

REVELATION TEACHING NOTES

These teaching notes are written to help Urbana 18 Bible Study Teachers prepare to frame each passage and lead lively, focused, and fruitful studies. For each of our passages, these notes include:

- **Literary Context:** This information should help you frame the passage in the context of Revelation and our journey through Revelation at Urbana.
- **Cultural & Historical Background:** These are included in the daily PowerPoint presentations. This Urbana, they also appear in the handbook and app, so that participants will be able to refer back to them throughout the study.
- **Possible Interpretive Questions:** This section contains questions that you can insert into the list asked by your group or fall back on in the large group discussion if a question was not asked. The first level questions should lead a group through a fruitful discussion of the passage, while the second level of sub-questions are follow-up questions you might choose to ask if/as helpful.
- **Responding to the Word (Application Questions):** These also appear in the Urbana 18 handbook and app. Selecting which question you invite your group to engage with will be a real-time decision made as you see how God is leading your group that day.

Revelation 12 notes diverge from the typical pattern to fit the way we recommend leading this study (as we studied it together in September).

Blessings as you prepare and teach!

Revelation 2:8-17

Literary Context:

While in prayer and worship in his island prison, John had an encounter with Jesus in all his resurrection glory. Jesus didn't just appear to him in a vision; he physically placed his hand on John and commanded him to write messages to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). This morning we will look at the second and third of those seven messages.

Cultural and Historical Background:

- Smyrna & Pergamum – key cities in Asia Minor, centers of emperor worship
- synagogue – Smyrna's large Jewish population rejected the Jesus-followers among them, causing Christians to lose the exemption from emperor worship that Jews possessed.
- victor's crown – laurel wreaths awarded to those victorious in battles or athletic games
- Balaam – ancient pagan prophet associated with idolatry and sexual immorality (see Numbers 24:25 - 25:3)
- food sacrificed to idols – meat from animal sacrifices used in pagan rituals was eaten at trade guilds and other public meetings; forbidden by early church leaders (see Acts 15:19-20)
- manna – bread from heaven God provided for his people in the wilderness (see Exodus 16:4, 11-16, 35)

Possible Interpretive Questions:

- What challenges are the believers in Smyrna facing?
 - If the city is wealthy, how did this church come to be impoverished? How is the Christian community in Smyrna both rich and poor?
 - Why does Jesus use the term "synagogue of Satan"? (How can someone be both a Jew and not a Jew?)
- What is Jesus concerned about for believers in Pergamum?
 - How can the Pergamum church both be remaining true to Jesus but also need to repent?
- How would Jesus' perspective affect these churches?
 - What role does Satan play in the challenges these churches are facing?
 - What do Jesus' descriptions of himself communicate to these churches?
- What does it mean to be victorious? How would Jesus' promises encourage these believers to remain faithful?

Responding to the Word (Application Questions):

1. What are you afraid following Jesus might cost you and your community? How are we tempted to cut corners in order to avoid cost?
2. How can we guard ourselves against false teaching? Pray that God would use our study of Revelation to increase our confidence in the Scriptures and our hunger for his Word. Consider making a commitment to studying the Bible in community this coming year.
3. Where have we and our churches made compromises with the idols of our culture or country? What will repentance look like?
4. In your setting, what situations of evil require the faithful witness of God's people? Look through the seminar listings (pages 70-81) for opportunities to equip yourself in the face of that evil.

Revelation 5:1-11

Literary Context:

After Jesus finishes dictating his messages to the seven churches, John is given a vision of the heavenly throne room and the eternal worship of God by all of creation in heaven and earth. As John describes the worship in heaven, his readers would be reminded of how the Roman Senate honors Caesar. John's vision subverts the Emperor's claims of greatness and authority, reminding us that God is the creator and king of all. That vision of worship in heaven continues in this morning's passage.

Cultural and Historical Background:

- scroll – symbolizes God's plan for the nations (*Note: this is in the ppt, but not in the handbook.*)
- seals – important documents like deeds and wills were sealed with wax seals to prevent tampering. Only the intended recipient would have legitimate authority to open them.
- Lion of the tribe of Judah – messianic title (see Genesis 49:8-10)
- Root of David – messianic title (see Isaiah 11:1-5,10)
- Lamb – symbolically weak; object of sacrifice, in particular the Passover Lamb (see Exodus 12:21-23; Isaiah 53; John 1:29)
- Symbolic numbers:
 - 4 = completeness in creation
 - 7 = completion, wholeness, perfection
 - 24 = people of God (12 tribes of Israel; 12 apostles)
- symbolic images:
 - horns = strength
 - eyes = wisdom

Possible Interpretive Questions:

- Describe this scene. What all does John see here?
 - If this were the opening scene of a movie, how would it be filmed?
 - What would the soundtrack sound like?
- Why is John so emotional?
 - Why is it tragic that no one can be found to open the scroll?
- What is significant about how the Lamb is described?
 - Why is this figure represented as both Lion and Lamb?
- What makes the Lamb worthy?
 - Why is worthiness so important? How do worthiness and triumph relate?
 - What is the significance of the "new song"?
- What did the Lamb's death accomplish? What are the implications for us?
- Why is worship the primary response to the announcement of the Lamb?

Responding to the Word (Application Questions):

1. What circumstances in your life, your community, or our world seem hopeless? How does the slain Lamb on the throne speak into that hopelessness? Pray into that.
2. What do our culture, society, and political systems say is worthy to be worshipped? How can you resist the temptation to admire and honor worldly expressions of glory and power, and only worship the Lamb on the throne?
3. The Lamb is worthy because he was slain. How does this challenge our assumptions about power and vulnerability? In what practical ways can you follow the slain Lamb into self-sacrifice for the sake of others?
4. Jesus has ransomed for himself people from every tribe, language, people, and nation. How can you be a faithful witness to those who do not yet know of Jesus and his sacrifice for them?

Revelation 12:1-17

Frame

- As the video said, Revelation has cosmic conflict. What stories of good and evil were you exposed to growing up? How did they influence you? (*Share in pairs, then large group*)
- The original audience and their cultures had their own stories of good and evil. (*You could share the familiar hero-monster myth here.*) The next few chapters of Revelation will introduce the enemies of God's people: the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. They're the real culprits behind the problems of the churches John is writing to. As Jesus unveils the cosmic conflict to John, here we see the center of it all. Revelation 12 starts a new section of the vision and pulls back the veil fully to reveal what's really going on behind all the difficulties experienced by Jesus' followers under Roman rule.

Pray

Read passage (potentially 2 readers, 1 reading poem)

Give cultural background:

- Many ancient cultures had a well-known myth in which a hero grows up to slay a monster who had threatened him at birth. Roman emperors appropriated the story for themselves, often portraying themselves as Apollo, the son of Zeus, who killed the serpent Python.
- *Artist's rendering of an ancient Near Eastern dragon* (When we think of a dragon, we're thinking of something very different than the original audience would have had in mind. To them, *drakon* was more of a chaos monster, a multi-headed sea serpent associated with chaos and destruction.)
- dragon/serpent/accuser – see Genesis 3:1-4,14-15; Job 1:6-12
- the son who "will rule the nations with an iron scepter" – quoted from Psalm 2:9, a messianic psalm
- 1260 days (equaling 42 months, 3½ years, or half of 7) – a limited period of time corresponding to the period of persecution in Rev. 11:2 and 13:5 (see Daniel 7:25)
- wilderness – recalls God's care for his people in the wilderness (See Exodus 14; 19:4)

Individual Study:

- How are all the *characters* described? How do they interact? What might be their motivations?
- What do you notice about how *time* and *place* function in this story?

Share in SGs

Discuss in LG

- How are all the *characters* described? How do they interact? What might be their motivations?
 - Describe the atmosphere of this woman's labor and delivery.

- What motivates the dragon's attacks?
- What do you notice about how *time* and *place* function in this story?
 - How do heaven & earth relate?
 - How does time function?

Looking at the Structure:

- Throughout the book, considering John's structure helps us understand his meaning. Structure informs interpretation, especially where he tells his story non-sequentially.
- Divide the text into sections and give each one a title. (Our goal is to better understand the major scenes of this vision/story.)
- What do you observe about the overarching plot movements, conflicts, and patterns in this story?

Share in SGs

Discuss in LG

Interpreting the Poem:

- In several kinds of ancient literature (including Greek drama), poetry/song interprets action; it tells the audience how they're supposed to think or feel.
- Let's zoom out and read the whole thing again. **Read aloud again (potentially 2 readers)**
- How does this song/poem interpret or make sense of the story that surrounds it?
- Zoom further out: Where would John's original readers find themselves in this story? What does this poem tell the churches about how to live in the tensions they're facing?

Share in SGs

Share in LG

Summary

Responding to the Word (Application Questions)

1. How would recognizing the reality of spiritual warfare impact your prayer, attitudes, actions, and relationships? Select a seminar or visit a prayer room to invest in your ability to pray in the midst of spiritual warfare.
2. God's people triumph over our enemy through the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. What hinders us from faithful witness? Bring your fears to God. Ask for his protection and provision for your community as you testify to the Lamb.
3. Our Christian family around the world is suffering under the onslaught of the enemy. Spend some time praying for the persecuted church – for courage under pressure and for God's protection and provision in the midst of suffering.
4. How can your community's testimony about Jesus work against the lies of the enemy? Text those you came with to Urbana and set up a time to talk and pray about using *Reveal* to invite your friends into God's family.

Revelation 20:11-21:8

Literary Context:

We have reached the climax of John's series of visions about how God will deal with evil. Just before this morning's passage, we see what will happen when Jesus returns. The dragon Satan will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, along with the beasts that have been his puppets on earth. Babylon will fall. The nations of the earth will be freed from the evil trinity that have deceived them, and the people of God from the human systems that have oppressed them.

Cultural and Historical Background:

- books – reflect the common idea that angels recorded human deeds by which they ultimately would be judged (see Daniel 7:9-10; Ezekiel 18:30; 2 Corinthians 5:10)
- book of life – see Exodus 32:32-33; Daniel 12:1; Revelation 3:5, 13:8
- new heaven and new earth – see Isaiah 65:17-25
- bride – Ancient cities were often personified as women. John portrays Babylon/Rome as a prostitute (see Revelation 17); and Old Testament writers depicted Israel as God's bride (see Isaiah 62:1-5).
- God's dwelling place – see Exodus 25:8, 29:45; 1 Kings 6:12-13; John 1:14
- "I will be their God, and they will be my people" – promise repeated throughout the Old Testament (see Leviticus 26:11-12; Jeremiah 31:33, 32:36-41; Ezekiel 37:23-28)

Possible Interpretive Questions:

- Imagine the scene in vs. 11-15. How would you describe what is happening?
 - What details of this scene stand out to you?
 - If this were a play, how would you stage it?
- What is the purpose of judgment?
 - What is the significance of the various books mentioned? How do the books relate to the book?
- What is this passage saying about death?
 - What does John's imagery of the lake of fire communicate?
 - Why is final judgment and the death of death necessary?
- What picture does this vision paint of the new heaven and new earth?
 - What do the OT images and promises evoke?
 - What will it be like for God's dwelling place to be among his people?
- How does this new reality contrast with the old order (21:4)?
 - What is "done" (21:6)?
- Who is described in 21:8? Why can't they participate in the new heaven and earth?
 - How are they contrasted with the thirsty and victorious in verses 6-7?
- How would this passage impact believers struggling to live in full allegiance to Jesus alone?

Responding to the Word (Application Questions):

1. How is God's coming judgment good news for our world today? For whom is it particularly good news? How will you be a faithful witness to this hope?
2. Whose names do you hope will be in the book of life? You've seen Jesus in Revelation. Will you help others see him? Text a few friends right now and invite them to look at Revelation with you.
3. How has the old order impacted you and your community? Which evils are you excited to see gone forever? Pray with hope for Jesus to abolish these evils. Listen for how your faithful witness might be a part of his work in overcoming evil.
4. Revelation 21:8 lists old order ways of living, which have no place in God's new creation. What will it look like for you to live in anticipation of God's new creation by turning from them?