

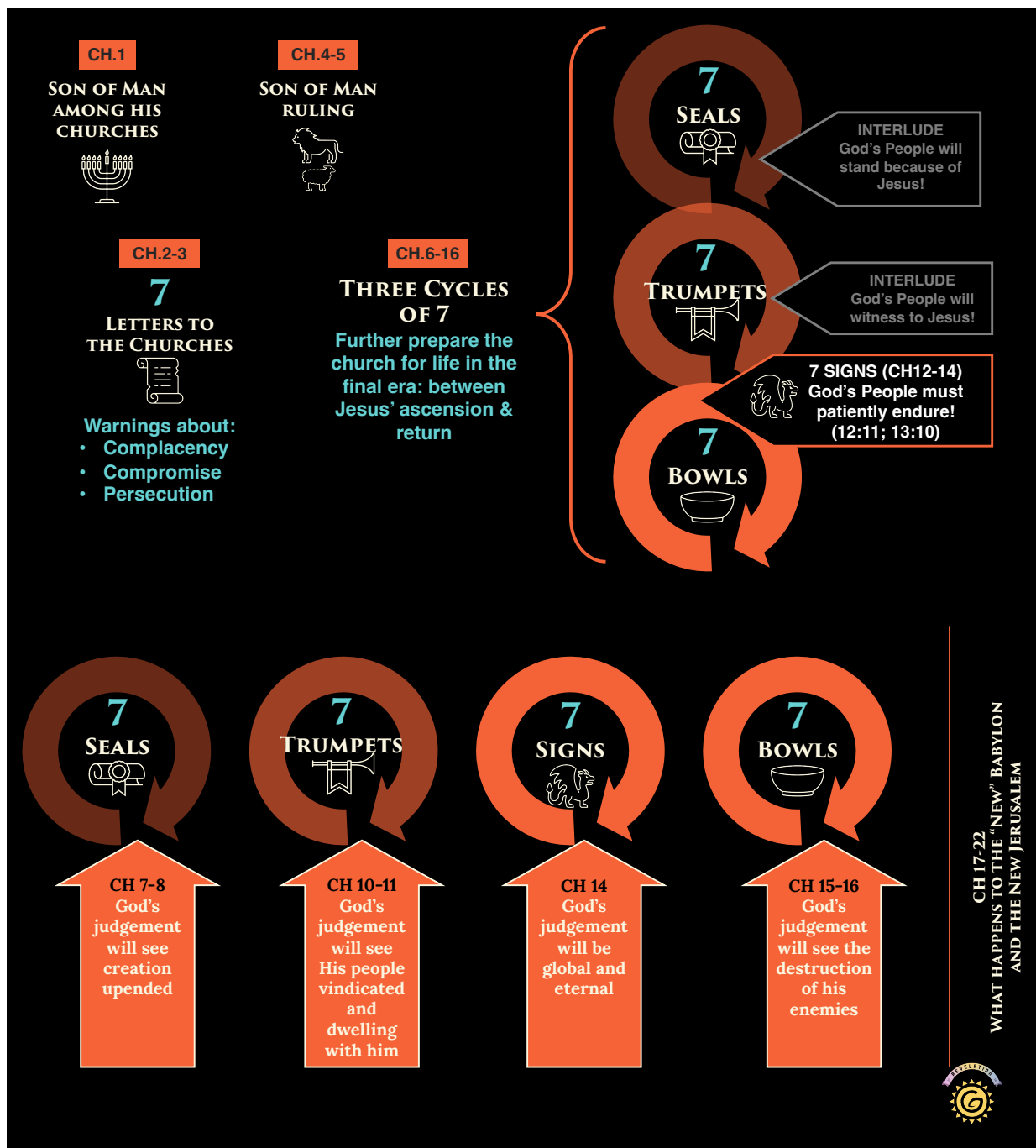
Contents

Introduction: Two Cities	2
Sermon notes on Revelation 17:1-18 – Babylon the Great.....	12
The “7 heads” (Rev. 17:9-11)	13
Study 1: Revelation 17:1-18 – Babylon the Great	18
Sermon notes on Revelation 18:1-24 – Fallen is Babylon the Great!	22
Study 2: Revelation 18:1-24 – Fallen is Babylon the Great!	23
Living as an Exile... Learning from the past.....	27
Sermon Notes on Revelation 19:1-10 – The Bride and Marriage of the Lamb.....	33
Study 3: Revelation 19:1-10 – The Bride and Marriage of the Lamb	34
Sermon Notes on Revelation 19:11-21 – The King Returns.....	37
Study 4: Revelation 19:11-21 – The King (Bridegroom) Returns.....	38
Sermon Notes on Revelation 20:1-6 – Satan Bound... Millennium	42
Before you start this study on the Millennium.....	43
Study 5: Revelation 20:1-6 – Satan Bound... The Millennium.....	44
Sermon Notes on Revelation 20:7-15 – The Final Judgment	48
Study 6: Revelation 20:7-15 – The Final Judgment	49
Sermon Notes on Revelation 21:1-8 – The New Heaven and Earth	53
Study 7: Revelation 21:1-8 – The New Heaven and Earth	54
Sermon Notes on Revelation 21:9-27 – The New Jerusalem.....	57
Study 8: Revelation 21:9-27 – The New Jerusalem	58
Sermon Notes on Revelation 22:1-5 – Eden Restored.....	62
Study 9: Revelation 22:1-5 – Eden Restored	63
Sermon Notes on Revelation 22:6-15 – Four Exhortations	67
Study 10: Revelation 22:6-15 – Four Exhortations	68
Sermon notes on Revelation 22:16-21	71
Study 11: Revelation 22:16-21 – Final exhortations	72

Introduction: Two Cities

The Story so far...

In Revelation 1-16, we've seen the 7 letters to the 7 churches (Rev. 2-3), the sequences of 7 judgments (and their interludes) that all issue from God's throne (Rev. 4-16), each culminating in the final judgment (Rev. 6:12-17; 8:1-5; 11:15-19; 14:1ff; 16:17-21). Like a multi-faceted diamond, Jesus is showing us the "last days" culminating in the final judgment from multiple angles and perspectives. The diagrams below illustrate some of this...



In Revelation 12-16 (our previous series), we saw the clash of two kingdoms and their rulers. On one side, we have God, the Lamb and His people (Rev. 4-5; 14:1-5), on the other side we have the Dragon (Satan), the Beast (antichrist) and false prophet with those who follow them (Rev. 12-13). Themes that were introduced at the end of this narrative were “Babylon” (Rev. 14:8; 16:19) and the final battle (Rev. 16:12-16). These will come into focus in Rev. 17-22.

The story of “twos” coming to an end...

When you begin to read the Bible from Genesis, you will notice that there are several “twos” in the Bible. Genesis begins with two trees: “the tree of life” and “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” leading to death (Gen. 2:9, 17). There are two spaces: “Eden” (Gen. 2:8) and the world outside of Eden (Gen. 3:22-24). Later it would be the Promised Land of Canaan (blessing) and the wilderness (testing / judgment) (Num. 14:1ff; Joshua 1:1-5:15); the Kingdom of Israel (1 Kgs. 4:25) and exile (2 Kgs. 17:1ff; 25:1). There are two mountains: “Mount Gerizim” (blessing) and “Mount Ebal” (curse) (Deut. 11:29). There are two ways to live: the way of life (trusting and obeying the LORD) and the way of death (doubting and rebelling against the LORD; pursuing idols / false gods) (Deut. 30:11-20; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8).

The book of Revelation (like the rest of the New Testament) picks up on all these threads of “twos”¹. One prominent thread of “two” picked up in Revelation 17-22 is the...

Tale of Two Cities...

In Rev. 3:12, Jesus promises His church that everyone who “overcomes” He will write “on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name”. The vision of the New Jerusalem will be the final vision in Revelation 21-22. The best is saved for last!

However, prior to reaching this incredible vision, in Rev. 14:8 we are introduced to a rival city, “Babylon the Great”, a city that is always destined to fall: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality” (v. 8). A city that will “drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his (God’s) wrath” (Rev. 6:19). This rival city, Babylon the Great, comes into focus in Revelation 17-18. Whereas the “New Jerusalem” is the city of God and its king is the Lamb (Jesus Christ), “Babylon the Great” is the city of “those who dwell on earth” (14:6), ruled by the Dragon (Satan) and the beasts (Rev. 12-13; cf. 17:3ff).

¹ Just consider Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) as an example.

These two cities, Babylon and Jerusalem, have deep Old Testament roots. So, to appreciate the visions of Revelation 17-22, we need to know the story of Babylon and Jerusalem...

Babel (Babylon)

The story of Babylon begins with “Nimrod” who established Babel and the kingdom of Babylon in “Shinar” (Gen. 10:7-10). Nimrod’s description, “a mighty hunter before the LORD” (10:9), is not positive. In Genesis, only Esau shares the title of “hunter” (Gen. 25:27) and Esau did not follow the LORD in any way (Bereshit Rabbah 37:2-3).

It will be the city of Babel (later to become Babylon) that was built in rebellion against God, seeking to exalt itself to God: “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves” (Gen. 11:4). Josephus suggests that Babel was built to defy God’s former judgment of the flood (this city will be too high to drown again, towering above the waters). They will build a city that can even challenge God’s judgment (Antiquities of the Jews, 1:4:1-2). Nimrod’s kingdoms and cities would become Israel’s two greatest adversaries, Assyria and Babylon. Israel and Judah would align themselves with Assyria (2 Kgs. 16:5-9) and Babylon (2 Kgs. 20:12-21) and inevitably adopt their gods / idols (cf. 2 Kgs. 16:10-20). Instead of being a “virgin bride” to God, they prostituted themselves to these kingdoms’ idols (cf. Ezk. 16:1-58).

During the time of the exile, king Nebuchadnezzar (like Nimrod), exalted himself and his city claiming: “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” (Dan. 4:30). He (and later kings) also demanded idolatrous worship from his subjects (worshipping him as a god) (cf. Dan. 3:1ff; 6:1ff). Yet, as the prophets declared, this centre of human power, rebellion and idolatry was doomed to fall under God’s judgment. Babel’s tower will never rise to reach heaven, but “sink, to rise no more” (cf. Is. 13:1-22; Jer. 50:1-51:64)².

In the Old Testament, Babylon is the paradigm (lens) through which we need to see / understand all the cities of men. Later Jewish writers would identify Rome (Edom = Red) as the city of men to have taken up the mantle of Babylon in their age, since it has all the qualities of Babylon (a great city of men) (cf. Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar, 7:10; Targum Lamentations 1:19). In Revelation, the great city of men to be identified as

² It is striking that the great city of Babylon remains a heap of ruins in the desert; a relic and city of nothing. How lamentable that world empires do not heed the warning this city represents to all who exalt themselves against God. It should strike us that even today people who live in the great cities of men seem to believe that their current city or empire will remain standing and not follow the historical trend that started with Babel in Gen. 11. Like Nimrod, they think they can build a city that can somehow weather the storm of God’s judgment in defiance against God.

“Babylon” remains Rome (cf. Rev. 17:9 – Rome’s geography). Yet, we should not limit “Babylon” to Rome, since the mantle has passed on to other kingdoms and cities of men as well.

5th Century Christian writer, Augustine, used this lens / paradigm to help his contemporary audience understand the collapse of the Western Roman Empire and the fall of Rome in 410 A.D. Augustine dedicated 15 years of his life to write “The City of God”. It remains one of the greatest Christian works and remains very helpful to us in grasping why human kingdoms / rulers and their cities keep falling and will ultimately fall (as this angel declared in Rev. 14:8) when Jesus returns. He will utterly crush the cities of men (the Babels / Babylons of our time) who have set themselves against His New Jerusalem (Mount Zion).

Jerusalem

Jerusalem’s first appearance in the Bible is under another name: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine (he was priest of God most high)” (Gen. 14:18). In Psalm 76:2, Salem is identified as Jerusalem: “His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion”. Unlike Babel³ (confusion), Salem means “peace” and was ruled by a Priestly-King, Melchizedek. It is striking that King David, who ruled Salem-Jerusalem, would look forward to a day when his Lord would rule as a Priestly-King “after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:1-7). Even so, prior to David’s arrival, the Jebusites would rule this region and rename the city as “Jebus” (cf. Josh. 18:28; Judg. 19:10-11; 1 Chron. 11:4-5).

The significance of Jerusalem (Salem-Jebus) is not evident in Genesis-to-1 Samuel. The reason it becomes prominent is due to two intertwined and unfolding realities, the throne of God (Tabernacle-Temple) and the throne of His King (David).

During Israel’s wilderness journey, when Israel dwelt in tents (Num. 1:52), God travelled with them in His own tent, the tabernacle (Ex. 28-29). When God’s tent is packed up, so Israel must pack up their tents and follow God through the wilderness (cf. Num. 1-10; Ex. 13:17-22; Deut. 1:29-33). The tabernacle was God’s portable throne room (like a King on campaign with his soldiers). Even so, this was a temporary arrangement. Israel was never meant to stay in the wilderness in tents, but to enter and make their permanent home in the promised land (cf. Ex. 3:7-8).

³ The Chaldeans would rename the city Babel (confusion) to be “*Bab-ili*” (gate of God) (Kidner 2003:110). As its original intent, they persisted in wanting to build a city “*in the heavens*” (Gen. 11:4), a “*Bab-ili*” (gate of God).

Significantly, God chose Joshua (in Greek: Jesus), to lead Israel into the Promised land, conquering all God's enemies (the Canaanites) to establish His people (cf. Deut. 31:1-8; Josh. 1:1ff). Joshua's conquests would only be once the "iniquity of the Amorites (is)... complete" (a good 400 years) (Gen. 15:16). The Canaanites were warned, for 40 years, of Joshua's & Israel's arrival. Some responded with faith prior to that day (cf. Josh. 2:8-14). All this is a "shadow" or "type" of what is to come when Jesus (Hebrew: Joshua) returns to lead His people in the final conquest against God's enemies (the world) and establish His people in His Kingdom forever (Rev. 19:11-21). The "last days" we live in are like the 400 years between God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:1ff) and its fulfilment (Joshua 1:1ff). Now is the age to respond in faith-repentance (following Rahab's example)⁴.

Once Joshua-Israel had entered the Promised Land, settled there and conquered all their enemies, God would choose a place to dwell permanently: "you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there... when he gives you rest from all your enemies around, so that you live in safety, then to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you... Take care that you do not offer your burnt offerings at any place that you see, but at the place that the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you..." (Deut. 12:1-28).

As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear what tribe and place God has chosen. God chose Judah⁵; from Judah, God chose the house of Jesse and from Jesse's sons God chose David (1 Sam. 16:1-13). It would be through King David that God would give Israel rest from her enemies and his son (Solomon) would build God's house (2 Sam. 7:9-13; 1 Kgs. 9:1ff). David conquered Jebus and renamed it "Jerusalem" (1 Chron. 11:4-9). It would be here that the Ark and Tabernacle resided (1 Chron. 15:1-16:43) and that God revealed to David where His house must be built (1 Chron. 21:18-22:1). It would be at Jerusalem, the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, that God's house must be built. Consequently, Mount Zion (Jerusalem) would be the visible place of God's glory and

⁴ Another aspect to keep in mind is that the Promised Land was meant to be a New Eden. It is not coincidental that Joshua enters the east side of the Promised Land and meets a figure with a drawn sword (cf. Josh. 5:13-15). Adam and Eve were banished from Eden on the east side and it was guarded by the cherubim with a flaming sword (Gen. 3:24). The parallel is deliberate. Like the first Eden, the New Eden (Promised Land) was meant to expand from its initial boundaries to "*the ends of the earth*" (Ps. 72:8). Jesus (our Joshua) has claimed the whole world as His (Matt. 28:18). He will return to take what is His by right, cleansing it of all His enemies (Rev. 19:11-21).

⁵ There were some hints that Judah would become a prominent tribe, specifically linked with rule / kingship. Jacob blessed Judah, saying that Judah would conquer all her enemies and "*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples*" (Gen. 49:10; Ps. 2 echoes Gen. 49:10). Balaam declared that Israel's "*King shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted... a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel*" that will crush all her enemies (Num. 24:7, 17-19).

rule as well as the throne of His anointed King. It would be from here that the nations will be blessed.

Yet, as the New Testament continually explains, all this is a “copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Heb. 8:5). It was preparation for a “second” covenant (Heb. 8:7). What God gave was a “guardian” (Gal. 3:24) waiting for the “fullness of time” for the arrival of the Son (Gal. 4:4), the fulfilment of the “Law and the prophets” (Matt. 5:17-19).

In Revelation 21-22, we see the entire Old Testament narrative (and its various types / shadows) finding their fulfilment. Eden’s Tree of Life (Gen. 2:9) and rivers return in spectacular fashion in Rev. 22:1-5. The old earthly Jerusalem (beset with idolatry and destroyed on multiple occasions) is replaced by the “New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:2). The earthly throne of God (the Temple) is replaced by God Himself dwelling among us: “God Himself will be with them as their God... I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev. 21:3, 22). Every prophecy concerning Jerusalem (the city of God) finds its completion in the New Jerusalem.

So, when you think of history (the story of God and humanity), you can view it as a tale of two cities: Babylon (the city of men) and the New Jerusalem (the city of God). In the current chapter of history, believers are citizens of the New Jerusalem (the city of God) living as exiles in Babylon (the city of men). And so, like Daniel in Babylon, we live as witnesses to the true King (God: Father, Son and Spirit) awaiting the end of exile (this wilderness life) and the establishment of “Mount Zion” (the new creation with the New Jerusalem) (Rev. 21-22).

In the words of the “letter to Diognetus” (2nd Century): “For Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs. They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an eccentric manner of life... Yet, although they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man’s lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living... they live in their own countries, but only as aliens. They have a share in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land... They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require. They love all men, and by all men are persecuted... They are treated by the Jews as foreigners and enemies, and are hunted down by the Greeks; and all the time those who hate them find it impossible to justify their enmity” (5:1-17).

What to keep in mind in Rev. 17-22...

Apart from the major theme of two cities, here are four things to keep in mind as we journey through Revelation 17-22...

Jesus' promises to the 7 churches (Rev. 2-3)

Although the Bible is written for us, it was not written to us. Revelation was originally written to the 7 Churches, so we should always keep the original audience in mind prior to applying it to our own day. A great way to do this is by remembering all Jesus' warnings and promises to His churches.

1) Warnings: Idolatry, persecution and complacency

We know churches like Smyrna, Pergamum and Philadelphia suffered tremendous persecution from the “synagogue of Satan” (Jews who rejected Jesus as Messiah) and “Satan’s throne” (the imperial cult of Rome) (cf. Rev. 2:9, 12-13; 3:8-9). In Rev. 17:6, “Babylon the Great” is depicted as being “drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus”. The 7 churches were facing persecution from her hand.

Other churches, like Thyatira, Pergamum, and Sardis were compromising with idolatry, false teaching and sexual immorality (these three usually go together) (cf. Rev. 2:14-15, 20-22; 3:1-4). Laodicea was becoming “lukewarm” (useless and nauseating) in their complacency in pursuit of worldly security and riches (Rev. 3:17-19). In Rev. 17:2ff, “Babylon the Great” is depicted as a prostitute with whom the world commits “sexual immorality”, filled with riches “gold and jewels and pearls” and full of “abominations (idols)”. She makes the nations wealthy and causes them to compromise in her idolatry / sexual immorality (cf. Rev. 18:2-3, 9-20).

The churches are shown who they are aligning themselves with if they should not repent. The false teachers who have infiltrated them are servants of “Babylon the Great”. Rev. 17-18 serves as a warning to the 7 churches (and us today).

2) Promises

As we walk through Revelation 17-22, remember the following promises and consider how they are depicted in the concluding visions....

- “To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). Read **Revelation 22:1-5**.
- “The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death” (Rev. 2:11). Read **Revelation 20:11-15**.
- “To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it” (Rev. 2:17 – an invitation to a banquet). Read **Revelation 19:6-10**.
- “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star” (Rev. 2:26-28). Read **Revelation 19:11-21**.
- “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels” (Rev. 3:5). Read **Revelation 19:6-8, 14; 20:11-15**.
- “The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name” (Rev. 3:12). Read **Revelation 21:1-27; 22:4**.
- “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. 3:21). Read **Revelation 21:1-27**.

How to read Apocalyptic literature

A common statement about Revelation is that it is “the entire Bible in one book”. How does Revelation do this? Through its visions. Revelation fits into the category of “apocalyptic” literature (Daniel, Zechariah and Revelation being the most prominent). That is literally its title: “the apocalypse / revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:1).

Revelation wants you to “see” the visions, yet these visions (what you see) do not stand alone, but serve as signposts or symbols that point you to other parts of Scripture (especially the Old Testament), tapping into rich and deep themes that run from the OT to the NT. So, Revelation assumes that you know the OT and NT quite well (and that you read it as one book, one story culminating in “the Revelation”).

Another element you will notice is that there are many references to various Jewish texts (interpretations of the Old Testament). Revelation is using common images that were well-known in that period among Jewish Christians as well. This does not mean that the Jewish texts are the authority here, but merely that John’s original readers would have been aware of this. Where it is relevant, I added it to the Group Guide (yet I would advise you not to get lost in this rabbit trail).

Although symbols / signs are used, this is real!

It is worth noting that although Revelation communicates in symbols and signs, this does not imply that it is not real. There will be a literal return of Jesus Christ to conquer the nations (Rev. 19:11-21). There will be a literal final judgment resulting in two eternal destinations (Rev. 20:11-15). There will be a literal new Jerusalem coming down from heaven to bring on a new creation (Rev. 21:1ff). The symbols do not nullify the reality, instead they try to communicate a reality that is greater than the symbols. So, understand, the visions are just a glimpse, seeing “in a mirror dimly” our future hope (1 Cor. 13:12).

As an analogy, I’ve done many 2–6-day hikes in South Africa (from the Drakensberg to the Cederberg). One thing I am always aware of is that the pictures I take never compare to the reality of being there (the glory of the place is never captured in the image). They might give those back at home an inkling of the region, but it is nothing like being there yourself and witnessing the reality of it. In a similar way, Revelation is like the “pictures” I took. The visions are beautiful, but they are nothing compared to the reality that they try to depict. And one day, we will have the joy of being there, seeing God (Father, Son and Spirit), the new creation, the New Jerusalem and the glory of all His people “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

There is disagreement on Rev. 20:1-6 – the Millennium

A passage that has become quite controversial over the last two centuries is Rev. 20:1-6 concerning the millennium (thousand years). We will be looking at this passage in detail but just know that believers and followers of Jesus have differed about this passage throughout the ages. There are three broad interpretations of this passage with many great present and historical figures promoting each view. Each view has extremes that could lead to unhelpful beliefs and practices, but this is not a salvific or “closed hand” issue.

Just to give a summary of each view (and Lord-willing we will explore this in more depth), here are the three views (next page)...

- 1) **Pre-Millennial** view: Jesus will return before the millennium to usher in a literal 1000-year reign.
- 2) **Post-Millennial** view: Through evangelism and societal reformation, the church will usher in a millennial reign preparing the way for the return of Jesus after the millennium.
- 3) **A-Millennial** view: The 1000 years, like the rest of the numbers in Revelation, is not a literal number. The millennium refers to the “last days” between Jesus’ first and second coming (the age we are living in).

There are many variations of each view, but this is the broad consensus. The challenge of Rev. 20:1-6 is that it is the only passage in the Bible that refers to the Millennium. Other passages that have a reference to a “thousand years” have very little connection with Rev. 20:1-6 (cf. Ps. 90:4; Eccl. 6:6; 2 Pet. 3:8). So, as we approach this passage, let us discuss it in an attitude of humility, patience and grace. We should always be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit, not drive an unnecessary wedge between believers who differ on points of interpretation in a very difficult passage (Eph. 4:1-3).

Overall, don’t let controversy in some Christian circles eclipse the severity and beauty of the final visions of Revelation 17-22. See the whole picture (the wood) and marvel at our future hope. If you trust and follow Jesus, then know you are looking at your future home.

Sermon notes on Revelation 17:1-18 – Babylon the Great

The “7 heads” (Rev. 17:9-11)

*“This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are **seven mountains** on which the woman is seated; they are also **seven kings**, five of whom **have fallen**, **one is**, the other **has not yet come**, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.”* (Rev. 17:9-11)

Although we believe, as a church, in the perspicuity of Scripture (that it is clear – ironic that the word ‘perspicuity’ means ‘clarity’, yet the word itself is obscure), this does not imply that it is easy to understand or that you can study it in isolation from others. The church collective, the church of the past and present, helps in interpreting Scripture. It is not “me” and “my” Bible, but “us” and “our” Bible. A book that really tests us here is Revelation. One such passage, where we need all the help we can get, is Rev. 17:9-11.

The text begins with “this calls for a mind of wisdom” (v. 9). A bit like those messages “only 10% of the smartest people get this”, followed by the puzzle – you would like to include yourself in that 10%. I must be one of those with “a mind of wisdom” (v. 9). Ironically, we then think it means I do this alone, when those who seek “counsel” from others are considered wise (not loners who think they know it all) (Prov. 1:25, 29-33; 2:1-6; 15:22; 20:18). Wisdom is found in seeking it from God and others who follow Him, not in yourself. We should be prayerfully asking for God’s wisdom (James 1:5). So, let us practise heavenly wisdom that is “meek... peaceable, gentle, open to reason... impartial and sincere” (James 3:13-18). This is ultimately the way of the Spirit of Wisdom who anointed Wisdom at His baptism: Jesus (cf. Deut. 34:9; Is. 11:2⁶; Acts 6:3; 1 Cor. 2:6ff)

So, what are these “7 heads” all about? Like a Tiramisu cake, this vision has many layers to it. Let’s try to unpack each layer and see how it all fits together...

a) Seven heads = Seven Mountains = Rome

The angel is very clear that the seven heads are “seven mountains” (Rev. 17:9) and that this city (now called Babylon the Great) “has dominion over the kings of the earth” (Rev. 17:18). Now, let us humbly remember that although the entire Bible is written **for us**, it is not written **to us**. The original audience of Revelation is not Gracefields, Fish Hoek in the 21st century, but the literal seven churches in Rev. 2-3 of the 1st Century.

⁶ This moment happens at Jesus’ baptism (cf. Matt. 3:13-17). Jesus calls Himself “wisdom” (Matt. 11:19) and greater than Solomon (the wisest) (Matt. 12:42). People were astonished by Jesus’ wisdom (Matt. 13:54). Luke 11:49 is an interesting one, since it probably refers to both the Son and Spirit.

To the 1st Century reader, it is obvious what city is in view here: **Rome**. Rome celebrated the “*Septimontium*” (seven mountain / seven hill) festival which is named after “the same number of hills / mountains (*montibus*) which the city afterwards embraced within its walls” (Varro, *De Lingua Latina*, 5:41; 1st Century BC). Rome was well known for this geographical distinction (cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6:782-783; *Georgics* 2:535; Martial, *Epigrams*, 6:64; Cicero, *Ad Atticum*, 6:5:2 etc.).

Even so, there is more to “mountains” than just geography. In the Old Testament, “mountains” are often used to refer to entire kingdoms and cities (as a bastion, a stable place, awe-inspiring power). For example, the following cities / kingdoms are described as mountains: Jerusalem (Is. 2:2); Babylon (Jer. 51:25); Edom (Ezk. 35:3); God’s Kingdom (Dan. 2:35, 45; Zech. 4:7; Is. 41:15). So, the “seven mountains” might be referring to Rome’s geography, but also to Rome’s kingdom and Empire. This becomes significant when you consider Rev. 21:10-27 in which the New Jerusalem is depicted as being on a “high mountain” and the size of the city is roughly the size of the entire Roman Empire.

Yet how do we apply this today? Rome and her empire are a relic of the past now (she is destroyed). The Rome of today is not the Rome of the 1st century. The key is to understand that “Babylon the Great” is a mantle passed on from the original Babel/Babylon (Gen. 11; Jer. 50-51) to any global city / kingdom that aspires to be the next Babylon (city of men) today. Every city and kingdom after the Roman Empire aspires to supplant her and become the next “Rome” (Babylon the Great). Historically, many western powers of Europe and America have aspired to be the next Rome with her empire. You can go and study why many European, British and USA buildings have a Greco-Roman style (there is some ambition there to be something).

In the middle east, many Persian-Parthian-Sasanian Empires desired to rival and supplant Rome as the superpower. The Arab conquests under Islam wanted to take over the original Roman and Persian Empires. The Byzantines wanted to preserve and restore the original Roman Empire. The Turkish/Ottoman Empire longed to be the next mistress of Constantinople (New Rome), finally achieving it in 1453. It is noteworthy that the centre of Islam, Mecca, was known for her seven mountains and called “the mother of cities” (Akhbar Makka 1:3). Yet, this description only appears in the **9th Century**. Mecca might not be the explicit reference of Rev. 17:9-11, but she behaves like Rome in her region of power and influence (as do Beijing, Moscow, Tehran, Washington D.C and any other great city and power).

The point is not trying to locate one city or kingdom of men as “Babylon”. It is recognising that whatever age or region of this current world you are living in, you live

under Babylon's rule (the city of men), whether it is in the great centre of power / wealth of our age or one of the cities / kingdoms / nation states under her influence (since she is "the mother of all prostitutes and of earth's abominations", 17:5). Cape Town might not be "Babylon the Great", but she is one of her daughters. No city of men is the city of God. Churches (Christians) are pockets of citizens of the New Jerusalem (that will **come down** from heaven, Rev. 21:1-2) living in the cities of men as exiles.

b) Seven heads = Seven Kings and an eight that belong to the seven = ?

The seven heads = seven mountains is the clearest. What has stumped Christians for centuries is the next seven. Who are the "seven kings"? Are they possibly like the "seven mountains", where they were a literal geographical location relating to a symbolic Old Testament theme of mountains and Babylon?

On the literal side, the list of suggestions of who the "seven kings" might be are numerous, but none of these suggestions is very satisfactory. Just to give you an idea. **Option 1:** Some suggest it is emperor Augustus to Vespasian (but skipping the three emperors in one year between Nero and Vespasian). **Option 2:** Others suggest it is the emperors between Nero and Domitian (Tertullian, Apologeticum, 5 [2nd Century]; Eusebius, Church History, 3:20 [4th Century]). There are at least 5 renditions of options 1 & 2. **Option 3:** seeing that the lists of emperors are not working, some have suggested it might be kingdoms. Egypt, Nineveh, Babylon, Persia and Greece (five have fallen), Rome (one is) and a future one to come (which is then interpreted as the Papacy of Rome) – a popular option during the Reformation. It is not obvious whether options 1, 2 or 3 are likely. You can speculate here (if you like), if you remember you are speculating. To be dogmatic about what is not certain is not wise.

So, that leaves us with the possible symbolic / thematic interpretation. Firstly, this type of numerical expression is not unique to Revelation, but occurs a couple of times as a type of Hebrew idiom. For example, in Proverbs 6:15, we read: "there are **six things** that the LORD hates, **seven** that are an abomination to Him", followed by 7 examples (not 13). Prov. 30:15, 18, 21, 29 has a "two... three... four" expression, followed by 4 examples (not 9). Eccl. 11:2 states: "Give a portion to seven, or even to eight". Mic. 5:5 speaks of "seven shepherds and eight princes of men". So, at least here we might pause and consider that the 5-1-1-8th (part of 7) of Rev. 17:10-11 might be something similar.

What is more clear is that these kings mirror the beast (antichrist) that attempts to mimic the Lamb (Jesus Christ) and God. Notice (next page)...

God and the Lamb	The Beast (antichrist) – belongs to the Seven	The Seven kings
“Who was <u>and is</u> and <u>is to come</u> ” (Rev. 1:4, 8, 17-18; 4:8)	“its mortal wound <u>was healed</u>... <u>was wounded</u> by the sword and <u>yet lived</u>” (13:3, 14) <i>“The beast I saw was, and is not, and <u>is about to rise</u>... was, is not... <u>it goes</u>”</i> (17:8, 11)	“have fallen... <u>is</u> ... <u>not yet come</u> ” (17:10)

So, given the significance of the number 7 in Revelation, each case conveying completeness (seven churches & lampstands, Rev. 1:4; 2-3; seven spirits, Rev. 1:4; 3:10; 4:5; seven stars / angels, Rev. 1:20; seven seals, Rev. 5:5; seven horns and eyes of the Lamb, Rev. 5:6; seven trumpets, Rev. 8:6; seven thunders, Rev. 10:3-4; seven heads of the dragon and beast, Rev. 12:3; 13:1; seven plagues, Rev. 15:1; seven golden bowls with the seven plagues of God’s wrath, Rev. 15:7-8; 16:1), it would be odd if the seven kings were somehow different, conveying something completely different from all the other sevens. Even Rome’s “seven mountains” is connected to the idea of the complete number of all human kingdoms / cities.

So, the “seven kings” is referring to the complete number of human rulers / kings that imitate the beast (the antichrist). All these kings will culminate in the “eighth” final beast (a last antichrist) who will be like the previous seven kings (they belong together, the eighth is “of the seven”). For the early church of the 1st Century, the Roman Emperors were imitators / followers / manifestations of the beast (the anti-christ). Yet, they will not be the last. History is full of subsequent beast-imitators. Today is no different (the world is full of human rulers / kings / presidents / governments that desire our total loyalty and promise what only Jesus Christ can give).

What you can be assured of is that once the final number of human rulers has been reached, a final “beast” (antichrist) will rise. But it will be “of the seven” (like what you have seen before in previous human rulers). In this sense, the church was correct in resisting the imperial cult of Rome in the 1st-4th Century. The church was correct in resisting human kings / monarchs who desired the church to be loyal / subservient to / shaped by the State (like Athanasius resisting Emperor Constantius II). Hildebrand’s (Pope Gregory VII) reforms in the 11th Century (removing state power / rulers from influencing / controlling the church) had good intentions (though they led to another evil). The church was correct in resisting what the Papacy became during the time of the Reformation (and the various kings / queens who were subservient to the Papacy). The examples are numerous.

So, in conclusion (putting the 7 heads of **mountains** and **kings** together), whereas “mountains” refer to human kingdoms / cities, the “kings” refer to those who lead them.

The question is, are you wisely considering how this might be the case for us today? Our brothers and sisters in the Middle-East and North Africa have no illusions about their rulers / cities / states and kingdoms. Christians in China are very aware of the hostility between church and state. How about us in South Africa? Were our former rulers and are our current rulers truly “friends” of the church, or were / are and will they be just imitators of someone else... a beast? How are the oppressive / seductive powers of this world tempting / pressuring us today as we live in South Africa?

Study 1: Revelation 17:1-18 – Babylon the Great

1. If someone asked you to describe “Cape Town”, “London”, “Washington D.C.”, “Beijing” (etc.), how would you describe it (the good, the bad and the ugly)?



Investigate

We have already heard of the judgment of “Babylon the Great” at the final judgment (Rev. 14:8; 16:9). Revelation 17 picks up the themes already introduced. Moreover, during the time of the 7 churches, Rome was the city of “seven mountains / hills” (Varro, De Lingua Latina, 5:41; Sibylline Oracles 2:18). Rome was known as the “the mother of nations” (Jerome, Letters 123:16-17, 127:12-13, 128:4)...

1. Have a look at these interpretative “keys” and then **read** vv. 1-6 together with them in mind...

Cities: It is about the people, not the buildings

In Revelation cities are depicted as women. The “Prostitute” (v. 1) and “the Bride” (19:7-9; 21:2). A city / people that committed idolatry is called a “prostitute”. This was used to describe Jerusalem (Is. 2:21; Jer. 2:20-25; 13:27; Ezk. 16:15; Hos. 2:5), Nineveh (Nah. 3:4), and Tyre (Is. 23:16-17). God’s faithful people and the **restored** Jerusalem are described as a “bride” (cf. Is. 62:5).

“waters” (v. 1): Echoes Jeremiah’s description of Babylon “who dwells by many waters” (Jer. 51:13). Babylon was the archetypal city of idolatry and opposition to God and His people (see introduction).

“... of the earth... dwellers of the earth” (v. 2): In Revelation a negative term to refer to people in rebellion against Jesus who are not “in the book of life” (Rev. 17:8; cf. 6:15; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6).

“... into the wilderness” (v. 3): A picture of this present age (last days – Rev. 12:6, 14) prior to the return of Jesus. A place of testing (Ex. 16:4; Mat. 4:1ff), but also of God’s fellowship, protection and care (cf. Ex. 19:4; Deut. 1:31; 32:10-12).

“Beast” (v. 3): It is the red dragon (12:3, 17) and beast (13:1-2). The city of men (Babylon) is dependent on and carried by the beast (the antichrist) empowered by the dragon (satan).

“Purple and scarlet” (v. 4): Expensive colours of royalty and elites (cf. Judg. 8:26; Dan. 5:7). Jerusalem adorned herself in this way to be alluring to her suitors (Egypt, Assyria and Chaldea) by adopting their idols / abominations (Jer. 4:30; Is. 1:15-22; Ezk. 16:15-58).

“Golden Cup” (v. 4): Through idolatry (abominations) she ensnares and ultimately destroys those under her sway.

“On her forehead... Babylon the Great” (v. 5): The beast will give his own his mark (Rev. 13:16; 14:9) and the name of his city (Rev. 17:5). It is the anti-Shema (Deut. 6:5, 8). You belong to the beast and his city based on how you think (head) and act (hand).

2. Summarise how these verses describe the relationship between the church and the “city of men”. (Don't miss the shock of v. 6!)
3. Have a look at these interpretative “keys” and then **read vv. 7-15** together with them in mind...

“the beast... was... is not... about to rise” (v. 8): Imitates and rivals God & Jesus (cf. Rev. 1:8, 18; 2:8; 4:8; 11:16; 16:5). Only those who are “dwellers of the earth” will ultimately follow the beast. Over the centuries many human rulers have risen to oppose God’s people. There will be an ultimate fulfilment of this pattern in the final antichrist.

“7 mountains” (vv. 9-14): Most famously, the city of Rome has “seven mountains” but there is broader symbolism here: Mountains in the OT often to refer to **human kingdoms** (and the city that rules them). So, “seven” can also refer to the complete number of human kingdoms and cities in opposition to God prior to Jesus’ return.

“7 Kings” (vv. 9-14): This probably refers to the complete number of human rulers trying to mimic God & Jesus. These human rulers will be followed by an 8th (final) antichrist figure.

“10 kings” (vv. 12-14): Subject to the king will be many other “kings of the earth” (cf. Rev. 16:4, 16; 17:2; 19:19). These are subsidiary kings / governments with relatively short (“one hour”) reigns – but who also wage war against the Lamb (v. 14)

Her fall (vv. 15-18): God can use evil empires as instruments of judgment (He does so all through the Old Testament). Yet, when their purpose is fulfilled they will be destroyed by the nations they subjugated (cf. Is. 10:5ff; Jer. 50-51; Hab. 2-3).

4. Have a go at summarising some things we can learn from this vision.



Thinking and Living

Cities and empires come and go. Often destroyed (“from within”) by their own subjugated kingdoms and colonies....

1. How does Revelation 17 change your view of human societies, cities and empires today?
2. Babylon is something that caused John to “marvel” (v. 6). She was impressive and alluring. How are you tempted by the “city of men” (as Augustine put it) to compromise following Jesus? Where do you feel her allure?
3. As vivid and confusing as this vision is, what is important and encouraging about the way it ends (vv. 14-18)?
4. In Jeremiah 29 & 50-51, the prophet called the exiles to “seek the welfare of the city (Babylon)” (29:7), yet they must also expect Babylon’s destruction and so “flee from the midst of Babylon” (50:8). **A tension.**
 - How do we live out this tension today, knowing we live under the power of “Babylon the Great” (city of men), yet we are citizens of the “New Jerusalem” (city of God)?

For reflection in the week: Consider how Daniel and his friends (exiles) related to Babylon in Dan. 1-6. Consider how Paul related to the very impressive city of Athens (Acts 17:16-31). Read the article about “7 Kings”. How does this apply to you (brother and sister) in Fish Hoek?

Points to Pray (now and during the week)

Let Revelation 17 shape your prayers...

1. Praise God that our citizenship is not “Babylon” (the prostitute) but the “New Jerusalem” (bride of the Lamb)! Unlike the cities of men, the city of God will never be destroyed, but is “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Pet. 1:4-5). Meditate on Rev. 21-22.
2. Confess and repent where you might have believed that the “city of men” (like Rome) could somehow be the city of God (New Jerusalem). Our security cannot be found in the cities of men (Washington D.C., New York, London, Berlin, Beijing, Sydney, Johannesburg or Cape Town). None of them is the “New Jerusalem”. Confess where you have lost sight of your heavenly inheritance and lived for “treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal” (Matt. 6:19), like Laodicea (Rev. 3:17).
3. Pray for wisdom as you live with the tension of living during the time of “Babylon the Great” (seeking the welfare of those who live in her) (Jer. 29) and yet knowing she will ultimately be destroyed (Jer. 50-51). What we do for Christ on earth has eternal significance (1 Cor. 15:58). Remember, we are God’s lampstand (a visible display of His glory) on earth as churches. Live in the light of your identity.
4. Pray for our brothers and sisters in cities where martyrdom is a reality (Rev. 17:6). There are many powerful cities of men in this world where it is not safe (in any way) to be a follower of Jesus. Pray that the Holy Spirit would strengthen them as they continue to testify to the blood of Jesus, even if it might cost them their lives (Rev. 12:11).
5. Pray for wisdom as you seek to testify to Jesus (our King), His city (the New Jerusalem) and eternal kingdom (the new creation) (Rev. 21-22). Pray for opportunities to share your faith with people in a restless world where the kingdoms and cities of men are shaken and come crashing down.

Sermon notes on Revelation 18:1-24 – Fallen is Babylon the Great!

Study 2: Revelation 18:1-24 – Fallen is Babylon the Great!

“Who would believe that Rome, built up by the conquest of the whole world, had collapsed, that the mother of nations had become also their tomb?”

(Jerome, Commentary of Ezekiel, Preface to Book 3, 5th Century)

1. **Human empires and their cities will fall.** How would you interpret the news if you heard: “Washington D.C has fallen!” or “Beijing has fallen!” or “Tehran has fallen!” or “Pretoria has fallen!”?



Investigate

Read Revelation 18...

1. What does the angel pronounce about “Babylon the Great”? (vv. 2a, 8)
2. List some of the features of “Babylon the Great” (vv. 2b-3)
3. What does the angel command God’s people to do? (vv. 4-5)
4. Identify the groups who will lament the fall of the city (vv. 9-19). Can you find anything they have in common, in terms of their reasons for lamenting?
5. Who is called to rejoice over the fall of Babylon? (v. 20)

6. What is being emphasised in this picture of judgment in vv. 21-23? (Count the number of times “never” is repeated)
7. What are the reasons given for the judgment? (v. 24)



Thinking and Living

“We renounce our rights as citizens of this world, and flee unto God on the wings of faith”
(Augustine, The City of God, 18:18, 5th Century – Responding to the fall of Rome)

1. We pray regularly, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Considering Rev. 17-18, what can we expect when God’s will is done and His kingdom comes?
2. How can this passage shape your perception of human cities / kingdoms?
3. Knowing that “Babylon the Great” will be destroyed...
 - How does that change what you and your family prioritise?
 - Why the church’s focus should be “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:18-20), being a “lampstand” of God’s glory, testifying to Jesus?

4. How does Rev. 18 challenge the following ...

- Materialism/Hedonism: I am going to live for making money, building a legacy and enhancing my enjoyment of this world. I am going to create a “heaven” on earth for future generations.
- Nationalism: life is about protecting, preserving and advancing the interests of my own people above everyone else (to build a kingdom and city for us).

Reflection: Prayerfully consider this week. What is God saying to you through these visions of “Babylon the Great”? Consider where we live (Cape Town, Fish Hoek) and any city of men you thought might be a bastion of hope (a refuge and strength).

Points to Pray (now and during the week)

Let Revelation 18 shape your prayers. Keep in mind what Jesus has taught us to pray:

“Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10)

1. Praise God that He will judge fairly: “pay her back as she herself had paid back others...” (Rev. 18:6). We can be assured that whatever judgment might befall, “God shows no partiality” (Rom. 2:11). What a relief to know that the evil we witness in the cities of men (Babylon) will ultimately end. There will be ultimate justice.
2. Praise God that His people will be vindicated. God will answer the prayer: “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:10). This is good news for Jesus’ people (the church) that has, is and will suffer persecution in this world (like the churches of Smyrna, Pergamum and Philadelphia).
3. Praise God that the ultimate destruction of Babylon (the city of men) will result in the arrival of the city of God (the New Jerusalem)! Babylon must fall for God’s city and kingdom to fully come on earth as it is in heaven. It will be a glorious day for Jesus’ people!
4. Pray for family, friends and people in our Valley who are not citizens of the New Jerusalem, but of “Babylon the Great”. We exist as ambassadors of our heavenly city and King Jesus to call those around us to come to Jesus before He returns. Pray for wisdom as you testify, but also for open hearts to receive this message.
5. Pray for our missions’ partners who are ambassadors for Jesus and His city in other parts of South Africa, Africa and the world. Pray for faithfulness and fruitfulness as they call various “nations... tribes and peoples and languages” to turn to Jesus (Rev. 7:9).
6. Pray for our children at Gracefields, that they would (at an early age) become citizens of the New Jerusalem and live for the kingdom to come and not “Babylon the Great” and what she offers through her idolatry.

Living as an Exile... Learning from the past

The imagery of “Babylon the Great” in Rev. 17-18 has led many Christians throughout history to consider the question: “How should I live in relation to the ‘city of men’?” She is clearly alluring and hostile (Rev. 17). Her future end is destruction (Rev. 18). So, how should we live? Reading Revelation 17-18, it would be tempting to think that a Christian’s only response to world kingdoms, cities and rulers is **to flee** or **fight** them. Some Christians have made these conclusions in the past. It is worth considering past answers to avoid present mistakes...

Option 1: Flee like a monk

Jerome (4th century), for example, argued that the only way you can be a truly devoted Christian is if you become a monk in the desert (flee the city!) (cf. Letter to Heliodorus). The entire monastic movement that began in the 4th Century was motivated by this desire to “flee”. Asceticism and isolation is a very tempting option for some who want to avoid “worldliness”. Normally, to “flee” the world you had to go to the desert, some inaccessible mountain cliff or wilderness region. Yet, this led to some serious legalism and bizarre views of spirituality.

For example, wanting to avoid the “world”, some Christians began to live on the pillars of old ruins. They were called the “stylites” (a famous example is Simeon Stylites). Here they will remain, never leaving the top of the pillar, until they fell off dead. Moreover, people began to believe that these people were somehow “closer” to God (super spiritual people) and that, if you could just touch something of theirs, you too could get closer to God (as if their “holiness” could rub off). When news spread that one of the “stylites” was about to die, people would gather at the base of the pillar. The reason was gruesome... Their fallen bodies (and pieces of clothing) would be chopped up as “relics”. How ironic that the pursuit of avoiding “worldliness” would lead to “idolatry” (the worship / veneration of these “monks” or “nuns”). It is worth asking, did they escape “Babylon the Great” who produces “abominations” (idols), when they have become idols themselves?

There are many “holiness movements” within Protestant circles that, without knowing it, breathe the air of the monastic movements. Ironically, these movements produce the same results of dividing Christians between the super spiritual and carnal (worldly / sinful); venerating individuals who we believe are “closer” to God due to their seeming “holiness” or believing that they are anointed by the Spirit, while we are not. These movements are generally characterised by legalism (you begin with Jesus, but through

these “steps” you can get closer to God). If only we could learn from history and gain some wisdom.

Option 2: Unite or Fight like a soldier or politician

Some Christians believed we can conquer “Babylon the Great” by the sword, political intrigue or legislature (law); we must “Christianise” the state or violently oppose it. This was a common view during the time of emperor Constantine (4th century) and most European kingdoms thereafter. The historian Eusebius was very optimistic that the city of God and the city of men could be united (cf. *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 10:9:6-7; *Oration of Praise of Constantine*, 1:4-6; 7:13). Many toyed with the possibility that Christianity could be promoted by legislation or imperial backing. For example, Emperor Theodosius, with the “Edict of Thessalonica” (380 A.D.) outlawed various heresies in the Roman Empire.

Not everyone was onboard with this church-state arrangement (as if the city of God and city of men can be united). The biggest movement against it was the Donatists in North Africa that started in 311/312 A.D. (just as Constantine began to rule over North Africa). Believing it needed to oppose the Empire, the movement aligned itself with rebel groups that waged war against the Roman Empire (fuelling old hatreds). For example, they were keen supporters of Firmus, an Amazigh leader claiming to be the “emperor of Africa”, leading a rebellion in 365 A.D. (and the death of thousands). When this failed, they welcomed the Vandals in 429 A.D. who could help them to destroy the Imperial powers (and the death of thousands). Many people were killed by this anti-imperial violent zeal of the Donatists (Daniel 1993:271).

Over a period of 26 years (393-419 A.D.), Augustine initiated 18 different conferences with the Donatists to try and reconcile Donatists with the rest of the church, but with little success. The continued violence and lack of success motivated Augustine to suggest and defend that the State could possibly “compel” the Donatists by legislation to return to the church (cf. Letter 185). Although Augustine sought to bring stability in North Africa (where he ministered) and end the violence and bloodshed, later readers (ignoring the context) would use Augustine to justify imperial violence.

King Charlemagne (8th Century), for example, believed you could convert people to Jesus by using the sword: **repent or die**. Seeing the problem here, Alcuin of York (8th Century) resisted Charlemagne’s policy and explained to him that *“faith is, as St. Augustine teaches, born of will, not compulsion. A person can only be attracted to Christianity: he can never be forced... Teachers of Christianity must be educated in the example of the apostles. They must be preachers, not predators, trusting in God’s goodness alone”* (Epistle 111). For the Reformers and Catholics during the period of the

Reformation (and afterwards), it was often considered necessary to use the State to protect or promote their interests. Yet, the state was more than happy to use the church for her own ends...

This relationship has led to some horrifying wars / evils in Europe (and in her imperial ambitions). One of the worst examples was the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Although the war was begun under the pretext of “religious beliefs”, it later became apparent that the church was used as a political tool for imperial ambitions: “in the final years of the conflict religion faded to insignificance” (Shelley 2008:304). Millions of civilians and soldiers died during this war. Living during the time, Lutheran minister Rupertus Meldenius pleaded that theological debates should never be settled with the sword: “*In a word, I would say: if we kept unity in necessary things, liberty in unnecessary things, and charity in both, our affairs would be in the best state*” (An Earnest Exhortation for Church Peace, 1627).

Since Constantine in the 4th Century, many Christians throughout history were incredibly uneasy with this newfound relationship with the State. For example, Athanasius (bishop of Alexandria, 4th Century) opposed the emperors for promoting the heretical doctrines of Arianism or Semi-Arianism (denying the Trinity). He suffered multiple exiles and was persecuted during his ministry. Similarly, John Chrysostom (5th Century) was not hesitant to preach from the Bible against the malpractices of the emperor / empress (and elites) who visited his church in Constantinople. For this, he was exiled and died on the outskirts of the empire. During the Reformation (16th Century), great churchmen like William Tyndale (who translated the Bible into English), Hugh Latimer and Thomas Cranmer (who reformed the church of England), due to their criticism of the State, were killed by the “Christian” state who they hoped would promote their cause.

In South Africa, when NG Dominee, Johan Heyns, began to speak out against Apartheid as a system (a government his denomination was aligned with for decades), he was assassinated in 1994.

It is encouraging to know that despite all the “evil” that has come from this idealistic belief that the church and state can somehow be united, God can turn evil upside down to accomplish His own good purposes (cf. Gen. 50:20). This does not justify the “evil” perpetrated, but it is good to know that evil cannot subvert God’s mission of reaching the nations (cf. Augustine, City of God, V:21). Yet, let us not be foolish enough to think: “And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying” (Rom. 3:8). As the Apostle concludes: “Their condemnation is just” (Rom. 3:8).

Option 3: Live like an exile...

This option is evident in many Christian writings (I will quote some at the end) and has gained more traction with the collapse of the former western orders of “Christendom” during the 20th Century (marking the end of what was begun by Constantine in the 4th Century). There has been a “rediscovery” or “reformation” (if you like) of early Christian thought.

In recent years, it has been quite popular to cite Jeremiah 29 as the lens through which Christians need to live in the city: “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer. 29:7). The word “welfare” here is the word “shalom” which refers to wholeness (in totality). This would have been a very radical thing to hear for the exiles living in Babylon (their enemy). They are called to seek the “shalom” of their enemies. Jesus’ words “Love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44) echo this.

Probably the greatest example of someone seeking the welfare of Babylon in the Old Testament is Daniel and his friends⁷. Daniel and his friends were so impressive and trustworthy in their work: “in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanterers that were in all his kingdom” (Dan. 1:20). Daniel served in some administrative capacity in the royal court “until the first year of king Cyrus” (Dan. 1:21; cf. 2:49) and beyond with Darius (Dan. 6:1ff). However, Daniel and his friends never compromised their faith and faithfulness to the LORD, even if it might cost them (cf. Dan. 1:8; 3:8ff; 6:10ff).

However, Jeremiah 29 and Daniel 1-6 are not the end of it. Daniel prophesied and expected the destruction of Babylon (the very kingdom he was serving, cf. Dan. 2:31-45). The prophet Jeremiah also prophesied the inevitable destruction of Babylon (Jer. 50-51). When that day comes, God’s people (the exiles) must “flee from the midst of Babylon and go out of the land of the Chaldeans” (Jer. 50:8). Ultimately, Daniel, Jeremiah and every faithful Israelites’ home was not Babylon (the city of men), but Jerusalem (the city of God). The hope was always to go home (Dan. 9:2ff). Although the exiles lived in Babylon, they remained citizens of Jerusalem. Daniel’s life in Babylon was about testifying to the LORD and His greatness, not making Babylon a new Jerusalem. The expectation was that Babylon would be destroyed, but the exiles could live testifying to God’s Kingdom and King that “shall stand forever” (Dan. 2:44; cf. Dan. 7:13-14).

The same is true for us. Although Babylon the Great seems alluring and powerful, it is expected that she will be destroyed by the nations she subdued and seduced (Rev. 17:16-17). The original Babylon’s rise and fall is the blueprint for all great powers and

⁷ Esther and Mordecai would be great examples as well in the book of Esther.

their cities. Our role during this time is to live like exiles. Live as the best citizen of the New Jerusalem (your home) while in exile in Babylon (showing God's peace /shalom), knowing Babylon will be destroyed (cf. Phil. 1:27; 3:17-21). And when Babylon is destroyed, "come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues" (Rev. 18:4; cf. Jer. 51:45).

Living in Fish Hoek

Fish Hoek might not be "Babylon the Great, mother of prostitutes and of the earth's abominations" (Rev. 17:5), but she is definitely one of her daughters (deeply influenced by the "Babylon the Greats" of our age). Fish Hoek is not our home, but a place of our exile.

Like the exiles, we live here. We build our homes, we have families and we work for the "shalom" (welfare / wholeness / peace) of Fish Hoek (or the larger Valley / Peninsula). We seek to live as the best citizens of the New Jerusalem (our real home) while living here (like ambassadors showing our neighbours what God's Kingdom is like). We want to show those around us what it means to be a follower of King Jesus (the Lamb), living for His glory. However, we do this without compromise (unlike the churches of Thyatira, Pergamum and Sardis that were compromising) or complacency (like Laodicea seeking security in earthly riches) (Rev. 2-3).

Nevertheless, we live this way, knowing full well that the Fish Hoek we know today will be destroyed at some point in the future, whether by some other nation in the future or the very people that live here (Rev. 17:16-17) or at the return of Jesus, the final judgment, and the establishment of the new creation and New Jerusalem (our real home) (Rev. 20:7-15; 21-22). Fish Hoek is temporary. It is worth noting that all seven of the cities where the seven churches resided (Rev. 2-3) are ruins today (with some modern cities built close to or over them). This is the tension we live with. **Living for eternity in a temporary home.**

The early church in the 1st-2nd century grasped this tension well: *"They (Christians) dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers... Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world"* (Letter to Diognetus, 5-6; 2nd Century). Tertullian (a resident of Carthage) described the church as being a *"sojourner on the earth... her dwelling place, her hope, her recompense, her honours, are above"* (Apologeticum, 1:2; 2nd Century). Justin (from Rome), wrote that Christians *"do not place our hopes on the present [order]"* (Prima Apologeticum, 11).

When the “Babylon the Great” of their age fell (Rome) in 410 A.D., Augustine wisely wrote **The City of God**. In it, he advised Christians to live the following way: “*we renounce our rights as citizens of this world, and flee unto God on the wings of faith*” (City of God, 18:18). Rome, like any city of men, was never meant to last since it was built on “*the love of self, even to the contempt of God... glories in itself... seeks glory from men... lifts up its head in its own glory... the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling... delights in its own strength, represented in the persons of its rulers*” (City of God, 14:28). Whatever peace the city of men might enjoy it is short-lived, since “*this city is often divided against itself by litigations, wars, quarrels, and such victories as are either life destroying or short-lived*” (City of God, 15:4).

Rome, and any great city of men (Babylon) thereafter, is not your friend and never will be. All of them are temporary seats of power from whence the unholy trinity (the dragon, beast and false prophet) exercise influence. The city of men is the enemy of the city of God (the New Jerusalem). Yet, love your enemy, witness to the Gospel of Jesus in the city of men in how you live. Remember, you were once a citizen of Babylon (doomed for destruction) whose story will just end with lament (Rev. 18). Someone loved you enough to share Jesus with you, you trusted in Jesus and have become a citizen of the New Jerusalem (destined for eternity with God). Why not do the same for those around you? Be the best citizen of the New Jerusalem you can be in Fish Hoek for the sake of those around you.

Sermon Notes on Revelation 19:1-10 – The Bride and Marriage of the Lamb

Study 3: Revelation 19:1-10 – The Bride and Marriage of the Lamb

“For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you (Jerusalem)” (Is. 62:5)

1. What do you love about weddings? What’s great about receiving an invite to a wedding?



Investigate

Read Revelation 19:1-10...

1. Quickly recall some of the things we’ve learnt about “Babylon” / “the great prostitute” over the past few weeks.
2. What cry did John hear three times in the previous chapter? (cf. 18:10, 16, 19)
3. **Read Rev 19:1-5:** Who is being praised and why?
4. **Read Rev 19:6-10:** Who is being praised and why?
 - a. Who is the bridegroom at this wedding? (cf. Rev 5:12-13)
 - b. Who is the bride? (cf. Eph 5:32)
 - c. What is she wearing and what does this represent? (v. 8)
 - d. What is the right response to news of this wedding? What is the wrong response? (vv. 9-10)

5. How would you summarise the message of Rev 19:1-10



Thinking and Living

You identify with and belong to one of the two cities (depicted as two woman). You can belong to Babylon (the prostitute) or the New Jerusalem (the Bride of the Lamb; Rev. 21:1-2). **There is no third option...**

1. In what sense is Rev 19:1-5 a warning for everyone? How do you feel about God's being praised for His judgment?
2. Why is it "good news" that history will end in a wedding? How much are you looking forward to this wedding day?
3. The work of Christ makes us ready for the wedding (see Rev 7:14). But if we have accepted what Christ has done for us how will that be seen? (See **Rev 19:8**; Eph 2:8-10)
4. In which case... how is your wedding dress coming along? Is there some sin you need to be repenting of or some aspect of godliness you need to pursue more?
5. Overall, how does this part of Revelation encourage you to remain loyal / faithful to Jesus?

Points to Pray (now and during the week)

Let Revelation 19:1-10 shape your prayers...

1. Praise God that the “corruption” endemic to “Babylon the Great” will be completely removed at the final judgment. At the new creation, there will be nothing on God’s holy mountain that will destroy His City / Kingdom (cf. Is. 65:25). The “former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).
2. Praise God for the future “marriage supper of the Lamb”! The end of history is not the final judgment, but the wedding of the Lamb and His bride (the New Jerusalem). The end of our story is one of celebration!
3. Pray for those you might know who have not yet trusted in Jesus. We know that God’s patience and kindness is meant for people to repent (turn to Jesus) (cf. Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). We would love to see people turn to Jesus and know they are invited to the “marriage supper of the Lamb”.
4. Pray for our church family (and other Christians you know). We are “betrothed” to Jesus. Pray that we would remain faithful to Jesus, preparing ourselves in this life for the joyful wedding of the Lamb and His bride at the end.
5. We have received “the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 19:10). Pray that we would truly be prophetic in proclaiming / testifying to what we have received (the testimony of Jesus in the Old and New Testament Scriptures). It is only by the testimony of Jesus that people hear, believe and are saved.
6. John’s response to the angel is, sadly, not uncommon. Cornelius was tempted to worship Peter (Acts 10:25). Some in Colossae were worshipping angels (Col. 2:18). We know Satan can disguise himself “as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). Many heretical movements have begun with the appearing and listening to some angelic figure (Islam, Mormonism etc.). Pray for discernment.

Sermon Notes on Revelation 19:11-21 – The King Returns

Study 4: Revelation 19:11-21 – The King (Bridegroom) Returns

H.G. Wells commented in 1914 that WW1 was “the war to end all wars”. After Communist Russia fell, Francis Fukuyama argued that we have reached “The end of history” and would enter a new era of peace...

1. If you think back over all we have seen in Revelation so far, what should our expectation be of life in this world before Jesus returns?



Investigate

Read/interpret Revelation 19:11-21...

1. **Read** vv. 11-16 together. The following table can help with the different images / symbols.

Jesus and His armies (vv. 11-16) – Some parallels to Rev. 1:9-20
“white”: symbolises righteousness, purity (holiness) and vindication (cf. Rev. 2:17; 3:4-5, 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 14:14; 19:8, 14)
“Faithful and True”: A title shared by Jesus (the Word) (Rev. 1:5; 3:14) and God in the Old Testament (Jer. 42:5). It was expected that the Messiah would judge in “righteousness... faithfulness” (Is. 11:4-5).
“flames of fire”: Jesus sees everything (cf. Rev. 2:18-23). Nothing is hidden from his gaze.
“many diadems”: the dragon has “seven diadems” (12:3) and the beast “ten diadems” (13:1). Jesus’ crowns have no number.
“He has a name written that no one knows”: 1) The church is promised a “new name” (Rev. 2:17; 3:12). This new name is Jesus’ name. 2) When God rescued Israel and established His covenant with them, He revealed a new name: “I AM” – “YHWH” (Ex. 6:3). Jesus’ return marks the final exodus. 3) Jesus is given a “name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:9).
“Dipped in blood” (v. 13): This is not Jesus’ blood at His first coming to redeem and cleanse (Rev. 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11), but the blood of His enemies in judgment (Is. 63:1-3; Rev. 14:19-20; 19:21).
“Armies of heaven” (v. 14): The heavenly host is Jesus’ angels (spiritual beings) (Matt. 13:40-42; 16:27; 24:30-31; 2 Thess. 1:7, Rev. 15:6 etc.). It is also His people (the church). Their robes are described in the same way (cf. Rev. 3:4-5, 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 19:8). Jesus has promised that His people will join Him in crushing rebellious nations (Rev. 2:26-27).

Vv. 15-16: Echoes Psalm 2 (God's Son – King), the “Servant of the LORD” (Is. 49:2) and the “shoot of Jesse” (Is. 11:4). The imagery of the winepress is in Rev. 14:19-20 echoing passages like Is. 63:2-6. All will acknowledge the supremacy of Jesus' rule (cf. Phil. 2:9-11; Dan. 2:47; 4:34-37).

2. Who is the main figure John sees (vv. 11, 13, 16)? And how is he described? (vv. 12, 13, 15)?

3. What is His mission? (vv. 11, 15)

4. Who is following him? (v. 14) What will happen to those who oppose him? (v. 15)

5. There are two suppers in Revelation Ch 19:
 - a. From last week: What was the “Marriage Supper of the Lamb's wedding” (v.9) about?

 - b. What is the “the Great supper of God” (v. 17) about?

6. Battle lines are drawn...
 - Who is the battle between? (v. 19) [Reminder: We met the beast and the false prophet back in Rev 13. They are the devil's henchmen and represent political and religious powers that are opposed to God and His people.]

 - What is the outcome? (vv.20-21)

7. How would you summarise the message of Rev 19:11-21?



Thinking and Living

1. How will all wars and history end? Who will end it? Why is He alone qualified to do so?
2. Why is it actually good news that God will, in the end, overthrow all evil and all His enemies? What would be the alternative?
3. What difference does it make to struggling Christians if we forget the outcome that Revelation 19 outlines?
4. Why has Jesus not returned yet (2 Pet. 3:9)?

Reflection: As you follow the news of wars and rumours of wars, consider... what is God saying to you in this vision? How does this change how you “see” everything?

Points to Pray (now and during the week)...

Let Revelation 19:11-21 shape your prayers...

1. Praise God that Jesus will return to end all evil and to establish His rule on earth (Rev. 19:11-21). Praise God that nothing and no one can stop Jesus from claiming what is His own: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18). When Jesus returns: "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10).
2. Praise God that all who trust in Jesus have also received the "Spirit of adoption", the "seal" (the Holy Spirit) to be co-heirs with Jesus, sharing in His victory (cf. Rom. 8:12-18; Eph. 1:13-23; Rev. 2:26-28). This is only possible because of the "blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10; 7:13-14; 12:11).
3. We live in a world of injustice/evil that does not recognise nor honour/glorify God. So pray...

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:9-10)

4. Think of specific evils/injustices you know of or have been done to you. So pray in line with the following passages...

"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written,
"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" (Rom. 12:19)

5. We live in a troubled world of tribulation/pressure/distress (Rev. 6:1-11). Consider what you are anxious about now. So, pray in line with this passage...

"The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Phil. 4:5-6)

6. Pray for boldness as ambassadors of Jesus, testifying to the Gospel of His victory until the "end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 4:23-31)

Sermon Notes on Revelation 20:1-6 – Satan Bound...

Millennium

Before you start this study on the Millennium...

This study will be shaped by the “amillennial” view. This is generally the interpretation held by the preaching team at Gracefields. However, this does not imply that there isn’t an appreciation of postmillennial or premillennial positions (each has its strengths, each has its problems). We will have a **Hot Topics** evening to explore the different views further (**Monday, 18 May, 7pm**). These are issues on which Christian brothers and sisters can and do differ, while humbly seeking to understand each other’s position.

Here is where we all **should agree (what is clear)**: 1) Jesus will return physically (for all to see), 2) the final defeat and eradication of evil from His Kingdom, 3) the physical bodily resurrection of the dead, 4) the final judgment, 5) hell, 6) the new creation, 7) the New Jerusalem is our forever home. These are the essentials.

Here is what we should do where **we disagree**: Jesus prayed for the unity of His people in Him (Jn. 17:20-26). The Apostle Paul urges the church: “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2-3). Let not Rev. 20:1-6 (the only passage on the millennium) divide you. Instead, as Rupert Meldenius (17th century) advised during the 30-Years war: “in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity”. Heed his advice and do not “grieve the Spirit” (Eph. 4:30) by dividing His people.

On the “1000 years”: There is no other reference to this in the Bible (seriously). The closest is “one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8; cf. Ps. 90:4). In 2 Pet. 3:8-13, the Apostle Peter is speaking of the present time (prior to Jesus’ return), which might support an amillennial view (but not decisively in any way). Some Premillennialists, like Irenaeus (2nd Century), interpret the 1000 years in the light of the 6 days of creation (Gen. 1:1-2:3), viewing the 7th Day (the sabbath) as the 1000 years – a number for the new creation. Amillennialists like Augustine (5th Century), agree with this link to Genesis, but see it as the “sabbath” Jesus’ people enjoy now in heaven prior to the new creation (cf. Rev. 6:11; 14:13). The new creation is seen as the eternal sabbath (rest).

It is worth noting that the majority of premillennials, postmillennials and amillennials throughout history have interpreted this number figuratively (like the other numbers in Revelation). Though some, like Tertullian, Justin (2nd Century) and various dispensationalists (19th-21st Century) would read it as a literal 1000 years. Ultimately, whether literal or figurative, it refers to a time of victory and rest for Jesus’ people (whether you see this as a present reality in heaven or only a future reality enjoyed on earth).

Study 5: Revelation 20:1-6 – Satan Bound... The Millennium

1. What impact did Jesus' first coming have on a) the spiritual realm, b) Sheol / Hades (the place of the dead) and c) the nations dwelling in darkness?



Investigate

In Rev. 16:12-16 (a scene just before the final judgment), we have the dragon, beast and false prophet deceiving the nations, rallying them for the final battle. In Rev. 19:11-21, this final battle is revisited, but now focusing on just the beast and the false prophet and their end. Now, in Rev. 20:1-15, this final battle is revisited again...now focusing only on the dragon and his end. **These are not three different events but one reality (the final judgment) from three different angles...**

1. **Read vv. 1-6 together.** The following table can help with the different images / symbols.

“The bottomless pit” (v. 1): Jesus holds the “keys” since He has overcome it by His death and resurrection (Rev. 1:18)⁸. This is the place of imprisonment of demons (Rev. 9:1-2) and rebellious angels: “He has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). It is “Hades” (Sheol - OT) (Rev. 6:8; 20:13-14), the place Jesus describes in His parable about Lazarus (Lk. 16:23). Jesus has taken His own from this place at His first coming (cf. Eph. 4:7-10; 1 Pet. 3:18-19), since He has ransomed them (cf. Rom. 3:25-26; Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10).

“Bound... sealed” (vv. 2-3): At Jesus’ first coming He “binds the strong man (Satan)” to plunder Satan’s house (Matt. 12:29). Jesus has “cast out” the ruler of this world and is now “drawing all people to (Himself)” (Jn. 12:31-33). Satan is cast out of heaven as accuser (Rev. 12:7-9) and Jesus reigns (Rev. 12:10). At the Cross, Jesus has “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Col. 2:15). Having “all authority” (Matt. 28:18) and having ransomed a people from all nations (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10), Satan cannot prevent Jesus from gathering His own from all nations. All of this does not imply a season of inactive passivity from Satan or demons. Yet, Satan knows he has “little time” left (Rev. 12:12; 20:3) and he is unable to take Jesus’ people (Rev. 12:11).

“Testimony of Jesus” (v. 4): A Christian is someone who trusts in Jesus, testifying to Him even if it might cost them their lives. The “martyrs” and those who have “passed through the great tribulation” are with Jesus now (cf. Rev. 6:10-11; 7:13-14).

⁸ In the Apostles’ Creed, this is what the phrase “*descendit ad inferos*” (descended into the underworld / lower depths / place of the dead) refers to; as testified by early Christian writers like Irenaeus (2nd Century) (cf. Against Heresies, 5:31:1-2).

“souls” (v. 4): In Revelation, it refers to the inner-self (person) that generates life that is separated from the body after death (cf. Rev. 6:9; 8:9 “living”; 12:11 “lives”; 16:3 “living”; 18:13-14). After death, Jesus’ people are not in “Hades” awaiting the final judgment, but with Him in heaven (cf. 1 Tim. 2:11-12; Phil. 1:23-23; 2 Cor. 5:6-8 etc.) waiting to join Jesus at His return (Rev. 19:14) and the new creation (Rev. 21-22).

“First resurrection” (vv. 5-6): Only occurs here in the Bible (implying a second resurrection). “Resurrection” almost exclusively refers to bodily resurrection (39 times in NT). There are, however, exceptions (cf. Lk. 2:34; Jn. 5:24-29; 11:25; Rom. 6:4-13; 8:10-11). Jn. 5:24-29 speaks of having “eternal life” now. Jn. 11:25 speaks of living after dying (prior to the future resurrection of the body). Paul speaks of having “resurrection” life already due to our union with Christ by the Spirit (Rom. 6:4-13; 8:10-11). This is what the “first resurrection” is referring to, the life His people enjoy “from now on”, even though they might die (Rev. 20:6) – they are alive with Jesus, resting in heaven (Rev. 6:11; 14:13), awaiting the second resurrection of the body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12-58).

“Second death” (v. 6): The “lake of fire” (20:14) at the final judgment. We call this “hell”.

2. What does the angel have and what does he do? (vv. 1-2)
3. Why does he do this? (vv. 3)
4. Who are the people John sees in his vision and what are they now doing with Christ? (vv. 4, 6)
5. What has happened to make that possible? (v. 4)
6. In summary, what are some things we can conclude about **the current state** of....
 - a. Satan
 - b. Jesus’ people who have died
 - c. The unreached nations



Thinking and Living

“You were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10)

1. Why will the great commission of “making disciples of all nations” succeed “until the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20)? Why can we expect “good soil” from all nations?
2. Can Satan stop Jesus from building His church? Why is this the case?
3. How does this passage motivate local and global mission? How are you involved in the mission at Gracefields?
4. What will happen if you die trusting in Jesus’ death (blood) and resurrection? Where will you be? (Rev. 6:11; 14:13; 20:4-6)
5. How can you not suffer the final judgment of hell? How can you have assurance that you won’t suffer this judgment? (cf. Rev. 7:13-14; 12:11)

“Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”
(2 Cor. 6:2)

REMEMBER: 18 May, 7pm, we will be exploring the other Millennium views. Please join us on this Monday evening.

Points to Pray (now and during the week)

Let Revelation 20:1-6 shape your prayers...

1. Praise God that Jesus is victorious over death, Satan and all spiritual powers (Col. 2:15; Eph. 1:20-23). He has bound the strong man and is busy plundering his house (Matt. 12:28-29). He is building His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). Jesus has all authority and so His mission will succeed in “making disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:18-20). The church is the display of God’s wisdom and victory over “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:10).
2. Praise God! The reason you believe and have become a disciple. The reason you are no longer under the dominion of Satan (deception and death) is that Jesus has ransomed you (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10). “Death and Hades” no longer has any hold over you and you will not suffer the final judgment of the “lake of fire”, because Jesus has ransomed you by His blood.
3. Praise God for the “first resurrection”. All who die in the Lord Jesus will “rest” with Him in heaven (cf. Rev. 6:11; 14:13) until He returns to eradicate and judge all evil (Rev. 19:11-21; 20:7-15), establishing His new creation and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22). At this moment, Jesus’ people are reigning with Him in heaven as He brings all things to their end (Rev. 4-5).
4. Confess where you might have believed that the “ruler of this world” (Jn. 12:31-32) or “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:3) is more powerful than Jesus’ ability to save. Confess where you might have lost sight of Jesus’ victory at His first coming, a victory you stand in and live by until He comes.
5. Pray that we will use this time well in being faithful and fruitful in gathering in Jesus’ ransomed people from “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9-10). Our valley has different tribes, languages, peoples and nations. Pray for opportunities to “make disciples” personally and as a church family (Gracefields).
6. Pray for our missions’ partners who have gone to the “nations” seeking to gather in Jesus’ ransomed people. Pray for boldness, faithfulness and fruitfulness: “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death” (Rev. 12:11).

Sermon Notes on Revelation 20:7-15 – The Final Judgment

Study 6: Revelation 20:7-15 – The Final Judgment

“Always after defeat and a respite, the Shadow takes another shape and grows again”
(J.R.R. Tolkien, the Fellowship of the Ring)

1. Will evil always “take another shape and grow” again? Discuss...



Investigate

1. Recap: What did we conclude in the last study about what Satan is and isn't able to do during the “1000 years”?

Some “keys” to have in mind as you read vv. 7-10...

The final battle and defeat of Satan (vv. 7-10)
“four corners of the earth” (v. 8): An expression to convey the whole world (cf. Is. 11:12; Ezk. 7:2). Once Jesus’ ransomed people are gathered in, a great apostasy / rebellion is expected.
“Gog and Magog” (v. 8): Echoes Ezekiel 38-39. The terms “Meschech and Tubal” (Ezk. 38:2) are possibly Hebrew names for groups that allied themselves with the empires that were Israel’s enemies. This is now symbolic of the final battle. NB: Over the years there have been many attempts to link these names with contemporary rulers or empires. There are also plenty of strange conspiracy theories out there around these names! They all miss the point that, in summary, “Gog and Magog” is a catch-all term for <u>all</u> the nations allied against Jesus and His people under the influence of Satan. What happened in Ezk. 38-39 is a picture of what is now going <u>global</u> .
“Camp of the saints” (v. 9): First time the saints are described as a “camp”. The term is overwhelmingly used in the OT to describe Israel’s wilderness journey to the Promised Land. “Saints” is the term used for Christians (the church) in Revelation. They are also the citizens of the “city” (the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21:1-22:5). This is our identity in Christ.
“Fire came down” (v. 9): Like Rev. 19:19, there is no battle. The nations cannot resist God. This echoes Ezekiel 38:22; 39:6 (“I will enter into judgment... rains and hailstones, fire and sulfur... I will send fire on Magog”). So, the “fire” is God’s holy glory revealed in judgment.

Some questions to answer (briefly) as you read through the verses...

2. What will happen to Satan at the end of the 1000 years and what will he then do?

3. How does God respond?

4. Who ends up in the lake of fire? What happens to them there?

Some “keys” to have in mind as you read vv. 11-15

Final judgment (vv. 11-15)
“Great white throne”: God’s throne in Rev. 4-5 (cf. Dan. 7:9-11; Ezk. 1:26-28)
“Earth and sky fled away”: See Rev. 6:14; 16:20 – The “former things” have “passed away” (Rev. 21:4; cf. Matt. 24:35; 2 Pet. 3:10-12).
“Book of life”: Moses (Ex. 32:32), David (Pss. 139:16; 56:8), Isaiah (Is. 4:3) and Malachi (Mal. 3:16-18) allude to this book. Daniel saw it (Dan. 7:10; 12:1-2). Ezekiel notes that false prophets will not be in this register (Ezk. 13:9). This book belongs to the Lamb and so contains the names of His people. The punishment that all people deserve for what is written in the “first books” (v. 12) has already been taken, for his people, by the Lamb.
“Death and Hades”: The last enemy that will be destroyed is “death” (1 Cor. 15:26, 54-55). The place of imprisonment (Hades) will be irrelevant after the Final Judgment.

Some questions to answer (briefly) as you read through the verses...

5. Who is seated and who is standing?

6. What is recorded in the books? How does this guarantee a fair trial?

7. What is the other book (vv. 12,15)? Who does it belong to? (See Rev 21:27)

8. What happens to those whose names are not found in the book of Life?

9. In summary, what is this vision saying to us? How does it relate to the promise: “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 3:5)?



Thinking and Living

“He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury” (Ps. 2:4-5)

1. How does Rev. 20:7-15 answer the introduction question?
2. The philosopher Bertrand Russell said: “When I die, I rot”. What does this passage say to that idea?
3. How will God judge the world? Will it be fair? (cf. Rom. 2:6, 11)
4. How can you know your name is written in “the book of life”? How can you be sure you will not be imprisoned in “Hades” awaiting the final judgment? (cf. Rev. 1:5-6, 18; 5:9-10; 7:13-14; 12:11).
5. Considering this passage, perhaps share with your group the name of one person you would like to pray for and reach out to with the Gospel.

Points to Pray (now and during the week)

Let Revelation 20:7-15 shape your prayers...

1. Praise God that all evil will be ultimately destroyed in Satan's final defeat and the final judgment. The end of the story reads: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth... the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:1, 4). Everything wrong in this world. Everything out of sync with God. All evil and discord, will be gone. The problem of evil will be dealt with entirely.
2. Praise God that in Jesus Christ we can have the assurance that on the final day of judgment, our names are written in "the book of life". It will not be a day of terror, but vindication. What a relief to know that if we trust in Jesus' blood and follow Him, we will be with Him forever.
3. Praise God that the last enemy to be destroyed will be death. A day is coming where there will be no fear or power of death. What Jesus has accomplished at His first coming will be fully realised at His second coming. We can sing now and will especially sing then: "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55).
4. Pray for your family, friends and acquaintances who do not know, trust and follow Jesus. To not follow Jesus is to ultimately follow the dragon into destruction, the lake of fire. Pray for wisdom, patience and opportunities to testify to the Gospel of Jesus and invite people to the family of Jesus (Gracefields) to hear the Gospel explained. Pray for a living faith.
5. Pray for our church family. The picture in Rev. 20:7-15 is one of a great deceit, apostasy and hostility. Pray that we would "not fear what (we) are about to suffer" and as we are "tested" we would be found "faithful unto death" (Rev. 3:10). The opposition, temptation and deception are temporary ("his (the dragon's) time is short", Rev. 12:12); our hope is eternal.

Sermon Notes on Revelation 21:1-8 – The New Heaven and Earth

Study 7: Revelation 21:1-8 – The New Heaven and Earth

“I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now” (C.S. Lewis, The Last Battle)

1. What are some of the things that people hope for in this life? What impact does death have on those things? What is your hope?



Investigate

Some “keys” to have in mind as you read Rev 21:1-8

“a new heaven and a new earth” (v. 1): The first creation was unravelled at the final judgment (cf. Rev. 6:14; 20:11). Creation longs to be set free from its bondage. It was expected that it would be transformed. Like Jesus’ death, resurrection and glorification, so all of creation will die, rise again and be glorified.

“The sea is no more” (v. 1): Represents evil spiritual forces, chaos and death (cf. Rev. 13:1; 20:13). Also, a form of separation between people (cf. Rev. 1:9).

“New Jerusalem” (v. 2): Culmination of God’s promises of a renewed Jerusalem, through the Old Testament prophets. It is the culmination of the New Testament promise of union between Jesus and His church.

“the dwelling place” (v. 3): What was lost in Eden (Gen. 3:24), partially restored at Sinai, the Tabernacle and Temple (cf. Ex. 25:8), lost at the exile, realised in Jesus (Jn. 1:14) and the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:15-23)....is now **fully realised**.

“former things” (v. 4): Persecution, tribulation and martyrdom and temptation are gone. The source of evil and corruption (Satan) is gone (Rev. 17:1-18:24). Death is gone (Rev. 20:14). All sin is gone.

“It is done” (v. 6): Said at the final judgment (16:17), echoing Jesus’ words on the Cross: “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30). The death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus is the **end brought forward and revealed in the present**.

“water of life” (v. 6): The imagery is linked with the Spirit being poured out on His people and creation to resurrect. Jesus is the Giver and Source of this living water (cf. Jn. 4:14; 7:38-39).

1. Discuss what John **sees** in vv. 1-2. What do you find encouraging in these verses?

2. Discuss what John **hears** in vv. 3-5. What do you find encouraging in these verses?
3. Discuss what John **hears** in vv. 6-8. What do you find encouraging in these verses?
4. What is the warning contained for everyone in vv. 6-8?



Thinking and Living

1. What about this vision do you look forward to the most? Share with the group...
2. Using Rev. 21:1-8, how would you explain your hope to a non-Christian? What is your future in Jesus?
3. If this is our future, how does it...
 - Shape your priorities in the present? "... lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven... seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:19, 33)
 - Change how you think about your past (regrets, what you've lost due to time, chance, circumstance etc.)?
 - Change your outlook on "the future" (anxious, excited, hopeful etc.)? How does your story end?

"All their life in this world... had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before"
(C.S. Lewis, The Last Battle)

Points to Pray (now and during the week)

Let Revelation 21:1-8 shape your prayers...

1. Praise God for a “new heaven and a new earth”. A new creation where “the former things have passed away”. Praise God for our eternal home: “the New Jerusalem” ...

“For behold, I create new heavens
and a new earth,
and the former things shall not be remembered
or come into mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in that which I create;
for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy,
and her people to be a gladness.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and be glad in my people;
no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping
and the cry of distress.” (Is. 65:17-19)

2. Praise God for this future “heritage”: “He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:3-5).
3. Confess where you might have been like the church of Laodicea, building your sense of security, future and hope on this current world and Babylon: “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17). Pray that this vision of the new creation and New Jerusalem would grip your imagination and desires, shaping your entire life.
4. Pray for our children and youth. The greatest future we can give them is to know that they are a “son” of God, having this future inheritance in Jesus Christ. Pray for their journey of discipleship at home and at Gracefields. May they grow up and live with this hope in their hearts.
5. Pray for people in our Valley who do not have this hope, but are building their lives on the “former things”, investing in Babylon: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!... So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more” (Rev. 18:2, 21). Pray that they would come to know Jesus and have this hope for themselves.

Sermon Notes on Revelation 21:9-27 – The New Jerusalem

Study 8: Revelation 21:9-27 – The New Jerusalem

“Cape Town has been named the best city in the world by Telegraph travel... for the seventh time in a row” (Business Tech, 2025). Copenhagen is rated the best city to live in (Global Liveability Index, 2025)

1. What city in the world would you most like to visit / live in? Why?



Investigate

Once again the Old Testament is the key that helps us understand all these symbols. Ezekiel 40-48 is especially important in this regard...

Read Revelation 21:9-27...

1. What does the angel say he will show John? And then what does he show John?
2. Use the notes below to help you read through and understand the following four sections
 - a. The Appearance of the City and what that symbolises (vv. 11-14)

“The glory of God” (v. 11): It was expected that Jerusalem would be filled with the light of God’s glory (Is. 58:8; 60:1-2, 19). In Ezekiel’s Temple-City “the glory of the LORD filled the temple” (Ezk. 43:2, 4-5). The “radiance” we have already seen in Rev. 4:3-6.

“Twelve... Twelve” (vv. 12-14): Ezekiel’s city had 12 gates (cf. Ezk. 48:30-35) and is named “the LORD is there” (Ezk. 48:35). The 12 & 12 point to faithful Israel (OT – Rev. 12:1) and her offspring via the apostles (the church, Rev. 12:17). $12 \times 12 = 144$ (number of the sealed). $12 + 12 = 24$ (24 orders of priests, [1 Chron. 24:3-19; 24] Levitical gatekeepers (1 Chron. 26:17-19); 24 elders [Rev. 4:4]). Jesus’ ransom was to create “a kingdom and priests to serve our God” (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10).

- b. The Dimensions of the City and what that symbolises (vv.15-17)

“Measure”: Ezekiel’s temple was measured (Ezk. 40-48) and was larger than the ancient city of Jerusalem (giving the idea of a temple-city). In Rev. 11:1, the temple court was measured, giving the idea of protection (as in Zechariah). God promised that His presence will be “a wall of fire around” His city (Zech. 2:1-5).

A cube of “12000 stadia” and “144 cubits”: It was the shape of the stones to build the temple (1 Kgs. 6:20). A cube has twelve edges: $12000 \times 12 = 144\,000$. It is the symbolic number of Jesus’ people sealed by His Spirit (cf. Rev. 7:1-8; 14:1-5). Remember, Jesus’ people are God’s Temple (Rev. 3:12)

The size: The New Jerusalem is depicted as roughly the size of the entire Roman Empire. In the place of Rome (the ultimate “city of men”) and her kingdom, will be the New Jerusalem (the city of God) and God’s Kingdom. God’s Kingdom will encompass “all nations” (cf. Rev. 7:9; 21:26).

c. The Building Material and what that symbolises (vv.18-21)

“pure gold, like transparent glass” (vv. 18, 21): Solomon’s Temple was overlaid with gold (1 Kgs. 6-7). The Second Temple was overlaid with gold. Yet, no one could go into the Temple and see God’s glory. In the New Jerusalem (the Temple-City) there is no veil, no barrier, to God’s glory.

Twelve “Stones”: God’s glory resembles these stones (Rev. 4:3, 6). The High Priests’ breast piece had these twelve stones (representing God’s people) (cf. Ex. 28:17-20). It was expected that the New Jerusalem’s walls would be adorned in this way (Is. 54:11-12). Now, the entire city (God’s people) is adorned as “a kingdom and priests to serve our God” (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10).

d. The City Interior and what that symbolises (vv.22-26)

“No temple”: Eden was a Temple-garden (Gen. 2) upon which the Tabernacle-Temple was modelled. Ezekiel saw a temple-city (Ezk. 40-48). The New Jerusalem is a temple-city, but on a global scale. The OT expected a change. Haggai expected that the second temple “will be greater than the former (first temple)” (Hag. 2:9). Jeremiah expect that “Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem” (Jer. 3:16-17). Jesus is the cornerstone of this new temple (Eph. 2:20). The church is described in temple language throughout Revelation (Rev. 1:6, 20; 2:12; 5:10; 11:1).

The prophets looked forward to a day when Jerusalem would be filled with God’s glory: “the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory... The LORD will be your everlasting light” (Is. 60:3-17, 19-20; cf. 42:6; 49:6-8; 66:12-14).

“They will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations” (v. 26): What was promised to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), inaugurated by Jesus’ first coming and commission (Matt. 28:18-20) is now complete.

3. What determines citizenship of this city? (v.27)



Thinking and Living

1. Our cities have eras in which they are “glorious” and eras in which they are run down / destroyed. The relentless march of time, human sin and death ensures this (Eccl. 3:1ff). How does the New Jerusalem compare?
- 
2. In John's day, most people in the world would have said “Rome” in answer to the opening discussion question. How is this vision an encouragement to the 7 Churches who were persecuted by Rome and her Empire? Why should they keep going with Jesus and “overcome”? And so: How is this vision an encouragement to Christians living in nation states and cities where they are persecuted?
 3. The size of the New Jerusalem would roughly cover the entire Roman Empire of the 1st Century. Rome and her empire were the “Babylon” (world kingdom) of their age. What is this vision saying to us about the kingdoms of men and the cities that rule them today?
 4. Given the meaning of all the symbols in this vision – what do you think it would be like to be a citizen of this city forever?
 5. Jesus prayed: “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17:24). Rev. 21 is a picture of how this prayer is answered. What would you say to God in response?

Points to Pray (now and during the week)

Let Revelation 21:9-27 shape your prayers...

1. Praise God for our future home that is glorious! Realise that the biblical imagery in Rev. 21 is conveying a future reality that is greater than the imagery. As glorious as the imagery is, the future New Jerusalem is more glorious. Like a picture of the Drakensberg cannot compare with the actual Drakensberg (seeing it in person), so the picture of the New Jerusalem cannot compare with the actual New Jerusalem, when we see our home in person.
2. Praise God for a home that is safe. Unlike our current homes and cities that need to be protected from invaders, the New Jerusalem will be perfectly safe. There will be no evil or potential for evil to enter it. Nothing in this current world order can compare with the safety we will enjoy with God in the New Jerusalem.
3. Praise God for a home that is eternal. All ancient cities are built on ruins (layers testifying to past destruction). Some cities, like Babylon, remain ruins. Many towns and cities in South Africa are experiencing serious decay and ruin. Our own homes show cracks and break down over time. Praise God that the New Jerusalem will never be a ruin and will never suffer destruction. It is our forever home.
4. Praise God that the warring kingdoms of this world (human empires that continue to rise and fall) will be replaced by His Kingdom. We have, are and will continue to pray: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Rev. 21 is the answer to your prayers revealed. We know we are still waiting (Rev. 6:11) and God the Father is still gathering in Jesus’ ransomed people through the church empowered by His Holy Spirit (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10; 2 Pet. 3:9; cf. Acts 1:8). Yet we can already thank Him for what is coming. This future hope is certain.
5. Pray for local and global mission (and our own missionaries). As promised to Abraham, God always intended to bless the nations (Gen. 12:3) and not keep them in a state of scattered confusion (Gen. 11). We live in the age when the nations are being gathered in Christ, fulfilling the promise (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2:1ff). We at Gracefields are involved in this mission. Pray that we and our missions partners will fulfill the role God has given us to “bring into (the New Jerusalem) the glory and the honor of the nations” (Rev. 21:26).
6. Pray for our children and youth. May they grow up living for the future hope of the New Jerusalem. There is no greater gift we can give them than the hope of being with God (Father, Son and Spirit) in His temple-city, forever.

Sermon Notes on Revelation 22:1-5 – Eden Restored

Study 9: Revelation 22:1-5 – Eden Restored

“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps. 42:1-2)

1. What longing is the Psalmist describing here? How do you identify with this longing?



Investigate

Having been introduced to the city and some of its features last week, these verses show what are its “main attractions”. In a sense, the best things about the city have been left till last! Again, the Old Testament background is helpful:

- Eden, the mountain garden (Ezk. 28:13-14), origin of many rivers (Gen. 2:10-14) and place of “the tree of life” (Gen. 2:16) that was lost due to humanity’s rebellion (Gen. 3:24).
- The tabernacle-temple had garden & cherub imagery (reminiscent of Eden), but none could enter except the priesthood and High Priest.
- After the destruction of the temple, Ezekiel saw a temple-city: “water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple... the water was trickling out” (Ezk. 47:1-2). Wherever it flowed, “on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing” (Ezk. 47:12) ...

1. **Read vv. 1-2** in conjunction with the notes below...

The River and Tree of Life (vv. 1-2)
“From the throne”: Remember, the Temple was an earthly copy of God’s heavenly throne room (cf. Is. 6:1ff; Ezk. 1-2; Rev. 4-5).
“Water of life”: God is “the fountain of living waters” (Jer. 2:13). Water is often used as a symbol of God the Holy Spirit being “poured out” upon His people and creation (cf. Joel 2:28-29). Jesus offers a “spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn. 4:14), referring to “the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive” (Jn. 7:39).
“Tree of Life”: People who live by God’s Word, trusting in the LORD, are described as life giving trees nourished by water (cf. Ps. 1:3). They are like “a tree of life” (Prov. 3:18; 11:30). Ezekiel sees life-giving trees along the banks of the river that “heal” (Ezk. 47:12). Jesus is “The Word” in whom is “life” (Jn. 1:1-5). All who trust in Him have “eternal life” (Jn. 3:15-16). Jesus is the “Vine” in whom we bear fruit (Jn. 15:1ff). He is the “olive tree” we are

grafted into when we believe (Rom. 11:24). He bore our sins on “a tree”, so that we can be “healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). All who trust in Jesus, indwelt by His Holy Spirit, will bear His fruit (Gal. 5:22-24).

“twelve kinds of fruit” (v. 2): We have had 12 gates (tribes of Israel), 12 foundations (apostles) that refer to God’s people. Now we have 12 kinds of fruit which is a continuation of this theme.

2. In summary, what is special about the heavenly city’s river and trees?

3. Read vv. 3-5 in conjunction with the notes below...

Life in God’s city (vv. 3-5)
“no longer...any curse” (v. 3): The first Eden had “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:17) and the serpent (Gen. 3:1). The Promised Land had the idols/gods of the surrounding nations “under every green tree” (Deut. 12:2). When Jesus first came He was tempted by Satan (Matt. 4:1ff) and his “brood of vipers” (Matt. 23:33). The church is facing the dragon (Rev. 12:17) through the beast and false prophet (Rev. 13), living in Babylon (Rev. 17-18). This current world order is still under the curse (Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 8:20-22).
“They will see His face” (v. 4): After the rebellion and exile of Eden: “no one may see Me (God) and live” (Ex. 33:20). God’s glory is always veiled (cf. Ex. 19:18-20). The longing and hope was that “the upright shall behold His face” (Pss. 11:7; 17:5; 27:4). Prior to Jesus’ incarnation “No one has ever seen God” (Jn. 1:18), yet His glory was veiled in His humanity (Jn. 1:14; Phil. 2:5-8). For now, we see “in a mirror dimly”, but then “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12). “When He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2).
“His name... on their foreheads”: Remember Rev. 3:12; 7:3, 9-17
“Night”: symbolic of evil taking place in the dark (1 Sam. 28:8; Job 24:14; Ps. 121:6; Jn. 1:4-5; 12:27-30), God’s judgment against evil (Ex. 10:21; Joel 2:30-31) and death / calamity (Job 3:5; 10:21-22; Pss. 88:8-12, 18; Is. 45:7; 47:5 etc.).
“Reign”: Our original purpose (Gen. 3:16-17; Ps. 8), the reason Jesus ransomed us (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10) and the promise to His church (Rev. 2:27; 3:21).

4. What two things will God’s people be doing? (vv. 3, v. 5)

5. In summary, what will be so special about life in the heavenly city?



Thinking and Living

“Our hearts are restless till they find rest in You” (Augustine, Confessions, 1:1:1)

1. How does the vision of Rev. 22:1-5 answer the longing in our hearts?
2. At this moment, wherever people go, they bring with them their sin and the ruin it brings to everyone and everything around them. “Death reigned from Adam...” (Rom. 5:14). What will Jesus’ people be like in the New Jerusalem? What are you looking forward to the most?
3. How are you living out this future identity now? If you trust in Jesus, your “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20-21).
4. How does this vision help to put our present struggles, suffering and discouragement in a new perspective?
5. Having explored Rev. 21:1-22:5, stop and think about the prayer: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20). Why should we pray this?

Points to Pray (now and during the week)

Let Revelation 22:1-5 shape your prayers...

1. Praise God for the future restoration of everything Eden was meant to be (and greater!). Praise God that “nothing accursed” will ever be found in His New Jerusalem and new creation. A place of ongoing blessing.
2. Praise God that we will see Him (Father, Son and Spirit) “face to face”. God’s glory will be fully unveiled, and we will know Him like we have never known Him before.
3. Confess where, like the early church, you might be pursuing satisfaction and security in idols (things or powers) instead of God who is “the fountain of living waters” (Jer. 2:13). Pray that God would uproot all rivals in your heart and that your heart might continually find rest in Him.
4. Pray for wisdom as we seek to live out our future identity in our present situation. Christians are supposed to be “the salt (and)... the light of the world” (Matt. 5:13-16). It is through us the world will come to know God in Jesus (Jn. 17:20-23). We are the custodians of the message that brings true healing. Although this current world order will pass away (Rev. 20:11-15; 21:4), we can live lives testifying to the new order that is coming with Jesus. Pray that the Spirit would continually empower you to be an ambassador of Jesus and His Kingdom.
5. Pray for the second coming of Jesus. Notice the response of the church (the bride) and the Holy Spirit: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’” (Rev. 22:17)

Sermon Notes on Revelation 22:6-15 – Four Exhortations

Study 10: Revelation 22:6-15 – Four Exhortations

1. What are some of the biggest days or events you've ever had to prepare for in your life?



Investigate

Read Revelation 22:6-15...

The visions the Apostle John received have ended. What remains are a series of exhortations / applications for the church. Vv. 6-15 contain four sets of different applications to us...

What should we do (or not do)?	Why?
Vv. 6-7	
Vv. 8-10	
Vv. 11-12	
Vv. 13-15	



Thinking and Living

1. Martin Luther said: “*There are two days in my calendar: this day and that day*”. If Jesus will return on “that day”, then how should that impact “this day”?
2. How do you “wash your robes”? Here are three perspectives from earlier in Revelation. How does each one apply to you?

“Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy” (Rev. 3:4) – a “soiled” garment refers to idolatry / compromise	“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14)	“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!” (Rev. 16:15)
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3. How can you be assured that you are called “blessed” by God (vv. 7, 14)? How might this differ from how the word “blessed” is used today?
4. We are given three reasons (vv. 6, 7, 10) why Revelation, in particular, is important. These same points could be made about all of God’s Word. How are you doing in paying attention to God’s Word, while “the time is near”?
5. Why did Gracefields attempt to teach Revelation over the last couple of years? Why should you read, keep, and not avoid Revelation (vv. 6, 7, 10)?

Points to Pray (now and during the week)

Let Revelation 22:6-15 shape your prayers...

1. Praise God for this assurance: “And behold, I am coming soon... Behold, I am coming soon” (vv. 7, 12). It is true that Jesus is always with His people; He is among His lampstands (Rev. 1:12-13) and does come in salvation and judgment throughout history (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3, 9, 20). Even so, on “that day” Jesus will come to judge the living and dead, defeating all evil and establishing His Kingdom forever. It is a good day for all who persevere with trusting in and following Him.
2. Praise God that He has already begun, is continuing and will ultimately complete the Revelation. The book is unsealed! The time of the end had begun when this book was first received by the 7 churches and will complete at Jesus’ return. You live in “last days” when this book was fulfilled, is being fulfilled and will be ultimately fulfilled.
3. Pray that you, your group and our church family would “keep” this book as part of God’s Word and not disregard it. Pray that each of us would always trust in Jesus’ blood to have washed you clean from your sin and ransomed you to be His people forever. The enemy will seek to tempt you away from Christ to “soil” your garments in idolatry / compromise / false teaching.
4. Pray that we would not be discouraged that “evildoers still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy” (Rev. 22:11). Let us not be tempted to compromise and join them in evil. Rather, as we hear the words of this prophecy, may we be spurred on to continue: “the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy”. The Gospel does not just unite nations, but divides people into two groups as well (Matt. 10:34-39).
5. Pray that we would find comfort in knowing that whatever evil / injustice might be done in this current world, when Jesus returns: “I am... bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done” (Rev. 22:12). God will judge all things fairly. Even so, let it spur us on to proclaim the Gospel, for it is only by the blood of Jesus that we will receive grace and mercy on that day (Rev. 7:13-14).

Sermon notes on Revelation 22:16-21

Study 11: Revelation 22:16-21 – Final exhortations

The Judaizers (1st Century) in Galatians did not like the Gospel message of grace, and added to it the stipulations of the Law. Others added their mystical experiences of angels to understand the Law and Gospel (cf. Col. 2:16-20). Marcion (2nd Century) did not like the Old Testament and many parts of the New Testament. He created his own “bible”, cutting out the entire Old Testament and many of the writings of the New Testament. The Montanists (2nd Century) believed they were a third wave of prophecy and so “added” to the Bible their “revelations” (as did Mohammed [7th Century], Mormons [19th Century], New Apostolic Church [19th Century] etc.). Thomas Jefferson (18th century) cut out all the parts of his bible that did not fit his deism and rationalism...

1. Do you know examples of people adding to or subtracting from the Bible? What are some things that drive people to do this?



Investigate

Read Revelation 22:16-21...

1. What does every person who is indwelt by God's Spirit and belongs to His church long for (vv. 16-17)? Notice the imagery (where have we seen this imagery?).
2. The book ends with a warning (vv. 18-19). What are we commanded not to do and what can we expect if we disobey this?
3. Notice how many times we are assured of Jesus' return (vv. 7, 12, 20)? Why repeat it?
4. How will God's people be able to make it to the end (v. 21)?



Thinking and Living

1. Revelation is not the only book with this warning. Consider the following examples from many such passages... What common themes do you pick up?

“You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you ...Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it” (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; 29:20)	“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <u>Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same</u> will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven... Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matt. 5:17-19; 7:24)	“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8-9)
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2. We might find certain passages in Revelation difficult or emotionally upsetting. How is vv. 18-19 a warning to us?
3. What do those who believe the Bible yearn for? (v. 17)
4. What does Jesus promise them? (vv. 20, 21)

Reflection: Our time in Revelation has ended (for now). Consider what God has been saying to you in Rev. 17-22. How will these final visions and commands shape your life today?

Points to Pray (now and during the week)

Let Revelation 22:16-21 shape your prayers...

1. **Pray for the return of Jesus Christ!** Ultimately, His return will mean the end of evil, this old order of sin and death, and the ushering in of the new creation and complete union between God and His people. Everything our heart longs for will be found on “that day”.
2. Praise God that you have the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ, from Genesis to Revelation. You have everything you need to know Him and to become like Him as you follow Him (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). You have received everything you need to know about the “last days” in Revelation.
3. Praise God for His grace in Jesus Christ. It is by His grace we are ransomed by Jesus’ blood (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10). It is by His grace we are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Rev. 7:1ff). It is by His grace we can overcome this world (the dragon, the beast, false prophet and Babylon) by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony (Rev. 12:11). His grace is with us all in Christ Jesus.
4. Pray that you would resist the temptation of adding or subtracting from God’s Word (Revelation here). Pray that we would humbly continue to search the Scriptures to know Jesus more (even when parts of it make no sense at this moment). The issue is not the Bible, but our understanding and knowledge of it. Pray for a humble heart of repentance where you realise your understanding is incorrect or inadequate. The Christian life is one of “semper reformata” (always reformed – always changing) as we know the Bible more.
5. Pray for a greater understanding, appreciation and focus on the second coming of Jesus. Our eternity with Him should shape our present life on earth. To quote C.S. Lewis: *“If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next”* (Mere Christianity, Hope).