

LEAD SHEET

REVELATION - WK 3 IT IS NOT MEANT TO DIVIDE US OCTOBER 16, 2016

THIS MONTH'S FAITH SKILL: **WORSHIP WITH YOUR LIFE**

If you want to know God better, give back to Him!

GETTING STARTED

General Discussion:

- In any scenario, how do you rank what is most important? *(It varies from person to person, but we all have values based on experience, morals, preference, comfort, etc.)*
- When we have competing values and have to choose, how do we focus on what is most important? *(We have to eliminate the things that are not as important.)*

As we continue our study of the book of Revelation, we will discuss some things that people argue about. People argue because of competing values.

We are also going to try to settle on what is most important and let that be what unites us.

DIGGING IN

The Book of Revelation is Scripture. As such, it is not meant to divide the Church or cause hostility among the people of God. There are multiple ways to interpret the book of Revelation. There are Christ-loving people who espouse each of these views. We are going to talk about the fundamentally different ways this book can be approached and try to see that we can still unite around the message of the book while disagreeing about details.

Literal Interpretation

It is important to understand that no one believes in a 100% literal interpretation of the book of Revelation. If so, some of the following verses would be crazy!

Read Revelation 9:7-10

Discussion Questions:

1. Taken literally, what did the locusts wear on their heads? (*Crowns of gold.*)
2. Taken literally, what did their faces look like? (*Human faces.*)
3. Taken literally, what did their teeth look like? (*Lion's teeth.*)

Along with their women's hair, iron breastplates, and a scorpion's stinger, these are incredibly frightening creatures! Let's look at one more example of how literal interpretation of Revelation is problematic.

Read Revelation 1:12-16

Discussion Questions:

1. Taken literally, what picture of Christ do we get here? (He has fire in His eyes, a sword coming out of His mouth, a golden sash around His white robe, and candles surround Him as He walks.)
2. Do you think that is what Jesus really looked like? Why or why not (Allow for discussion.)
3. What word tips us off that these images aren't meant to be taken literally? (The word "like" indicates that these are symbolic descriptions.)

Plenty of people agree that John uses symbolic language, but argue that the meaning of these symbols should still be taken literally. For instance, some admit that the locusts mentioned earlier may not actually be locusts, but helicopters firing missiles, as a first century prophet had no knowledge of this technology. The description can be symbolic while the event may be literal.

In other words, literal interpretations insist that the actual behavior and destruction of the figurative locusts will occur whether John literally or figuratively described it. Their interpretation argues that John figuratively describes it, but something similar—or symbolic—will literally happen.

General Discussion:

- If symbols are figurative, can some of what Revelation teaches be taken literally? How can we tell the difference? (*We need to understand Revelation's use of symbols.*)
- Do you think it was easier for the first century reader to understand what John was talking about than it is for us? Why or why not? (*He is using a lot of Old Testament symbols which are based on a first-century understanding of things. This is far removed from the writing of Revelation, it's very difficult for us to capture all that meaning.*)

Here's an operating principle to use as we study Revelation—we need to think about how the first-century readers would've understood the text and then apply it to today's culture. Revelation wasn't originally written for today, so pressing fast-forward on these passages is not wise.

Figurative Interpretation

If we don't take Revelation completely literally, then we should probably read it figuratively. Like other apocalyptic literature, Revelation is ripe with symbols. Some of these are meant to disguise the meaning of certain statements.

General Discussion:

- Based on what you know about Revelation so far, why would John want to disguise some of what he was saying? (*Church was heavily persecuted. John himself was in exile for speaking about Jesus. John may not have wanted to critique the Roman government openly.*)
- Because someone uses symbols to write, does that mean what they are writing about is not true? (*Of course not.*)

• By interpreting Revelation figuratively, are we stripping it of its meaning? (*No, symbols have meaning, sometimes more powerfully so.*)

It's also important to understand that the original readers would've had a thorough understanding of the Old Testament, from which many of these symbols were borrowed. Sometimes our confusion comes from our lack of understanding of the rest of Scripture, and it may not have been confusing to the original audience at all.

Re-read Revelation 1:12-16

I want to use the same passage we read earlier to examine this principle. Chances are you can guess what John is trying to communicate as he writes.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does the white robe indicate about Jesus? (*He is pure, holy, and blameless*)
2. What are some possible meanings of the symbol of Christ having a golden sash around His white robe? (*He is the King, royalty.*)
3. What does the sword—a sharp, double-edged sword—symbolize? (*Authority, the Word of God.*)

Elsewhere in the Bible, the Word of God is called a double-edged sword (Ephesians 6). Sometimes to understand Revelation's use of imagery we need to look elsewhere in Scripture. Again, this indicates that the first-century audience's understanding of this content informs our own. Sometimes those symbols are intuitive—white representing purity. Other times, the symbol is defined in other Scriptures—like the double-edged sword.

Another possibly divisive aspect of Revelation is what we call a millennial view. There are three main millennial views. Each view causes the reader to understand the entire book of Revelation differently. We will do a fast overview of the three views, understanding that we don't have time to cover them in depth:

pre-millennialism, post-millennialism, and a-millennialism.

As we read, think about which view uses the most appropriate interpretive approach to Revelation.

Pre-Millennial

Read Revelation 20:1-7

Discussion Questions:

1. Who is bound for 1,000 years? (Satan.)
2. What is Satan restricted from doing during this time? (Deceiving the nations.)
3. Who reigns during these 1,000 years? (Jesus.)
4. Who reigns with Him? (Martyrs who come back to life; this is the first resurrection.)
5. When do all other dead come back to life? (After the end of the 1,000 years.)

This introduces us to the 1,000-year period. Incidentally, this is the only time, this period, is mentioned in the book of Revelation (or the rest of the Bible for that matter). However, it is this passage that shapes ones' millennial view.

The prefix of the three main millennial views indicates when they think Christ will return. Pre-millennials believe Christ will return before the 1,000-year period. After returning, He will rule and reign, Satan will be bound (to be re-released at the end of the 1,000 years), and martyrs will be resurrected to reign with Christ. Other dead believers will be resurrected at the end of the 1,000 years.

A few more things about pre-millennialism:

1. It is the only end times view which takes the 1,000 year reign literally
2. There are many variations within pre-millennialism, including historic pre-millennialism and dispensational pre-millennialism

3. Pre-millennialism is the view promoted by the Left Behind movies

4. It has historic roots in the teaching of Papias, a disciple of John, and seems to be embraced by many early Church fathers who awaited Christ's return to Jerusalem to overthrow Rome and rule over a physical Kingdom. (Note: pre-millennialism also maintains that all of this occurs after the rapture. It is during the 1,000-year reign of Christ that the raptured return as well as the dead believers rise to rule with Christ. The final judgment and eternal Heaven follows the 1,000 years.)

Post-Millennial

If pre-millennialism claims that 'everything is going to get worse before it gets better,' then post-millennials assert that everything will actually get better before Christ returns. In a world like ours, it can be difficult to argue that things are improving and hastening the return of Christ. However, post-millennials point to a few factors:

1. Post millennials ignore geo-political factors when discussing Kingdom improvement, and claim that the Kingdom of God is growing in spite of troubling global events.
2. As more and more people convert to Christianity, this will result in global good.
3. This improvement will be gradual, but will result in the Great Commission being fulfilled.
4. Christ's return will follow this symbolic period of 1,000 years where Christ's rule and reign grows on earth.
5. Historical roots for this view are found in the Church father Augustine of Hippo.

(Note: post-millennialism still maintains that Christ will bodily return to earth, ushering in a new age where He reigns over His Kingdom. This is the new Heaven and new earth. This reign is eternal, not 1,000 years long.)

A-millennial

The pre-fix “a” indicates the negative. That is, there is no millennium in the a-millennial view. Like post-millennialism, the 1,000 years is interpreted as symbolic. Like pre-millennialism, though, a-millennials believe that things will get worse in the last days, but that Christ can occur at any point. After His return comes the resurrection of the dead, judgment, and eternal life in Heaven.

Chief among its assertions are that the Kingdom is a present reality, not a future one. Christ reigns on the throne (albeit in a figurative sense, not in physical presence) right now, not in some future 1,000 year period.

(Note: Perhaps the most compelling aspect of a-millennialism is the question “Do you believe Christ could return right now or at any point He desires. Other views insist certain things must occur before Christ’s return—and that Christ said as much. Only a-millennialism allows for Christ’s return at any moment.)

MAKING IT REAL

As you can see, there is plenty to disagree upon in Revelation.

Even among our group, we have some disagreement, which is not surprising! Perhaps you’re not sure, or have a combination of the views. Again, not a shocker. People who read Revelation have been thinking through and arguing about these things for hundreds of years!

General Discussion:

- Whom do we need to read Revelation like?

(The original readers.)

- Do you think the first readers understood the symbols of Revelation? *(For the most part, yes.)*

- How did they understand them? *(They understood their time, the Scriptures, etc.)*

- How can we better understand them, then? (*By studying the Scriptures, their culture, Biblical literature, etc.*)
- Do you think the first readers of Revelation were pre-millennial, post-millennial, or a-millennial? (*This is a tough one to answer. We just don't know. That's the point!*)
- What do you think was most important to the original readers? (*Knowing that Jesus will prevail.*)
- Based on why and to whom Revelation was written, why was this the most important point? (*They were persecuted, threatened. They weren't arguing about when horrible times would befall them as believers— they were already living them! Knowing Jesus wins was encouraging.*)
- So, if that was the main point for them, what should be the main point for us? (*Jesus wins, we should remain faithful, and we should have hope as the first believers did.*)

At the same time, it's not wrong to study this stuff and be able to talk about it.

Again, the main thing is not which millennial view you espouse, or even which interpretive method you embrace. While opinions about those things may vary, the original reader was encouraged by the outcome. God wins. His faithful are rewarded. No temporary trial or hardship can change that. So hold firm.

Re-read Revelation 21:5

Discussion Questions:

1. Who is seated on the throne? (*God.*)
2. What is God making new? (*Everything.*)
3. What does God instruct John to do and why? (*Write everything down because it is trustworthy and true.*)

There are symbols to fuss over and interpretive methods to debate, but there is one thing that we can all know for sure. Jesus is trustworthy. His Word is true. And at the end of all things—and even now—He is busy making all things new. Redemption is at hand. We can debate the details, but our destiny is decided.

Those that belong to Jesus win because He wins. Indeed, He has already won.

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray for wisdom for your students as they study more, but pray for purity of heart that they can approach Scripture humbly and that they embrace the undeniable truth of Christ.