6. **Seventh bowl, into the air**: there is lightning, thunder, the greatest earthquake in history and huge hailstones (vv.17–21).

(?) Where does the angel pour the first bowl and what is the result (v.2)? [14]

(?) Where do the angels pour the second and third bowls and what is the result (vv.3–4)? [15]

(?) In verses 5–6, what does the angel say about God's judgments? [16]

(?) Why are the punishments caused by the second and third bowls described as "*just*" (v.5)? [17]

(?) How do people react to the punishments of the bowls (vv.9, 11)? [18]

God is sending these calamities to warn the world and to call people to repentance. But most people do not repent. Instead, they blame God for their suffering. This is a serious warning to us: disasters are God's call to turn to him — not a reason to turn away from him.

(?) What did John see coming out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet (v.13)? [19]

(?) Where does the seventh bowl bring its punishment, and what happens (vv.17–21)? [20]

"It is done!" (v.17): reminds us of when Jesus cried out "*It is finished!*" before he died on the cross (John 19:30). The seventh bowl completes God's punishment of the world. The bowls show us what God's complete wrath against sin looks like. This is exactly what Jesus absorbed in our place on the cross — so that all who trust in him will never face that wrath themselves. The punishment of the sins of the world was completed at the cross. All who believe in Jesus can be forgiven and have eternal life! (John 3:36)

(?) Why does God not punish those of us who believe in Jesus? [21]

Why does God need to judge the world?

Here are three reasons. For each one, think of how you would explain it to someone who does not yet believe:

1. **God is the Creator.** He made the world and everyone in it. Everyone owes obedience to him.

2. **God is holy.** He is preparing a perfect city — the new Jerusalem — for his people. He cannot allow evil to enter it.

3. **God is just.** A good judge cannot allow evil to go without punishment. All sin must be paid for.

The extraordinary truth about the cross is this: in Jesus' death, God shows that he is holy, just **and** merciful at the same time (Romans 3:21–26). Either we accept the payment Jesus has made for us, or we must face the cost of our own sin. There is no third option.

Which of the three reasons above do you find it most difficult to explain? **Practise** explaining it to the person beside you.

Ali's story

When I was 19 years old, my youth group and I were active in spreading the gospel. One day, we were invited to a gathering in a new neighbourhood. We praised the Lord, spoke together and shared. People were open to what we were saying. But then the police came.

They took our phones, held us until late at night and questioned us. Despite this, we knew the rest of the church was praying for us. A month later, the trial took place. I expected to be fined, but instead we were given prison sentences. We were taken directly from the courtroom to the prison.

The cell was small and dirty, with five of us in one room. But there were no beatings. Instead, we felt God's presence with us.

On the second day, we prayed together. The guards opened a window, and one of the brothers said, "If God opens a window today, he will open a door tomorrow."

The next day, we were questioned severely. They offered me freedom if I rejected Jesus. I replied, "I will never deny Jesus." After that, they threatened us even more. That afternoon, we were told there would be a retrial. On the third day, we were taken to a different city, where the court dropped all charges. We were released immediately.

God had opened the window, and then he opened the door. He was faithful to us, even in prison.

Discussion

Share with each other what you have learned through this lesson. In what ways are you not ready for Jesus' return? How can you become more ready?

When someone asks you why God allows disasters, what will you say? **Practise** answering this question using the three reasons from the box above.

Pray for each other to be ready for Jesus' return in glory!

Homework

Read **Revelation chapter 17** so you can be ready to study it in the next lesson. Be ready to share what you learned.

Answers

1 – Seven angels and seven plagues.
2 – They represent the completion of God's wrath on a rebellious world.
3 – Those who had been victorious over the beast, that is, those who refused to worship evil rulers or join in the evil they promoted. Instead, they remained faithful to Jesus.
4 – *What looked like a sea of glass, glowing with fire.*
5 – The song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb.
6 – Through Moses, God saved his people from slavery in Egypt. Through the Lamb, Jesus the Messiah, God saved his people from slavery to sin and death.
7 – *He is the Lord God Almighty.*
His deeds are great and marvellous.
His ways are just and true.
He is the King of the nations.
He alone is to be feared and glorified.
He is holy.
All nations will worship him.
His acts are righteous.
8 – The temple — the tabernacle of the covenant law.
9 – The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.
10 – It tells us that the holy God will no longer be separated from his people. Jesus has paid the price for our sins — we are forgiven and can come directly into God's presence!
11 – They were dressed in clean, bright linen and wore golden sashes around their chests.
12 – One of the four living creatures.
13 – God is sending calamities to warn the world and to call people to repentance. The seals and trumpets set in motion partial calamities. The bowls are total and final — with them God's wrath is completed.
14 – On the land. People with the mark of the beast get painful sores on their bodies.
15 – On the sea, rivers and springs of water. The waters turn to blood and the fish die.

16 – "*You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were; for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve*."
17 – Because these people shed the blood of God's people and his prophets.
18 – They curse God's name and refuse to repent.
19 – Three impure spirits that look like frogs.
20 – Into the air. There is lightning, thunder, the greatest earthquake in history and huge hailstones. The great city is split into three parts and the cities of the nations collapse.
21 – Because Jesus took God's wrath on himself for us!

Commentary

the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God (15:8): smoke was a sign of God's glory and holiness. When Solomon dedicated the temple, it was filled with the smoke of God's presence and the priests could not enter (2 Chronicles 5:13–14; Exodus 19:18; Isaiah 6:4).

the great river Euphrates (16:12): the eastern border of the Roman Empire. Invaders came from the east, and so this was a sign that destruction would come to Rome.

frogs (16:13): considered unclean and unpleasant. The frog-like spirits represent demons who gather the kings of the world to fight against God at Armageddon (vv.14, 16). But the Battle of Armageddon never takes place — Jesus returns and destroys his enemies before it begins (19:19–21).

out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet (16:13): these are the evil three — Satan, the evil emperor and the local rulers who enforce his rule. Their lying words are powerless compared with the word of the Son of Man (Revelation 1:16).

the great day of God Almighty (16:14): the Old Testament prophets used this phrase when speaking of the time when God would bring final judgment (Isaiah 13:9). In Revelation it means the end of the world.

"*I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake*" (16:15): Jesus' return will be sudden and unexpected, so we must always be prepared (Matthew 24:43–44). The apostle Paul wrote in a similar way, "*Let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober*" (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Jesus also told the church in Sardis to "*wake up!*" (Revelation 3:2).

remains clothed (16:15): in the New Testament, clothing is used as an image for good deeds and righteousness (Colossians 3:12; Revelation 19:8).

Armageddon (16:16): the Mount of Megiddo, where the decisive battle took place that marked the end of the kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 23:29–30). It became a symbol of total defeat.

flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake (16:18): in the Bible these are signs that God is present and acting in judgment. The same signs appeared when God met with his people on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16–20) and when Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 27:51). The thunder and earthquake at the cross were signs that Jesus was bearing God's punishment in our place.

Revelation lesson 14

The kingdom of wickedness will be destroyed



The story of Paul Schneider (Germany, died 1939)

Persecution of Christians has continued down the centuries to the modern era.

During the Second World War many Christians in Germany were put to death for following Jesus rather than submitting to Nazi anti-Christian indoctrination. One of them was Paul Schneider, who was known as the "Preacher of Buchenwald". He was arrested for preaching the gospel faithfully and for refusing to leave his church or join in with Nazi events. When he was sent to Buchenwald concentration camp he continually preached to fellow inmates, even from his prison bunker. He was violently punished for his defiance, and guards frequently mistreated and abused him. Every time he preached from his cell window, guards would beat him with canes. Finally, he was killed with a lethal injection. He was the first Protestant pastor murdered by the Nazis. Truly he was given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

In Revelation chapter 12 we read about a woman who represents the people of God. In chapter 17, we read about a woman called "Babylon", who represents the enemy of God and his people. Although we are confronted daily by the temptations of Babylon, this chapter assures us that Satan's evil kingdom will be destroyed!

Read **Revelation 17:1–6**.

In verse 5, the woman is called "*Babylon the great*". In the Old Testament, the Babylonian empire had destroyed Jerusalem and God's temple. After that, Babylon became a symbol for the enemy of God and his people. Similarly, in AD70 the Roman empire had destroyed Jerusalem and God's temple. So Rome also became a symbol for the enemy of God and his people. But as it would be dangerous to say this, John and also Peter, called Rome "Babylon" instead — see 1 Peter 5:13.

? What does Babylon represent in the book of Revelation? [1]

(?) How is the woman described in 17:1? [2]

In the Old Testament, the prophets sometimes described rich and proud cities that opposed God as "prostitutes" (e.g. Tyre — Isaiah 23:17; Nineveh — Nahum 3:4).

(?) What do you think the word prostitute means in Revelation chapter 17? [3]

(?) What does the angel say about where the prostitute is sitting in verse 1? [4]

(?) What does **Revelation 17:15** tell us that the waters symbolize? [5]

Rome was situated near the coast of modern-day Italy. Thousands of cargo ships came to, and left, its port each year. People from all over the empire could easily visit Rome, just as Paul did in Acts chapter 28. So the phrase "*sits by many waters*" is a description of Rome's huge economic, cultural and spiritual influence throughout the world.

(?) With whom has the woman been committing adultery and what is the result (v.2)? [6]

Satan has been exerting his power over peoples all over the world! Over both ordinary people and over those in power. We must not think that it's just tyrannical rulers who are evil. No nation or person is outside Satan's influence. We all have sin in our hearts!

Intoxicated (v.2): he attraction of worldly wealth and power can keep us from thinking clearly about what is good and true — just like a person who is drunk! The prophet Isaiah described the leaders of his day in the same way (Isaiah 28:7).

Now the angel shows John this woman in "*a desert*" (v.3). This is where the other woman, that is God's people, live (12:14). So God's people live in the same place as Satan's people. God does not want us to separate ourselves physically from the world around us, but to be salt and light in the place where we are living (Matthew 5:13–16).

(?) What is this woman sitting on and how is it described in Revelation 17:3? [7]

Satan's power structure in the book of Revelation

Satan (the dragon) → Roman Empire (the beast) → local rulers (symbolized by heads and horns — in chapter 17 — or the second beast — in chapter 13)

The Roman emperor appointed local rulers, for example King Herod in Matthew chapter 2. These local rulers were responsible for keeping the people in submission to the empire.

In Revelation chapter 17, the beast's heads and horns symbolize such local rulers (17:9–12). Their authority comes from the empire they serve (the beast), which is an instrument of Satan himself — the dragon (13:1).

(?) How would you describe Satan's power structure in the book of Revelation? [8]

The empire looks like it has complete power (seven heads) but this is a deception. Its power is limited and its rule will not last for ever — it only has a limited number of rulers (ten horns).

(?) What does the number of the beast's heads and horns tell us? [9]

(?) How is the woman dressed in 17:4? [10]

Purple dye was the most expensive of all dyes, made using thousands of sea snails. In the Roman Empire, only the highest rulers were allowed to wear purple. In the book of Acts Lydia was a rich woman who was a dealer in purple cloth (Acts 16:14).

Scarlet dye was also very expensive, as it was made from a type of beetle. Only rich people and Roman soldiers wore scarlet.

The intimidating clothing of the prostitute is in contrast with the "*fine linen, white and clean*" that God's people are dressed in (Revelation 19:14).

We are easily impressed by what the world has to offer, but it is a poor substitute for what Jesus has to offer us. Worldly pleasures do not last — see Matthew 6:19–21 and Hebrews 11:25–26.

The new Jerusalem will have far more gold, precious stones and pearls than anything that has ever been seen or heard of before! (Revelation 21:18–21)

(?) What does the woman's clothing warn us about? [11]

(?) Give some examples of what the world offers us that draws us away from Jesus. [12]

(?) What is in the woman's golden cup (17:4)? [13]

Every day, people are getting drunk on the ungodly attractions of the world (v.2). On the outside these things look attractive, just as the cup was golden. But on the inside, these things are evil. Jesus said: "*What people value highly is detestable in God's sight*" (Luke 16:15).

(?) What is written on the woman's forehead (Revelation 17:5)? [14]

In the book of Revelation, the person's true identity is written on their forehead (compare the mark in 7:3 with the one in 13:16).

(?) What is especially sickening about what she does (17:6)? [15]

When believers are put to death for their faith in Jesus, it is not defeat. Rather it is a great victory that they stay faithful to Jesus to the end! They know that their reward is worth it! (Revelation 12:11)

Read **Revelation 17:7–18**.

In this passage the angel explains to John what he has seen.

(?) What does the first part of verse 8 tell us about the beast? [16]

(?) How is this an imitation of Jesus? [17]

We have already read about Satan's imitation of Jesus' death and resurrection (Revelation 13:3,12, see lesson 12). The Roman Empire looked as if it might come to an end after the reign of the evil Emperor Nero in AD68. Civil war had broken out. But in the end the Roman Empire came back to life stronger than before.

In Revelation 17:8 the people are "*astonished*" (compare 13:3). This means that they are convinced by Satan's deception and are ready to believe other lies. For example, in the apostle John's time, there was a popular myth that the Emperor Nero would return after his death. Many people believed this but, of course, it was not true! We should not be surprised when we see people believing Satan's lies.

(?) What lies of Satan do people believe today? [18]

(?) What will happen to the beast in the end (see the first part of v.8)? [19]

When an evil earthly kingdom is destroyed, there is freedom and peace. We should use this time to proclaim the gospel. When a new evil kingdom arises — that is, the beast comes back to life — there is persecution and suffering. But we should not lose heart, because the beast will be destroyed in the end.

(?) What three "sevens" are mentioned in verse 9? [20]

(?) What are the similarities between these three sevens? [21]

Rome was famous for being built on seven hills. Cities built on a hill were hard to conquer. They lasted a long time. So, seven hills represents Satan's long-lasting power.

(?) What is the only purpose of these kings (v.13)? [22]

Satan shows his power in political systems that are corrupt and unjust. This is true today everywhere in our world, although it looks different in different countries.

But political leaders are not our enemies. As the apostle Paul wrote, "*Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*" (Ephesians 6:12).

This is a battle fought with prayer and all the spiritual weapons that Jesus has given us (Ephesians 6:10–18). In particular, we should pray regularly for our rulers (1 Timothy 2:1–2). Whenever we meet as a group of believers, we should always make sure that there is time to pray:

- for our country and its rulers
- that all those who follow Jesus will stay faithful.

? Who will win in the end (Revelation 17:14)? [23]

? How can we be sure that he will win (v.14)? [24]

? Who will be with him when he wins (v.14)? [25]

In history, several rulers have claimed to be "*the King of kings and the Lord of lords*", but this title belongs to Jesus alone. He is the supreme ruler over all earthly kings and rulers!

? What will happen to the prostitute (v.16)? [26]

Human empires are founded on destruction and violence. God allows this destruction and violence to bring evil empires to an end. Evil in the end will always fight against evil and bring destruction on itself. For example, in AD410, the great and glorious Rome was attacked and destroyed by peoples that it had once ruled. This chapter of Revelation assures us that Satan's evil kingdom will be destroyed!

Alia's story

My life before Christ was filled with broken hopes. When I was 19, I was kidnapped and forced to marry a man I'd never spoken to. My whole world had collapsed.

I found that this man was a slave to alcohol. Filled with pain, I tried to harm myself multiple times. After some time, I had two children, and I lived for them but I had lost interest in life. At the age of 24, I divorced my husband and returned home. In my heart, I envied those who married for love.

A few years later, a man asked me to marry him. I thought that I would be happy, but my heart was not at peace because this man already had a family. I was afraid of how my future was going to look.

One day, I heard about Jesus, and I repented! All my fear vanished. I had found true peace. But I realized I was living in sin. When I told my second husband and said that our lives were wrong before God, he beat me brutally. Jesus became my only hope. One day, crying and praying, I said "Jesus, I'm tired of living in sin." At that moment, the family picture on the wall fell and shattered. I clearly understood: this was not God's will. After that my struggle began, but after five years God brought me away from this man for ever.

Today, I am the happiest woman. My children have accepted Christ, and I lead a ministry in the church. I found that true happiness is to live in God's will.

Challenge

Do you hate sin like God does? What sin of yours has been giving you anguish lately?

We have all sinned. But the wonderful news is this: Jesus is ready to forgive us when we truly repent! See **1 John 1:8–9**.

Share with each other what changes you need to make as a result of what you learned in this lesson.

Practise explaining to the person beside you Satan's power structure; who the three layers are, and what each one does. Can you say it from memory?

Pray for each other to stay faithful to Jesus!

Homework

Read **Revelation 18:1–19:10** so you can be ready to study it in the next lesson. As you read, note down one thing that gives you hope or helps you understand the world around you. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – The enemy of God and his people.
2 – *The great prostitute.*
3 – Power and riches are very attractive but they lead us away from God — and towards his enemy.
4 – *By many waters.*
5 – *Peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.*
6 – Ordinary people as well as kings *were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.*
7 – *On a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.*
8 – The Roman emperor (*the beast*) appointed local rulers (*heads and horns* or *the second beast*) who were responsible for keeping the people in submission to the empire. This empire was an instrument of Satan (*the dragon*) himself.
9 – It tells us that rulers do not have complete power and their rule is only for a limited time.
10 – *In purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls.*
11 – We are easily impressed by what the world has to offer, but it is a poor substitute for what Jesus has to offer us.
12 – Examples include:
- impressive houses,
- expensive cars,
- showy jewellery,
- pornography,
- sexual immorality,
- alcohol abuse,
- drug abuse.

13 – *Abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.*
14 – *Babylon the Great... Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth.*
15 – She has killed many followers of Jesus.
16 – He *once was, now he is not and yet he will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction.*
17 – Jesus lived, died and came back to life again.
18 – Examples:
- Jesus is not the only way to God;
- Jesus is not God's Son;
- God does not care if we sin;
- we need charms to protect us;
- horoscopes can tell us the future.

19 – He will be destroyed!
20 – Seven heads, seven hills and seven kings.
21 – They represent power and authority.
22 – To give their power and authority to the beast.
23 – The Lamb!
24 – Because *he is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings!*
25 – *His called, chosen and faithful followers!*
26 – The beast and the ten horns will destroy the prostitute.

Commentary

The vision in this chapter is similar to the vision of four beasts that Daniel saw (Daniel chapter 7). However, John's vision merges Daniel's images together to form a combined image of human political rule.

mystery (v.5): in the New Testament, "mystery" means a spiritual truth that has been revealed to God's people (e.g. Colossians.1:25–26). The truth that is revealed in this verse is that Satan is using earthly power to promote the worship of anything other than God. And the result is terrible evil and suffering.

for one hour (v.12): the angel speaks of kings and empires coming and going. The beast is using each king to accomplish his purposes. But each king reigns for only a short time.

Revelation lesson 15

The fall of Babylon



The story of Vanya Moiseyev (died 1972)

Ivan Moiseyev was a young man from a Christian family in Moldova. Everyone called him Vanya. When he was conscripted into the army in 1970, he took his faith with him. He spoke openly about Jesus to the other soldiers. His commanding officers told him to stop but he refused. They told him that he had to choose between Jesus and his country. He said that he chose Jesus. What followed was two years of severe punishment. He was forced to stand outside in freezing temperatures for hours at a time. He was locked in rooms that were either boiling hot or bitterly cold. He was beaten. He was given extra duties and deprived of sleep. Through all of it he continued to speak about Jesus, and he wrote letters home to his family, telling them what was happening and urging them to pray. In July 1972 his body was returned to his family. The authorities said he had drowned. But when his family saw his body, they could see the marks of severe beatings. He was twenty years old. Hundreds of people came to his funeral. Many of them became followers of Jesus because of the way Vanya had lived and died. Truly he was given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

In this lesson we will learn about how important it is to leave Babylon, where Satan rules, and instead serve the King of Kings. We must be ready for Jesus' return.

Come out of Babylon!

John uses the name Babylon to represent the Roman Empire. Like Babylon, the Roman Empire was an instrument of Satan. It was ruthless and its rulers put many followers of Jesus to death for their faith.

It appeared that the Roman Empire was all-powerful and everlasting, yet this was not true. In Revelation chapter 18 John is declaring the unthinkable: he speaks of Rome's defeat as if it has already happened!

No earthly empire lasts for ever — the fall of earthly empires reminds us that Satan's kingdom will soon be defeated for ever (Revelation 20:10). Only Jesus' kingdom will never end! (Luke 1:33)

(?) What does the fall of earthly empires remind us about? [1]

Read **Revelation 18:1–20**.

(?) What does Revelation 18:2 tell us about the great city of Babylon? [2]

(?) What does God tell his people to do in verse 4? [3]

The prophet Isaiah had once prophesied that the great Babylon was going to be destroyed, so God's people needed to get out! (Isaiah 21:9; 48:20) In a similar way, in the book of Revelation God calls everyone to flee from Satan's rule so we do not suffer God's judgment.

God does not call us to physically leave our communities where people do not follow Jesus. He calls us to live our lives where he has placed us, as citizens of his heavenly kingdom (1 Peter 2:9–12). We need to learn how to live amongst people who do wrong things, without joining in the wrong things they do. If we have been living as if we never left Satan's kingdom, now is the time to truly leave it!

(?) What does it mean for us to come out of Babylon (v.4)? [4]

Give back to her as she has given, pay her back double for what she has done (v.6): "*double*" can mean twice as much, but here it means the same amount, the exact equivalent. Here it means "the same amount". The fairness of God's justice is an important theme throughout the Bible. His punishment is always perfect and righteous. Babylon will receive a punishment that exactly matches how she has dealt with others.

The punishment that is coming to those who continue to live sinful lives should challenge us all to flee from all sin! (Romans 6:12; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:22)

(?) Which three groups of people will be upset over the fall of Babylon (Revelation 18:9, 11, 17)? [5]

The desire to get richer had blinded these people to the lies of Satan. Riches do not bring us eternal joy or eternal life.

(?) Why does the angel call us to rejoice in verse 20? [6]

God will bring justice to those who persecute his people. So we do not need to take revenge on those who persecute us (Romans 12:19), but rather we can rejoice: "*But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ*" (1 Peter 4:13).

Read **Revelation 18:21–24**.

(?) What is the result of the angel's action in verse 21? [7]

(?) What sounds will no longer be heard and what will no longer be seen in Babylon (vv.22–23)? [8]

Babylon's destruction will be so complete that it will become dark and silent. No one will even be able to find the city any more. Music will be stopped in Babylon, but it will be found in the new Jerusalem — there we will hear the most beautiful music ever! (14:2; 15:2–3)

(?) What terrible thing will be found in Babylon (18:24)? [9]

Even today, every day, followers of Jesus are being put to death for their faith. God sees each one (Psalm 116:15). Their reward will be so much greater than what they lost (Revelation 2:7,11, etc).

Worship the King of Kings!

In chapter 18, we learned of the horror of God's coming judgment. But in chapter 19 we see God's people celebrating God's amazing salvation!

Read **Revelation 19:1–10**.

The "*great multitude*" (v.1) is the uncountable number of angels (5:11) together with the multitude of those who have followed Jesus (7:9). As believers we may be in the minority in our country. It is good to remember what the prophet Elisha said to his servant when they were surrounded by enemies: "*Don't be afraid... Those who are with us are more than those who are with them*." Then he prayed that God would open his servant's eyes so that he could see this, "*and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha*" (2 Kings 6:17). In the same way we should ask the Lord to open our eyes to see that, with Jesus, we are part of a heavenly majority!

(?) What words of Elisha should we remember when we feel that we are in the minority? [10]

Let's learn about what this "*great multitude in heaven*" was shouting:

Hallelujah (vv.1,3,4,6): is the Old Testament word meaning "praise the Lord". It is used frequently in the book of Psalms (e.g. Psalm 113:1). It is also a much-loved word in worship songs today. As we sing this word, we are joining with God's people who have sung it over thousands of years!

(?) Who is the prostitute in verse 2? (See Revelation 17:5.) [11]

(?) What has God done to her? [12]

(?) Find at least three ways that verses 1–3 are an encouragement to us. [13]

1.

2.

3.

The blood of his servants (v.2): Satan has corrupted the whole world. But the biggest offence to God is the murder of his people. God will "*avenge*" their death.

The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever (v.3): this means that Babylon, which symbolizes Satan's kingdom on earth, will never be rebuilt. Its destruction will be final and will last for ever.

Let us rejoice (v.7): we should rejoice at God's rule and victory over Satan! Singing praise to God is an essential part of the life of a believer! As the Psalmist wrote: "*Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation!*" (Psalm 95:1)

? What special occasion is going to happen next (v.7)? [14]

? Who is the bride (v.8)? [15]

? What do the bride's clothes represent (v.8)? [16]

His bride has made herself ready (v.8): in the gospels, Jesus often spoke of himself as the bridegroom (e.g. Matthew 9:15). God's people (the bride) will soon be united in perfect union with Jesus when he returns! So let us do everything we can to be the pure bride for our heavenly husband!

Righteous acts

Read **Ephesians 2:8–10**.

? How are we saved? [17]

? What has God prepared for us to do? [18]

God's people are saved by faith. They understand that Jesus's death was the one perfect sacrifice for their sins. They are **not** saved by their works. But after they are saved, God prepares opportunities for them to do good works (Ephesians 2:10; Revelation 19:8). God has saved us so that we can be a blessing to others. Believers worship God not only by singing his praise, but also by doing good works. These good works will be our "wedding clothes" when Jesus returns to marry his bride!

If we say that we love him (e.g. by singing his praise) but don't do what he wants us to do, we spoil our relationship with our future husband.

"*Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16).

Hakeem's story

I used to consider myself a religious person. I did my ritual prayers five times a day. But in my heart, I was still thirsty for truth. I asked my mentor if God hears prayers, but his answers brought no peace.

Around this time, I met a Christian girl. I wanted her to convert to my religion, but she wouldn't. I shared my pains with her, unaware she was taking everything in prayer to God.

I married her by kidnapping her, according to the old custom. I brought her to a house full of quarrels and drunkenness. This was a difficult ordeal for her. She endured, worked hard and stayed silent. I was cruel to her.

One day, I beat her, took her to her parents and told her to stay and find another man. But she replied, "Only death can separate us." I left, thinking it was finished. But she walked eight kilometres to return home. This broke my heart. I began to truly seek God, secretly reading Bible passages she had copied.

I went to church one day. There I heard the answers to my question: God hears prayers. I believed and changed my life, abandoning my sins.

My wife said to me: "I've been praying for you for five years." Through the love and prayer of one woman, Jesus changed my life for ever. God had answered the cry of my heart.

Challenge

What did Hakeem discover about religion?

What "*righteous acts*" can you start doing? For example, in many places around the world, believers are helping the poor and the homeless, helping those with disabilities, helping people recover from addictions, collecting rubbish in parks so that children can safely play there, and doing many other *righteous acts*.

What opportunities is God giving your church to show God's love to your village or city? If your church is not doing any *righteous acts* at this time, what can you do to learn about the needs that exist in your community? Ask God to show you how you can start serving those who need help.

Share with each other what God has been saying to you through this lesson.

Practise explaining to the person beside you what it means to "come out of Babylon", and give one example of a *righteous act* your church could do to shine the light of Jesus in your community.

Pray for each other to start making the changes that God is calling you to make today!

Homework

Read **Revelation 19:11–20:15** and **Ezekiel 38–39**, so you can be ready for the next lesson. As you read, note down one thing that gives you hope. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – Satan's kingdom will soon be defeated for ever! Only Jesus' kingdom will never end!
2 – Babylon has been defeated!
3 – *Come out of her... so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues.*
4 – We must leave behind our sinful lives, and live lives that please Jesus. Then we will not share in the sins of those around us and be punished.
5 – *The kings of the earth*; *the merchants of the earth; the sea captains, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea.*
6 – Because God will punish his enemies in the same way that they punished those who followed Jesus.
7 – No one will be able to find Babylon any more.
8 – Musicians playing music; workers working; people grinding grain into flour; lit lamps and joyful weddings.
9 – *The blood of prophets and of God's holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth.*
10 – *Don't be afraid...* "*Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.*"
11 – Babylon: that is, Satan's kingdom on earth.
12 – He has condemned her and avenged on her the blood of his servants.
13 – Answers should include:
- God is the One who can save;
- God's judgments are true and just;
- God will avenge the murder of his people;
- Satan's kingdom will be destroyed for ever.

14 – The wedding of the Lamb.
15 – The bride is God's people!
16 – The righteous acts of God's people.
17 – By God's grace and not by our works.
18 – Good works.

Commentary

Disaster for Babylon (Revelation 18)

a haunt for every impure spirit... unclean bird... unclean and detestable animal (v.2): this is similar to the prophet Isaiah's description of what will happen to Babylon (Isaiah 13:19–22). God will destroy all oppressive empires, just as he destroyed the Babylonian Empire.

for all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries (v.3): "adultery" is an Old Testament word picture for worshipping other gods. Satan offers us attractive lifestyles, riches and everything that apparently can make us happy. Sin can seem so attractive! But these are Satan's tools to lead us away from God who made us, loves us and wants to give us true joy in relationship with him. Worshipping other gods is even more offensive and shaming to God than the offence of an unfaithful husband or wife to their spouse. The pain is unbearable.

the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries (v.3): Rome was the biggest city in the world at that time. It was also the trading centre for goods from all over the empire. Wealthy citizens knew no moral boundaries as they indulged all their appetites. All that mattered to people was enjoying themselves. Each one's god was themself — they spent all they had to make themselves happy. But lasting joy can never come from material possessions and physical pleasures.

give her as much torment and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself (v.7):
- her decadence had caused many others to suffer
- the glory that she sought for herself was glory that belonged to God alone.

The measure of Babylon's judgment will match what she did to others.

I sit enthroned as queen. I am not a widow, I will never mourn (v.7): in a similar way, the prophet Isaiah reported what Babylon said of herself: "*I am for ever — the eternal queen... I will never be a widow or suffer... loss*" (Isaiah 47:7–8). How wrong this was! The gods that Babylon was "married to" were destroyed. Only God's glory will last for ever! (Revelation 1:6)

in one day (v.8): this reminds us of what the prophet Isaiah said, "*Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day*" (Isaiah 47:9). This tells us that Babylon's judgment will be sudden and swift. In the same way, Jesus spoke of his coming as being sudden, like a thief (Matthew 24:42–44).

death, mourning and famine (v.8): remind us of the punishments brought by the four horsemen when the first four seals were opened (Revelation 6:1–8). God is a terrifying judge!

mighty is the Lord God (v.8): it is not Babylon who is mighty (v.10), but the Lord God! Babylon once exalted herself in defiance of God, but was suddenly destroyed. So it will be with Satan's kingdom.

the kings of the earth and **the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn** (vv.9–17): conquering kings and merchants have a close relationship with each other. When kings conquer new lands, their merchants have new opportunities to trade and make money. Often, they rob the new lands of their natural resources like precious metals. And when kings lose these lands, the merchants also lose that opportunity to make money. Rulers and merchants both grieve.

Only rich people were able to own the luxuries listed in verses 11–13. In order for them to have them, many people suffered poverty and oppression. These things were bought at the huge cost of misery to so many people. Even today, the goods that we enjoy are often purchased through the suffering of those who produce them. Examples include those who work long hours in factories for very little money, those who pick cotton or fruit for very low pay.

human beings sold as slaves (v.13): the prophet Ezekiel also speaks of this terrible trade (Ezekiel 27:13). In Revelation 18:13, John doesn't use the usual word for "*slaves*". He explains that they are "*human beings*". These are not goods to be traded. They are people made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). Rome's trade involved the oppression of many people. At least ten per cent of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves at this time. Many had very short lives, for example, those who worked in the gold and silver mines.

It is shocking that the slave trade continues in many parts of the world today, usually in the form of human trafficking. Many of these modern slaves work as prostitutes. They were tricked into doing this work. Men who visit prostitutes are not only spoiling their relationship with their future or present wife. They are supporting this evil trade in human lives.

they will throw dust on their heads (v.19): this was a traditional sign of mourning (e.g. Joshua 7:6) or repentance (e.g. Job 42:6). But their grief is for their own loss, it is not a sign of repentance. They are like the people in Revelation 16:10–11 who refuse to repent. God, however, calls everyone to repent of their rebellion against him. The apostle Paul wrote, "*Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death*" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Blessing for God's people (Revelation 19)

salvation and glory and power belong to our God (v.1): this is similar to the earlier worship songs in the book of Revelation (4:11; 5:13; 7:12).

blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb (v.9): the idea of being a guest at the wedding banquet of heaven is similar to when Jesus said, "*The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son*" (Matthew. 22:2). But the apostle John also describes believers as the bride herself! (Revelation 19:7; 21:2, 9) For believers, the time we live in is like the time when the groom is getting his house ready for his bride to live in after the wedding. We are waiting for Jesus to come back and take us to his home (John 14:2–3).

I fell at his feet to worship him (v.10): John has been overwhelmed by all he has seen and heard, including the dazzling splendour of the angel (18:1). The angel's rebuke reminds John that angels are messengers of God but are on a level with human beings and must not be worshipped. This was already a problem in the church in Colossae (Colossians 2:18). In contrast to this, when John had a vision of Jesus (Revelation 1) and fell down in worship, Jesus did not rebuke him, but told him not to be afraid (1:17).

the Spirit of prophecy (v.10): there are many references to the Holy Spirit in the book of Revelation. They show us that the Holy Spirit is behind all John's visions and his records of them. At the end of each of the letters to the seven churches we read, "*Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches*" (e.g. 2:7). What the Holy Spirit says and what Jesus says are the same thing.

prophecy: the whole book of Revelation is a prophecy (1:3; 22:18–19), that is, a message from God that tells his people what is happening in the world and what is going to happen. The prophecy of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from Jesus and who he is. He "*bears testimony to Jesus*" (v.10).

Revelation lesson 16

Six visions



Wang Zhiming's story (China, died 1973)

Wang Zhiming was a pastor of the Miao people in the mountains of Yunnan Province in southwest China. He led hundreds of people to faith in Jesus over many years of faithful ministry. He was arrested in 1966, put in prison and held there for years. Then, in 1973, the authorities organized a mass rally in his home area. They brought Wang Zhiming out in front of a crowd of 10,000 people. He was paraded before the crowd with a heavy wooden sign around his neck listing his supposed crimes. Then he was shot. He was 66 years old. His wife and children watched him die. Truly he was given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

When we are persecuted and it seems as if evil is winning, we need to remember that Jesus is coming back as king and judge. Every enemy of God will be defeated. Every follower of Jesus will be vindicated. This is what God declared through the apostle John in six dramatic visions. In this lesson we will see what those visions teach us about the end of history.

Earlier in the book of Revelation, we read about the apostle John's visions of the **seven** seals, the **seven** trumpets and the **seven** bowls. Seven is an important number in the book of Revelation.

(?) What does seven represent? [1]

These three visions told us about the **same thing from different points of view**. They told us that God is showing his wrath against the world that has rebelled against him.

In the next section of the book of Revelation, we will read about **seven visions** which will also tell us the same thing from different points of view. In the original Greek, each vision starts with the words "*And I saw*" (Revelation 19:11,17,19; 20:1,4,11; 21:1). These visions are telling us that **Jesus will judge his enemies**. We will look at the first six in this lesson and the seventh in the next lesson.

John's visions show his love and understanding of the Old Testament. He does not teach us anything that is not found elsewhere in the Bible. For example, many of the things that John describes in these seven visions are similar to a vision that the prophet Ezekiel had (Ezekiel chapters 38–39).

(?) What do all the seven visions in this next section of the book of Revelation teach us? [2]

Vision 1: The rider

Read **Revelation 19:11–16**.

(?) Who is the rider on the white horse (v.16)? [3]

In Revelation chapter 4, John saw God sitting on his throne in heaven. Now we read that God, in the person of Jesus, is once more coming to earth!

(?) What is he coming to do (end of 19:11)? [4]

We are all involved in the war against Satan (Ephesians 6:10–20). When Jesus returns, he will bring the war to its final end.

He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself (19:12): knowing someone's name was thought to give a person mastery over that person. So Jesus asked the name of the demons who possessed the man of the Gerasenes before driving them out into the pigs (Luke 8:30). In Revelation 19:11–16 we are given three names that tell us who the rider is, but we are told that there is another, secret name. John is telling us that Jesus is known by many, but mastered by no one.

He rules them with an iron sceptre (v.15): this is from Psalm 2:9. This psalm prophesies that the Messiah will be a ruler to be feared. He will punish all those who rebel against him.

(?) Who is coming with the Lord Jesus and how will they be dressed (v.14)? [5]

In Revelation 3:18, Jesus told the church in Laodicea to buy "*white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness*". The army that follows is made up of those who have asked Jesus to forgive them all their sins. These white clothes also represent their righteous acts (19:8).

Vision 2: The supper

Read **Revelation 19:17–18**.

(?) What does the angel say (v.17)? [6]

Right now, everyone has the opportunity to repent. When Jesus returns, repentance will no longer be possible. Those who belong to Satan will face God's terrible judgment.

The great supper of God (v.17): the destruction of all those opposed to God and his Son is described as a hideous supper. It was considered particularly shameful for a dead body to be eaten by birds

(Deuteronomy 28:26). This contrasts with the wedding supper of the Lamb, which will be the most wonderful event that we could ever imagine! (Revelation 19:9)

When people persecute you for following Jesus, keep your eyes on Judgment Day. You will be richly rewarded for your faithfulness, and those who persecuted you will face terrible judgment. It is worth persevering!

Vision 3: God's enemies are defeated

Read **Revelation 19:19–21**.

(?) Who will gather to wage war against Jesus and his army (v.19)? [7]

The kings of the earth should be ruled by Jesus (Revelation 1:5) but instead they have been seduced by Satan so they are fighting against Jesus (17:2).

The beast (v.19): symbolized the Roman Empire, or any empire that Satan uses to bring misery on the world.

The false prophet (v.20): is the "*second beast*", which symbolizes local rulers who make people obey the beast and false religion (Revelation 13:13–17).

The beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gather to wage war against the Lord Jesus (19:19). But the battle never happens! The last battle does not take place. The end is so quick and decisive that John has no time to describe it. King Jesus instantaneously and totally destroys all the armies gathered against him!

(?) What happens to the beast and the false prophet in verse 20? [8]

"*Burning sulphur*" symbolized the final and full punishment, just like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:24.

(?) What happened to "*the rest*" (Revelation 19:15, 21)? [9]

This sword is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:16). Jesus will judge the world through his words. This word will decide whether they live or die (Matthew 25:34 and 41).

(?) Who kills those who are against King Jesus (Revelation 19:21)? [10]

Jesus **never** tells his followers to kill those who are opposed to his rule (Luke 6:27 and Romans 12:19).

Satan "*deludes*" those who don't submit to Jesus (Revelation 19:20). In his other writings the apostle John talks about this as being in "*the darkness*" (John 3:19; 8:12; 1 John 2:9). We must urgently pray and share with those in the darkness so that God opens their hearts and minds to the truth before it is too late.

Vision 4: Satan is bound

Read **Revelation 20:1–3**.

(?) What does the angel have in his hand (v.1)? [11]

The Abyss (v.1): earlier we saw that the Abyss is where evil comes from (9:1,2,11 and 11:7). Now the Abyss is turned into a prison for demons and all evil.

(?) What four words does John use to describe Satan in verse 2? [12]

John is telling us that God will defeat **all** evil!

(?) Jesus entrusts the key to the Abyss to a very important angel, to do a very important task. What is it (v.2)? [13]

A thousand years (vv.2–3): this does not represent an exact amount of time. As we saw before, 1,000 means a very large amount. So this phrase refers to the long period between the death and resurrection of Jesus and his second coming. During this time Satan's power to deceive the nations is limited, because he is "*bound*" (v.3). He was bound when Jesus died on the cross (Colossians 2:15). Right now, although Satan is bound, his spiritual servants or demons are still active (e.g. Acts 19:15–16). However, we can see that Satan is bound when we consider how the number of followers of Jesus has grown over the last 2,000 years. At first there were just a few frightened believers. And now there are more than two billion people who call themselves followers of Jesus! They are in every country of the world!

(?) What period of time does a thousand years symbolize? [14]

(?) What will happen to Satan after the "*thousand years*" (Revelation 20:3)? [15]

Satan's return is only for a short time. Similarly, the apostle Paul taught that before Jesus returns the "*man of lawlessness*" will be revealed, will deceive people for a limited time and then will be destroyed (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 7–8). This short time of much pain will be like the pain of giving birth — afterwards there is great joy! (Matthew 24:8.)

Warning!

Followers of Jesus understand these verses about the thousand years in different ways. Sadly, over the years there have been a lot of arguments about these verses. It is important to remember that everything we learn in Revelation about God's plan for the world can be found in other places in the Bible. So, let's not look for any new ideas that we don't find anywhere else in the Bible. Let's not allow Satan to bring division among God's people over these few verses!

Vision 5: Reigning with Christ

Read **Revelation 20:4–10**.

(?) What happened to those who were beheaded for their faith in Jesus (v.4)? [16]

This is the same **thousand years** that Satan is bound (Vision 4) — the present age, between Jesus' resurrection and his return. Right now, even in the middle of persecution, believers are reigning with Christ! We are seated with him in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6).

(?) According to verse 5, when will the rest of the dead rise? [17]

Unbelievers who have died will be raised on the Day of Judgment to face their condemnation (John 5:29).

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection (v.6): this blessing is for every believer — for you! In John's gospel, Jesus said, "*Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live*" (John 5:24–25). So believers have been spiritually raised from the dead when they started to follow Jesus. They are indeed "blessed and holy". If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ you have already experienced this!

Notice three things about the blessing given to these believers who share in the first resurrection:

1. They are **priests of God and of Christ**: like the Old Testament priests, believers come directly into God's presence and bring others to God through prayer and evangelism.

2. The **second death has no power over them**: physical death is the first death. The second death is eternal separation from God after the final judgment. But those who belong to Jesus will never face it!

3. They will **reign with him for a thousand years**: even now, in the middle of difficulty and persecution, we reign with the King of Kings!

(?) What is the blessing for those who share in the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6)? [18]

(?) What will Satan do once he is released from prison (v.8)? [19]

Gog and Magog (v.8): these names represent all the nations who oppose God at the end of the world (Ezekiel 38:1). When Satan is "*released from prison*", the task of believers is to stand firm and be faithful!

Just as in vision 3 (Revelation 19:19–20), an army gathers for battle, but there is no battle. Satan's forces are destroyed instantly and completely!

(?) What will happen to the devil (20:10)? [20]

So, again we are reminded of the final end of those who oppose the rule of King Jesus.

Vision 6: The heavenly courtroom

Read **Revelation 20:11–15**.

(?) Which books are opened (v.12)? [21]

(?) How are the dead judged (vv.12–13)? [22]

In verses 4–6 we read about those who died for their faith in Jesus — they rise first and reign with Christ. Now in verses 11–15 we read about the final judgment of all people, including these faithful believers. Everyone stands before God's throne. Everyone is judged according to their deeds (2 Corinthians 5:10).

(?) Who is thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15)? [23]

Everyone is judged according to their deeds. But by God's amazing grace, if we believe in Jesus, he has written our names in the Lamb's book of life and we will not face the second death!

(?) What else is thrown into the lake of fire (v.14)? [24]

After the final judgment there will be no more death! (21:4)

Next lesson we will look at the seventh scene. Just as the seventh seal, trumpet and bowl describe the triumphal end to God's dealings with the world, so the seventh vision is also about the triumphant end to God's dealings with the world!

Layla's story

I heard about Christ during my university years. A woman simply told me about him and my heart responded, so I repented. Later, I learned that my neighbours were believers and had been praying for my family for a long time. But my path to faith was not easy. I had married an unbeliever, and he forbade me from going to church.

My hardest trial was my inability to bear a child: eight years of pain during treatment, of hope followed by disappointment. In my culture, this was like a curse and a stain on the family. Wives were expected to have a child immediately. My heart was broken, but I brought every tear to God.

One day, my husband's brothers repented and began to serve God, but my husband still resisted. We continued to pray for him, and for a child. And one day, Jesus touched his heart. His life changed, and my life changed too: I became pregnant! I realized God had been waiting for my husband to meet him. Today, I have two daughters, both of whom are devoted to the Lord. I believe that only in him lies fullness, joy and true life!

Discussion

What blessings did Layla learn from her experience?

How does knowing that Jesus is the returning Judge change the way you face difficult times and persecution?

Share with each other what God has been saying to you through this lesson.

Practise explaining to the person beside you what the "*thousand years*" represents, and what it tells us about where we are in history right now.

Pray for each other to keep your eyes on Jesus, the judge of all the world, who is returning soon!

Homework

Read **Revelation chapter 21** so you can be ready to study it in the next lesson. As you read, note down one thing that gives you hope or amazes you. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – Seven represents perfection and completeness.
2 – They teach us that Jesus will judge his enemies.
3 – Jesus the Messiah.
4 – To judge and make war.
5 – *The armies of heaven*. They will be *dressed in fine linen, white and clean*.
6 – "*Come, gather together for the great supper of God*."
7 – *The beast and the kings of the earth and their armies*.
8 – They are captured and thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur.
9 – The rest were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider.
10 – King Jesus himself!
11 – A great chain and the key to the Abyss.
12 – *The dragon, ancient serpent, the devil, Satan*.
13 – To bind Satan and imprison him in the Abyss for 1,000 years.
14 – A very long time.
15 – He must be set free for a short time.
16 – They rose from the dead and are reigning with Christ for a thousand years!
17 – After the thousand years has ended.
18 – They are priests of God and of Christ — they come directly into God's presence and bring others to him.
The second death has no power over them — they will never face eternal separation from God.
They reign with Christ for 1,000 years — even now, in the middle of persecution, they reign with the King of Kings!
19 – He will go out to deceive the nations and gather them for battle against God's people.
20 – He will be *thrown into the lake of burning sulphur*.
21 – Books of judgment and the book of life.
22 – According to their deeds, as recorded in the books of judgment. But those whose names are written in the book of life will not face the second death.
23 – All those whose names are not written in the book of life.
24 – Death and Hades — the place of the dead. After the final judgment these will be thrown into the lake of fire and destroyed. Then there will be no more death! (Revelation 21:4)

Commentary

Notes on vision 1 (Revelation 19:11–16)

a white horse (v.11): this is the war horse of the conquering king! In Roman times, rulers rode white horses because they were considered to be the best. We read that, amazingly, the armies of heaven — those who have followed Jesus to the end — are also riding white horses (v.14).

his eyes are like blazing fire (v.12): his eyes are blazing with anger. Jesus is the avenger who will destroy his enemies. This is terrifying!

on his head are many crowns (v.12): these royal crowns symbolise that he will be the supreme ruler of the world. This is in contrast with the illegal and unauthorized rule of Satan (12:3 and 13:1). It may sometimes seem as if Satan is in charge, but it is Jesus who has the highest control of this world and the next!

he is dressed in a robe dipped in blood (v.13): which reminds us of his sacrificial death on the cross.

his name is the Word of God (v.13): Jesus is God's revelation of himself. He is God and yet, at the same time, separate from God the Father (John 1:1, 14).

out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which he will strike down the nations (v.15): see Revelation 1:16.

he treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty (v.15): See 14:19.

he is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords! (v.16): Jesus is the only one we should really be afraid of! We should respect, but not fear, earthly rulers (Titus 3:1).

Notes on vision 3 (Revelation 19:19–21)

This vision reminds us of the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the final destruction of God's enemies in the last days (Ezekiel chapters 38–39):

- this describes a major attack by Gog and his allies on God's restored people
- the battle brings great danger to God's people and even affects the natural world (Ezekiel 38:19–23)
- at the Lord's command Gog's army is defeated
- the bodies of the enemy soldiers become a feast for the birds and wild animals (Ezekiel 39:17).

Notes on vision 5 (Revelation 20:4–10)

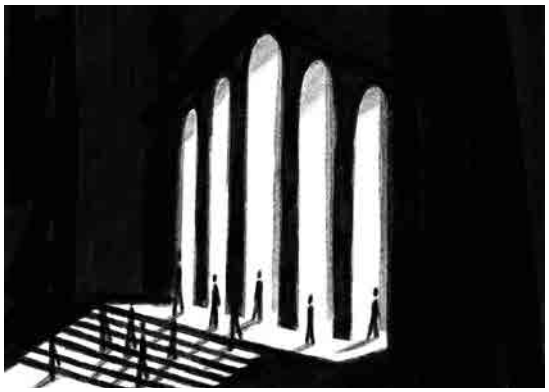
the camp of God's people (v.9): is a reference to the time when God's people lived in the wilderness after the exodus (Exodus 17:1). God's people were vulnerable and knew that they needed God to protect them, provide for them and guide them.

Notes on vision 6 (Revelation 20:11–15)

Books were opened (v.12): just as in the final heavenly judgment that Daniel saw in his vision (Daniel 7:10). These books record all our deeds. The book of Revelation tells us our deeds are of vital importance because they show whether we are truly following the Lamb (see 2:23; 3:15; 14:13).

Revelation lesson 17

A new heaven and a new earth



The story of Heng Cheng (Cambodia, died 1977)

Heng Cheng was one of the first Cambodian men to become a Christian pastor. He had studied at a Bible school and had given his life to building the church among his own people. When the Khmer Rouge took control of Cambodia in 1975, they began to hunt down church leaders. Heng Cheng was arrested and taken to a Khmer Rouge prison. He was tortured and interrogated. His captors demanded that he give them the names of other believers. He refused to give them any names. He continued to encourage his fellow prisoners to hold on to their faith in Jesus. In 1977 he was taken out and killed. He was one of the first Cambodian pastors to die in the Khmer Rouge persecution. Those who survived remembered that even in prison, even under torture, he did not stop speaking about Jesus. Truly he was given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

In this lesson we will learn about the seventh and most wonderful vision of the end of time. The vision teaches us that God wants to live with us! Many things in this chapter are too wonderful for us to fully understand. But they are written to draw our attention to our glorious future life with God in the new heaven and new earth.

Our new home

Read **Revelation 21:1–8**.

(?) What new thing does John see (v.1)? [1]

This means a new **everything**! The "old" creation that God made was very good (Genesis 1:31), but it has "*worn out*" like old clothing (Psalm 102:25–26). But the new creation will be perfect and glorious. It will never wear out. God will fulfil what he declared through the prophet Isaiah, "*See, I will create new heavens and a new earth!*" (Isaiah 65:17)

(?) What is no longer there (Revelation 21:1)? [2]

In the Bible, the sea often represents chaos or evil and the world in rebellion against God (Daniel 7:2,3 and 17). In the new creation there will be nothing evil or frightening!

(?) In what three ways is God's perfect new Creation described in Revelation 21:2? [3]

The Holy City (v.2): in the Old Testament, Jerusalem was called "the Holy City" (e.g. Nehemiah 11:1), because it was where the temple was located. Therefore, it was the place where God particularly met with his people. In the New Testament, God's presence is no longer just in one place. By his Holy Spirit, wherever God's people are, God is also there with them! So the Holy City means the worldwide church (1 Corinthians 3:16; Revelation 11:2).

The new Jerusalem (v.2): our future home, will be the most wonderful place that we can imagine! Everything is new and never gets old — no dirt, garbage, rundown houses, bad roads, beggars, advertising that deceives you! Every time something irritates us or makes us sad in this world, it is an opportunity for God to remind us that this is not our real home. He is preparing a much better home for us!

A bride beautifully dressed for her husband (v.2): refers to God's people being Jesus' "*bride*", dressed in her "*righteous acts*" (19:7–8). Jesus is preparing for himself a "*holy and blameless*" bride! (Ephesians 5:25–27) We will be "married" to Jesus and it will be the perfect marriage!

(?) What wonderful promise are we given in Revelation 21:3? [4]

The relationship between God and people will be restored for ever!

(?) Verse 4 may be the most beautiful sentence in the Bible! What will God do? [5]

(?) What does verse 4 say will not be there in the new Jerusalem? [6]

(?) What does God say about himself in the first part of verse 6? [7]

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. God holds all of time in his hands. He is all-powerful and eternal. We can trust him!

(?) What does God offer to give us, in the second part of verse 6? [8]

This is what God declared through the prophet Isaiah: "*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters!*" (Isaiah 55:1). It is the same thing as Jesus offered the woman at the well (John 4:13–14). It contrasts with the hideous drink that Satan offers us (Revelation 17:2). We have to choose daily which drink we want to drink.

Safe, magnificent and glorious

Read **Revelation 21:9–21**.

(?) What is the new Jerusalem compared with in verse 11? [9]

It is more beautiful and magnificent than Rome or any city that could ever be built on this earth!

(?) What does verse 12 tell us about the new Jerusalem? [10]

The walls are high and the gates are guarded. This city will be totally safe!

(?) What was written on the gates (v.12) and foundations (v.14)? [11]

(?) What are we told about the foundations of the wall of the city (v.14)? [12]

This city is the fulfilment of all God promised in the Old Testament to the twelve tribes of Israel. It is founded on the teaching of the twelve apostles of Jesus (Ephesians 2:19–20).

(?) What did the angel have in his hand in verse 15? [13]

In Revelation 11:1, the angel had told John to measure the inner court of the temple. This indicated that God was keeping his people safe — they were measured. In Revelation 21:15 the angel now measures the whole city with a **rod of gold**. Not only is God keeping his people safe, but these people that he is measuring are incredibly precious to him!

(?) What shape is the city (v.16)? [14]

This is the same shape as the Most Holy Place in the temple (1 Kings 6:20). This is where God will be with his people.

(?) How long and wide is the city (v.16)? [15]

Twelve thousand is a symbolic number. It is Twelve times 1,000. It symbolizes a complete and very large measurement, bigger than we can imagine any city to be: 2,200 km long, wide and high. There is room for all God's people!

(?) What is the city made of (v.18)? [16]

The inside of the walls of Solomon's temple, including the Most Holy Place, were lined with gold (1 Kings 6:20–21). The new Jerusalem will be a glorious city filled with the glorious presence of God!

(?) What are the foundations decorated with (see the beginning of v.19)? [17]

Many people believe precious stones can bring them protection, prosperity, health, joy and intelligence. However, these are blessings that only come from God! It offends God when we look to anything other than him for these blessings.

? What are the gates made of (v.21)? [18]

Pearls were considered to be more precious than gold in Roman times. The new Jerusalem will be more wonderful than we can begin to imagine!

God's dwelling place

Read **Revelation 21:22–27**.

? What does John not see in the city (v.22)? [19]

This is a shock! The apostle John's descriptions of the new Jerusalem are similar to the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the temple (Ezekiel 40:48–41:26). But now John tells us that in the new Jerusalem there will be no temple!

? Why will there be no temple (v.22)? [20]

The temple was where God's people could meet with him through sacrifice (1 Kings 6:11–13). In the New Testament, Jesus described himself as the temple! (John 2:19–21) He is now the way by which people can be forgiven and come to God (John 14:6). But in the new Jerusalem, there will be no sin and therefore no need for sacrifices. Everyone will have free access to God's holy presence!

? Why does the new Jerusalem not need the sun or moon to shine on it (Revelation 21:23)? [21]

This is what God declared through the prophet Isaiah: "*The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory*" (Isaiah 60:19).

The nations will walk by its light (v.24): means the gospel is for all peoples, not just for the people God chose in the Old Testament (Isaiah 60:3; Revelation 7:9).

? What will the kings of the earth do (21:24)? [22]

In the ancient world, kings brought their wealth and glory to the city of the greatest king, in order to show him honour. Everything that is truly good and beautiful in this world will reappear in the new Jerusalem. It will be purified and made even more beautiful!

? Why are the gates of the city never closed (v.25)? [23]

Night-time was a fearful time of day, but in the new Jerusalem we will have nothing to be afraid of!

This is what God declared through the prophet Isaiah: "*Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night*" (Isaiah 60:11).

God will bring us safely to live with him in the new Jerusalem!

Fatima's story

In my church, there was a sister called Fatima who suffered from cancer for many long years. She came to faith during her illness. In her family, she was the only believer. Her husband couldn't understand why she always wanted to go to church or why she needed to pray. But he saw her unexpectedly improve after turning to Christ, and he knew that no doctor had done this. His heart began to soften.

Despite her illness, she was always joyful. She never complained, even when her illness grew worse. When she could no longer leave her home, she asked for the church services to be held there. She wanted to worship with fellow believers and hear the Word, even when she couldn't get out of bed.

At Easter, we had the service at her home again. But this time, there was an inspection! Fatima was arrested for holding a service in her home. But despite this blow, she was overjoyed at the verdict. The document called her a religious teacher. She thanked God, saying, "Before Christ, I considered myself a nobody... But God called me a teacher. He used me as his blessed instrument." She understood what it meant to rejoice when we are met with trials and obstacles. Today, Fatima is in heaven, where there is no illness, but her example lives on.

Challenge

Jesus says: "*To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life*" (Revelation 21:6). People would never drink salt water to satisfy their thirst. But often we try to satisfy our desires with "salty water". We seek out all sorts of ways to satisfy our deepest desires: like a thirsty person drinking salt water, these ways do us more harm than good.

Give some examples of how we drink this salty water.

Examples may include: addictions to social media, unhelpful websites, alcohol, drugs, food; sexual immorality.

Only Jesus can truly satisfy our thirst for true life. Only he can give us living water!

What description of the new Jerusalem gives you the most hope at this time? Share your reason(s) with each other.

Share with each other what God has been saying to you through this lesson.

Practise explaining to the person beside you why the new Jerusalem will have no temple, no sun and no closed gates. What do each of these tell us about our life with God?

Pray for each other to fix your eyes on the new Jerusalem, so that present difficulties feel lighter in its light!

Homework

Read **Revelation chapter 22** so you can be ready to study it in the next lesson. As you read, note down one thing that excites or moves you. Be ready to share it with the group.

Answers

1 – A new heaven and a new earth.
2 – The sea.
3 – Holy City, new Jerusalem, a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.
4 – God himself will live with his people!
5 – God himself will wipe every tear from their eyes.
6 – There won't be any more death or mourning or crying or pain.
7 – "*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End*."
8 – "*Water without cost from the spring of the water of life*."
9 – *A very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal*.
10 – It had a great high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates.
11 – *The names of the twelve tribes of Israel*.
12 – *The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*.
13 – *A measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls*.
14 – The city was like a cube. Its length, width and height were the same measurement.
15 – 12,000 by 12,000 stadia.
16 – *Pure gold, as pure as glass*.
17 – Every kind of precious stone.
18 – Huge pearls.
19 – *A temple*.
20 – *Because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple*.
21 – *Because the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp*.
22 – They will *bring their splendour* into the new Jerusalem.
23 – Because *there will be no night there*.

Commentary

God's dwelling place is now among the people (v.3):
- in the beginning God walked with Adam in the garden (Genesis 3:8–9)
- then he dwelt with Israel in the tabernacle and later the temple (Exodus 25:8)
- when Israel sinned, God had to depart from these dwellings (Ezekiel 10:18)
- but through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, God promised that once again "*they will be my people, and I will be their God*" (eg Jeremiah 24:4–7; Ezekiel 37:23)
- later Jesus the Messiah came to earth and "*made his dwelling among us*" (John 1:14)
- today God does not live in man-made temples (Acts 7:48–50), but in the bodies of his people (1 Corinthians 6:19–20) and in the church (Ephesians 2:21–22)
- God lives with us — we are his people and he is our God (2 Corinthians 6:16)
- in the new Jerusalem, everything that stops us from experiencing that joy will be removed!

there will be no more death, or mourning, or crying or pain (v.4): this is confirming what God declared through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 25:7–8; 35:10; 65:17–19).

the list of sins (v.8): similar to the ones in Revelation 9:20–21 and 22:15. However, here there are three extra sins that are not in the other two lists. These three sins were a particular temptation for the believers:
- being **cowardly**: it was very hard for believers not to give in to the social pressure to do the same as everyone else, especially to worship the emperor. Jesus used this 'cowardly' word when he said to the disciples: "*Why are you so **afraid**? Do you still have no faith?*" (Mark 4:40) Being cowardly is the opposite of having faith.
- not **believing**: it was important for them to keep trusting in Jesus, whatever the cost and however great the storm (see Revelation 2:13).
- being **vile**: which included sexual immorality and idolatry.

like a jasper (v.11): jasper described the glorious presence of God (Revelation 4:3).

twelve gates (v.12): The prophet Ezekiel's vision of the restored Jerusalem had 12 gates, named after the 12 tribes of Israel. There were three gates on each side (Ezekiel 48:30–35). However, the new Jerusalem is for all God's people, who now come from **all** nations of the world (Revelation 7:9).

the wall... was **144 cubits thick** (v.17): this is 65 metres! 144 cubits is 12 times 12, which indicates utterly complete protection. We will be totally safe!

the foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone (v.19): this is similar to other lists of precious stones:
- in the garden of Eden (Ezekiel 28:13–14)
- on the high priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:17–21)
- in the prophet Isaiah's description of the restored Jerusalem (Isaiah 54:11–12).

Precious stones should always remind us of God's holiness and gracious mercy towards us!

light (vv.23,24): this reminds us that Jesus said, "*I am the Light of the world! Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*" (John 8:12). In the first century, night-time was truly dark and therefore dangerous. Travellers would make sure that they were inside the city gates before nightfall. Once it was sunset, the city gates were shut to protect the city from robbers.

So the image of "light" tells us that we can only find all that is good, wise and true in Jesus. Only he can restore our relationship with God the Father. Only he can give us love, joy, peace and hope for eternity! Without Jesus we are truly in darkness (John 8:12).

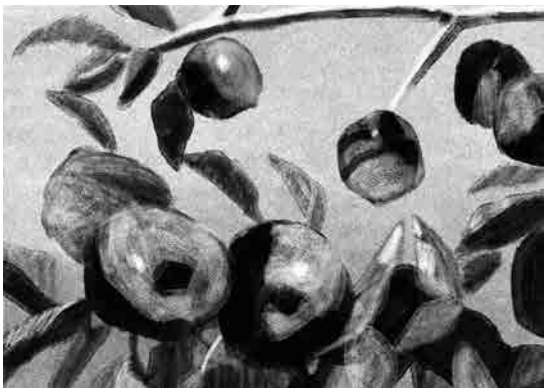
A comparison of the two cities and the two women

Babylon the Great	The new Jerusalem
The great prostitute (17:1)	The bride of the Lamb (21:2,9)
The great city of the earth (17:18)	The Holy City from heaven (21:2,10)
Purple and scarlet clothing represents wealth (17:4)	White fine linen represents purity (19:8)
Sinful deeds (18:5–6)	Righteous deeds (19:8)
Gold, jewels and pearls though corrupt commerce (17:4; 18:12,16)	Heavenly jewels, gold and pearls reflect God's glory (21:11,18,21)
Kings commit adultery with Babylon and weep (18:9)	Kings bring glory into the city (21:24)
A home for everything unclean (18:2)	Nothing unclean will enter (21:27)
The nations deceived (18:23)	The nations healed (22:2)
Woe and destruction (18:10)	Blessing and Life (22:14)
Call to come out (18:4)	Call to enter (22:14)

**Table from the Zondervan Study Bible 2015 p.2615*

Revelation lesson 18

God's promises fulfilled



The story of Osman Sheikh Ahmed (Somalia, died 2008)

Osman Sheikh Ahmed grew up in Somalia and became a follower of Jesus as an adult. He knew that this decision was dangerous. In Somalia, following Jesus can mean death. He chose to follow Jesus anyway. He became a teacher and worked quietly to share his faith with others. In 2008, the situation in Mogadishu became extremely dangerous for any known follower of Jesus. Osman was identified as a Christian convert by an extremist group. On 25 October 2008, he was shot and killed outside his home. He was one of several Somali believers killed in that period. He had known the risk and had chosen to remain in his country and serve his people rather than flee to safety. Truly he was given a wonderful welcome into heaven!

Many faithful believers do not enjoy healthy, wealthy and long lives, but in this lesson we will learn that in the new Jerusalem God will give abundant health, wealth and eternal life to those who belong to Jesus! God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be completely fulfilled. God's people will enjoy God's blessings and live in God's kingdom, the new Jerusalem.

The garden of Eden restored: the river and the tree

Read **Revelation 22:1–2**.

(?) What does the angel show John in verse 1? [1]

(?) Where does the water flow from in verse 1? [2]

Once more, we see how God and the Lamb work as one. God is the source of life and goodness (Psalm 36:9; John 11:25).

Flowing... down the middle of the great street of the city (vv.1–2): in Roman cities, a river flowing down the middle of a city would be a stinky open sewer. But here, clean and pure water is flowing. And because it flows through the centre of the city, everyone can enjoy it!

(?) What is on each side of the river (v.2)? [3]

This tree is the tree that gave eternal life in the middle of the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9). After Adam and Eve sinned, God expelled them from the garden so that they would not eat from the tree of life. He placed cherubim to guard the way to the tree (Genesis 3:22–24). God did not want to give eternal life to sinful people. However, in the new Jerusalem everyone will be able to eat the fruit of this tree!

(?) What are the blessings that the fruit and leaves of this tree bring (Revelation 22:2)? [4]

The tree grows in such a way that its blessing is far bigger than the blessing that the tree in the garden of Eden could offer! God's provision for his people is constant and endless!

The curse is removed, fellowship with God is restored

Read **Revelation 22:3–4**.

(?) What will there be no longer in the new Jerusalem (vv.3–4)? [5]

In Genesis 3:14–19 we read how God cursed the earth because of Adam and Eve's sin. But when Jesus comes back there will no longer be any curse! People of all nations, who have suffered the tragic consequences of sin but faithfully followed the Lamb, will be able to receive healing and restoration!

(?) What will believers be able to see in the new Jerusalem (Revelation 22:4)? [6]

The most important thing about the new Jerusalem is that God is there! We won't be ashamed of our sins and failures, because Jesus has washed us clean with his blood. God will welcome us as his beloved servants!

His name will be on their foreheads (v.4): in the book of Revelation, people are divided into two groups:

1. Those who have on their foreheads the seal of God, which is the name of the Father and the Lamb (Revelation 7:3 and 14:1). This seal shows that they belong to God and that he will protect them. So they must be faithful to him.

2. Those who have the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:16–18). Satan expects total obedience from those who bear his mark.

There is no neutral group: either we belong to God, or to Satan.

(?) What will God's servants do in the new Jerusalem (end of Revelation 22:5)? [7]

God's servants will **rule** over creation. This is the task that God gave his people at the very beginning: in Genesis chapter 1, God's first command was: "*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. **Rule** over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that*

moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28). But we won't need to "*increase in number*", as the full number will already be there in the new Jerusalem, symbolized in the number 144,000 in Revelation 7:4. God wants us to rule his new creation to the praise of his glory!

So, Revelation chapter 22 tells us that God will restore the garden of Eden, but this time it will be a garden city. Touching the tree of life was once forbidden, but it will be freely and lavishly available! Life will be everywhere, death will be finished! The never-ending day will come, when God will be amongst us and all our hopes will be fulfilled!

(?) What does Revelation chapter 22 tell us about our future hope? [8]

Conclusion

Read **Revelation 22:6–21**.

(?) When will Jesus return (v.7)? [9]

We can't tell exactly but the time may be very short, so we need to use each day to become more like Jesus and to tell people about him.

(?) Who is blessed in verse 7? [10]

The purpose of this prophecy is not to entertain us. Nor is its purpose to invite us to make predictions about when and how things will happen in the future. The purpose of this book is to call God's people to remain faithful to God, however difficult life may be.

(?) What is John told to do in verse 10? [11]

This message is for everyone to hear!

(?) What are believers told to continue to do in verse 11? [12]

When it seems like the end is not near, it can be hard to keep going!

(?) What does Jesus say in verse 12? [13]

God will repay everyone according to their deeds (Jeremiah 17:10). But here, Jesus himself is the one who rewards us according to our deeds (2 Corinthians 5:10).

(?) What does Revelation 22:13 tell us about Jesus? [14]

Compare this with what God said in **Revelation 21:6**. Jesus is God! We can trust him with everything!

(?) What is the promise in Revelation 22:14? [15]

These people are believers in the Lord Jesus. They have "*washed their robes*" and have "*the right to the tree of life*". This means that they will live for ever. They can "*go through the gates into the city*".

(?) What are we warned about in verse 15? Who are these people? [16]

Dogs (v.15): were wild, aggressive and unclean animals. This word is sometimes used in the Bible for those who rebel against God (e.g. Philippians 3:2). Unbelievers are known by their continuous sins. They do not repent.

We have read this invitation and warning before, in Revelation. This is the last time — soon it will be too late.

(?) What two names does Jesus call himself in the second part of verse 16? [17]

The **Root and the Offspring of David**: this name looks back to the Old Testament. Jesus fulfils all the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.

The **bright Morning Star**: this name was part of the promise to the church in Thyatira (Revelation 2:28). It looks forward — like the morning star, Jesus shines in the darkness before the dawn. Soon he will come back in glory!

(?) What does Revelation 22:18–19 say we must not do? [18]

This sentence isn't just for Revelation, but for all books of the Bible. No one is allowed to add to what is written in the Bible. In the Bible is written all that we need in order to know God and have eternal life. So, if someone says that they have a new and different revelation from God, we know that it's not true. Any revelation must be tested against what God has already said, in his complete and perfect word.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people (v.21): The beginning of the book of Revelation showed us that John was writing this book as a letter to the churches. In the same way, the book finishes in the usual way that the apostles finished their letters (e.g. 1 Corinthians 16:23). And it's a beautiful prayer for us to pray!

(?) What does John pray in Revelation 22:20? [19]

Do you pray this? If you do, it shows you are looking for Jesus' return and you are trying to be ready for that time!

Amina's story

My grandmother Amina was the last in our family to accept salvation. For a long time, she was against the faith, even forbidding her children from going to church. But she noticed the effect on her children. They used to lead a bad life, but after coming to God they became kind and responsible people.

One day, Amina suffered a stroke and completely lost control of the left side of her body. She couldn't even move her arm or turn her head left. Having seen the changes in our family, she decided to come to church. She heard the pastor say that only Jesus can change people.

That day, one of her sons was calling people to repent. Amina came forward. They both wept and prayed together. At that moment, she felt peace in her heart, and resolved to be baptized, despite the winter cold. The pastor had to break the ice to perform the baptism. When she emerged from the water, a miracle occurred — her left arm moved! The left side of her body started to function normally.

From that day on, she dedicated her life to Christ. The woman who had once stood against the faith was now a passionate evangelist! Through her testimony, many neighbours accepted Jesus. She influenced the lives of everyone who knew her.

People leave this life, but their testimonies continue to speak of the living God.

Discussion

Amina became a believer late in her life, and yet God used her powerfully. But what if she had died before she repented? How does this make you feel about people you love who are not yet following Jesus?

Discuss the reasons why you might not want Jesus to come back right now.

Practise explaining to the person beside you the new things that Revelation 22 tells us about the new Jerusalem. Say which things you are most looking forward to.

Share your answers with each other, and **pray** that you and those you love would long for Jesus' return in glory!

Review

We have now come to the end of our course on the book of Revelation.

1. What are your favourite verses or passages in Revelation?
2. What did you find out or learn from the book of Revelation?
3. Through this book, what was the most important thing that Jesus taught you?
4. After studying this book, how have you changed in life? What would you like to change?

Final challenge

Who will you read this book with or who will you recommend it to?

Answers

1 – *The river of the water of life.*
2 – *From the throne of God and of the Lamb.*
3 – *The tree of life.*
4 – Plentiful food and *healing of the nations.*
5 – *No longer will there be any curse.*
6 – They will see the face of God!
7 – *They will reign for ever and ever!*
8 – Revelation chapter 22 tells us that God will restore the garden of Eden! Life will be everywhere, death will be finished! The never-ending day will come, when God will be amongst us and all our hopes will be fulfilled!
9 – Soon!
10 – "*The one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.*"
11 – "*Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll.*"
12 – They are to continue to do right and continue to be holy.
13 – "*Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.*"
14 – "*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*"
15 – "*Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.*"
16 – "*Outside are the dogs, those who practise magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practises falsehood.*" These are unbelievers.
17 – "*The Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.*"
18 – We must not add to, nor take away from, the words of this book (or any other books of the Bible).
19 – *Come, Lord Jesus!*

Commentary

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (v.2): Leaves have always been used for healing. Even today, many medicines are made using leaves. John's vision reminds us of another vision that God gave the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 47:1–12). In this vision, a river flows from the temple and brings life everywhere it goes. Throughout the year, the trees growing either side of the river bear fruit for food and their leaves bring healing for God's people who were in exile. However, in John's vision the leaves are for healing "of the nations" — it is available for people from ALL nations! Peoples that were once divided by hatred and conflict are reconciled and restored in the presence of God (Revelation 7:9)!

his servants will serve him (v.3):

- God and the Lamb are so united that John writes "*him*" and not "them"
- "*Servants*" is John's regular word for the people of God in the book of Revelation (e.g. Revelation.1:1)
- serving God is a priestly task (Hebrews 8:5)
- God's servants now serve God by offering their whole lives to him (Romans 12:1).

they will see his face (v.4): God told Moses, "*You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live*" (Exodus 33:20). God is too holy and majestic for people to see him. And yet, occasionally, some privileged people were allowed to see him. For example, the elders of Israel saw God (Exodus 24:9–11). And we read: "*The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend*" (Exodus 33:11). However, direct and everlasting fellowship with God is the hope only for believers in the new Jerusalem. Jesus said, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*" (Matthew 5:8). See also 1 Corinthians 13:12 and 1 John 3:2. Are we ready to see God face to face, or are there things in our lives of which we will be ashamed when we see him?

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things (v.8): this is a phrase that was used when officially recording eye-witness statements (see 1 John 1:3). The apostle John wants us to know that he really did see what he's written down for us.

I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel (v.8): the apostle John was a man who made mistakes, just like other believers. As in 19:10, it shows us that angels are "*fellow servants*". Apart from Jesus, no one else (human or spiritual) may be worshipped together with God the Father.

do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll (v.10): this is in contrast to the instruction to the prophet Daniel, who was told to roll up and seal the words of the scroll (Daniel 12:4). This was because his visions concerned "*the distant future*" (Daniel 8:26). "*The words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end*" (Daniel 12:9). But in Revelation chapter 22, the angel told the apostle John, "*The time is near*". The apostle John's visions were explaining what was happening in his time as well as what was going to happen when Jesus returns to judge the world and the new Jerusalem comes. The believers of John's time desperately needed the encouragement and challenge that the book of Revelation brought them. Is the book of Revelation opened up in your church? If not, how can you encourage the members of your church to discover the encouragement and challenge that the book of Revelation can bring them?

let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong... (v.11): this is similar to the prophet Daniel's words, "*Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked*" (Daniel 12:10). When Jesus comes back it will be too late to change direction. What we decide now has consequences for eternity — the time is near (v.10)!

my reward is with me (v.12): this fulfils the promise made through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 40:10; 62:11).

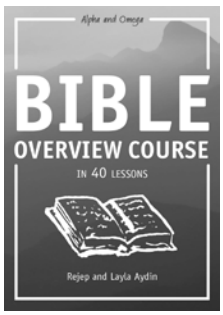
blessed are those (v.14): this is the seventh time in the book of Revelation that we have read about who is "*blessed*". We can be completely sure that if we follow Jesus, we will be truly blessed!

CONGRATULATIONS!
You have finished the Revelation course!

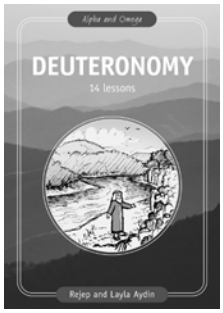
This course has been designed to help you develop a lifelong love of the book of Revelation and of Jesus himself!

Who can you share these lessons with?

Other books by Alpha & Omega



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Love One Another: 6 Lessons

The book of Revelation is the climax of God's revelation of himself and yet many believers do not read it! This is like a person watching an exciting film and walking out before the end because someone had told them what is going to happen.

For many centuries this book has been a blessing for those who are suffering from persecution. It encourages us to stand strong and not to be deceived by the attractions of the world. Jesus really is better than anything that the world offers us!

This course is written for those who teach God's word or want to know God's word more deeply. For those who rise to the challenge, the book of Revelation will fill your mind and heart with awe and wonder.

"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."

Revelation 1:3

EN