

The Book of Revelation

LESSON
TWO

STRUCTURE AND
CONTENT
Discussion Forum



THIRD MILLENNIUM

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The Book of Revelation

Lesson Two: Structure and Content

Discussion Forum

With

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Dr. Thomas Schreiner
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Question 1:

Why doesn't the book of Revelation use plainer language?

When we look at a biblical book's purpose and structure, we're basically asking, **why did the author write this and how did he communicate his message? In the book of Revelation, John encouraged his readers to remain faithful until Christ's return. But if John wanted to encourage the churches, why doesn't the book of Revelation use plainer language?**

Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner

When we first read the book of Revelation, we are struck by the strangeness of the book. I remember when I first read it when I was 17 or so, I got the picture from the book that Jesus was glorious, that God was in control, but there were many parts of the book that were quite foreign to me. But I think the first thing we should say is that when John wrote the book, the genre of the book, which is mainly apocalyptic, was not foreign to his readers. There were other apocalyptic books out there. We see some apocalyptic in the Old Testament — Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah. We see some apocalyptic literature in some Jewish intertestamental literature like 1 Enoch and 4 Ezra. So I think it's helpful for us to realize this book was not totally strange to people who first read it. They could understand it and grasp it. But then we step back and say, well, why was it written this way at all? I mean, what's the purpose of it? Why not just write it as an epistle? And I think one of the answers is apocalyptic literature appeals to the imagination. The Bible speaks to us, of course, propositionally, but it speaks to us in different ways. We have gospels. We have psalms. We have poetry. We have proverbs. And Revelation appeals to the imagination at another level. Apocalyptic literature speaks to us here in terms of the end of the world, God's cosmic purposes. I think it's fitting that God would clothe this in a kind of literature that speaks symbolically, in big pictures of things, strong contrasts between good and evil painted in strong colors: the dragon versus the woman and Satan versus God. And of course, the people of God are portrayed as a woman fleeing from the dragon in the wilderness. All these pictures, I think, help us

to appropriate at a different level, in terms of our imagination and our whole being, what God is accomplishing and will accomplish for his people.

Question 2:

Are there other parts of the New Testament that could be considered “apocalyptic”?

The book of Revelation is the most obvious example of apocalyptic literature in the New Testament. No other book contains as much imagery or prophecy concerning the distant future. So, does Revelation stand alone in this genre, or are there other parts of the New Testament that could be considered “apocalyptic”?

Dr. Mark Strauss

While the book of Revelation is the primary example of apocalyptic literature in the New Testament, there are other passages that have similar characteristics and that could be identified as apocalyptic in nature. The most famous and most significant is Jesus’s, what we call his Olivet Discourse, his discourse on the Mount of Olives in Mark 13, also Matthew 24 and 25. The same sermon appears in Luke 21. And in that sermon, Jesus describes the destruction of Jerusalem but also the coming of the Son of Man, the abomination of desolation — an image that comes from the book of Daniel, which itself has apocalyptic features and is sort of the foundation of apocalyptic literature. So that passage which describes, certainly, end times picture — some of the same kind of symbolic cosmic language that we find in apocalyptic — occurs in the Olivet Discourse. There’s a few other passages as well in the New Testament. In 2 Thessalonians, for example, Paul talks about the man of lawlessness who will set himself up in the temple — images taken again from the book of Daniel that have features of apocalyptic literature. So there’s a number of places, particularly when writers are talking about sort of the consummation of history, the conclusion of history, God’s final salvation, that we see apocalyptic elements coming through.

Dr. Craig S. Keener

Whether there are other parts of the New Testament that could be considered apocalyptic depends on how you define apocalyptic. According to the narrowest definition, it’s a kind of visionary literature that gives you revelations of heaven and sometimes historical sequences and so on. By that narrow definition, perhaps nothing else qualifies. But if we’re talking about apocalyptic thought and apocalyptic imagery about the end time and using prophetic symbolism, yes, Jesus’ discourse about the end time in Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21 could be in that category, and 2 Thessalonians 2, and so forth.

Dr. Greg Perry

I think we do have other parts of the New Testament that indicate apocalyptic visions. And one thinks especially of Jesus’ teaching on the Mount of Olives at the end of the Gospels in Mark 13 or Matthew 24 and 25, where Jesus himself is sort of the

mediating prophetic figure who's using symbols from the Old Testament that represent God's salvation and judgment in relation to his people and the nations who are coming against, or will come against Jerusalem as he forecasts and as he talks about in terms of the call to repent, and to recognize him as the Messiah. There are other parts of the New Testament that we see where this is also the case, and we see particularly in the warnings of 2 Peter and Jude against false prophets, because in those two letters of the New Testament, there's a great deal of concern about false prophets who are basically saying that no judgment is coming. And so Peter and Jude pick up on apocalyptic symbols and the words of the prophets to talk about the coming judgment and salvation and the need to repent. And so the symbolism is there as well in parts of those letters also. So those are a couple of places in the Gospels and in these late letters of the New Testament where apocalyptic is used as well.

Question 3:

Are there books in the Bible besides Revelation where recapitulation is used?

Sometimes books retell the same story from a different angle or perspective. Scholars call this "recapitulation." We see this often in the book of Revelation. But, are there other books in the Bible besides Revelation where recapitulation is used?

Dr. Scott Redd

The literary device of recapitulation, that is, telling a story or an event more than once in order to highlight different aspects of that story or event, is used elsewhere in Scripture than just in the book of Revelation. For instance, right there in Genesis 1 and 2 we see the story of creation retold in two different ways... In the first case you see you see this conflict between the Lord and chaos, and the story ends with the creation of humanity and then God's rest. But then in Genesis 2, you see the story retold again, this time focusing on humanity — the creation of Adam and Eve — and this story finds its ultimate ending in the creation of Eve and her beauty. So we see here two different stories of the creation account, each highlighting different aspects: first the overall picture of creation and then secondly the under-king, or Adam, and Eve and their creation in the Garden... So you really don't have two different creation accounts as some would say, but you actually have the same creation account told in two different ways. The first time, articulating these large cosmic-size events between God and chaos and death of the sea, and then secondly you see God's creation of Adam made in his own image and Adam's wife Eve. And so it highlights a different aspect of creation, drawing attention this time to the first humans.

Dr. Robert MacEwen

In the book of Acts you have the story of Paul's conversion on the Damascus road, and then it's told again two times with Paul narrating his experience. You also have a lot of recapitulation in the story of the conversion of the centurion Cornelius which I think starts in Acts 10, you know, where Cornelius has a vision, and later he will

repeat that vision. Peter has a vision. Later he will repeat that vision maybe a few more times, and when the whole thing is over, Peter goes back to Jerusalem and is confronted by his fellow Jewish Christians, and then Peter explains the whole story again. So that's another example that comes to mind.

Dr. William Edgar

I think there are books in the Bible besides the book of Revelation where recapitulation is used. There's a lot of different types of recapitulation. You can think of the two accounts of creation — Genesis 1, Genesis 2 — and in the entire book of Genesis that's a given structure: first a summary statement and then a detailed account of something within the summary statement, the so-called “toledoth passages.” And then you could find at the end of many books a recapitulation of what was said. The book of Samuel ends with a retelling of exactly what had been going on. You also have the Psalms, which use a poetic device called parallelism. So, often the Psalm does not begin with A and end in Z. It goes AB, AB, BC, BC, and it repeats. I think the reason for that is emphasis maybe, as well as encouragement. And also, the Bible, a lot of it, is not just a bland linear book, not a scientific text. It's a book of revelation, which relates the person of God and not just information to his readers. And recapitulation is a great way to do that.

Question 4:

What did John mean when he said that he was “in the Spirit”?

John introduced the four main visions in Revelation with a statement indicating he was “in the Spirit.” While this phrase is not uncommon in the New Testament, John’s use of it in the book of Revelation is unique. So, what did John mean when he said that he was “in the Spirit”?

Dr. Vern Poythress

It says, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,” referring to John. What does that mean? We know from other passages of the Bible that every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This is not merely that, but it is a special work of the Holy Spirit empowering John, giving him the visions that he saw. So this is the work of the Spirit in inspiring the book of Revelation.

Dr. Craig S. Keener

When John speaks of being caught up in the Spirit... he speaks of being caught places in the Spirit, or being in the Spirit on the Lord’s day in Revelation 1:10 — in these passages he evokes the language of Ezekiel, where in Ezekiel, in visions of God, Ezekiel was caught up in the Spirit at different times. So it means that John was in such an inspired state that he was receiving direct revelation from God at these points.

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

When John describes himself as being taken up in the Spirit that most likely goes back to a pattern in the Old Testament. Specifically, we see this in Ezekiel and in Daniel, and then even in Second Temple Judaism, or early Judaism, where you have prophets who enter into a type of trance where they receive revelation. It's difficult for us to figure out what exactly was this trance-like state... It's some type of a vision that the Spirit is giving to him and that is being communicated through the angel. To figure out what exactly that looked like is quite difficult, but it is indeed patterned after the Old Testament. Again, the book of Revelation falls in line with Old Testament prophecy, and John falls in line with the Old Testament prophets. And so, just as they were carried up with the Spirit, so was John.

Question 5:**Why did John describe Jesus as both a lion and a lamb in Revelation 5?**

On a number of occasions in the book of Revelation, John used vivid imagery to describe what he was seeing while he was “in the Spirit.” For instance, in Revelation 5, he used the contrasting images of a lion and a lamb to describe Jesus. But why did John use these images? Why did John describe Jesus as both a lion and a lamb in Revelation 5?

Dr. Thomas J. Nettles

In Revelation 5 we have a very interesting presentation of Jesus Christ. As John is involved in a vision, he is weeping because he has found that no one is worthy to open this book that contains the future and ideas of judgment and divine sovereignty, and who is worthy to do this. And someone tells him to stop weeping and to look and behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Now this symbol of a lion is one in which we have great strength, and one that has judgment, one who can come and have power and authority over all of his foes... But he looks and what does he see? He sees a lamb as if he had been slain. Well this tells us many things, among those that it does give us an understanding that the book of Revelation has very vivid imagery in it. We don't actually think Jesus is a lion and he's going to appear that way, or he is a lamb, but these carry within them certain mental images and certain historic presentations of both meekness and mildness on the one hand and power and authority on the other. And what John is seeing in this revelation and what he's trying to communicate to us is that the authority that Jesus has in his present condition as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the one who will subdue all of his enemies, this has been gained by his sacrifice... He is the Lamb that has been slain. He is the one who fulfills all the sacrifices. Every sin that we could imagine, even our unknown sins have been taken care of by this Lamb that was slain. Therefore, he is worthy, not only as one who has authority as Creator and one who is omnipotent, but he is worthy as one who has endured the wrath of God for sin. He has done that, and he has risen from the dead, and now he is seated as the one who has the authority to redeem and to draw people to himself as the king over that people, and he has the authority to judge all nations.

It's a very vivid image. Jonathan Edwards has a sermon on that passage of Scripture entitled "The Excellency of Jesus Christ," and the basic doctrine, he says, is there is a great diversity of excellencies in Jesus Christ, and it's a marvelous presentation of how Christ has gained the right to rule by being the one that was humiliated and submitted himself to the Father's wrath for the purpose of redeeming his people.

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

John used both the lion and the lamb imagery in Revelation 5 as he was showing us Christ in all his glory in order to emphasize really the way in which Christ has won the decisive victory for us. The lion imagery comes from the Old Testament. It comes from the promise that Judah would be the tribe in which the great conquering Lion, the true King would come. And it surely is a picture of power and strength... And that emphasizes the victory of Christ. But then, from what John hears, we're very surprised at what John sees, because he sees a Lamb who has been slain. Clearly this Lamb is the Lion because the heavenly chorus praises the Lamb who has been slain as "worthy to open the scroll." So the Lamb's death, violent death, is the Lion's victory because, by being slain, the Lamb has redeemed people from every tribe and nation and tongue under the earth and made us to be a kingdom of priests to God our Father. It really shows us in a very vivid way the point that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 1 when Paul says that the cross is the power of God. It looks like foolishness and weakness, but it is the power and the wisdom of God for the salvation of his people.

Dr. Mark Strauss

Revelation 5 is an amazing passage, because in many ways it sort of sums up the whole message of Revelation. John is shown a scroll, and no one is worthy to open this scroll. And so John is weeping because he knows the scroll holds the secret to God's future, the secret to the world's future in that regard. And suddenly an angel announces that, wait, there is one who is worthy. It is the Lion, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. And that's a picture from Genesis 49... Instead he sees a lamb, a symbol of sacrifice, a symbol of suffering. And there's a beautiful picture of who Jesus is, because Jesus is the conquering King, he is the Messiah, he is the Lord of all, yet he accomplishes salvation by suffering and dying as the sacrificial lamb. So the lion who is the lamb is the beautiful picture of who Jesus Christ is as Lord, as sovereign, as king. But how he accomplishes that salvation is by suffering and dying as a sacrificial lamb to pay for our sins. So, a powerful picture of who Jesus is and how he accomplished our salvation.

Question 6:
Is Satan a real creature?

John's use of symbolic imagery to depict places and characters in Revelation is sometimes a two-edged sword. While it highlights certain attributes of the characters and events, it can also be seen as mere imagery. On two separate

occasions John depicted Satan as being “a great dragon” and the “ancient serpent.” This has caused some readers to wonder how we should view Satan. Was John just using imagery to get his point across? Or is Satan a real creature?

Dr. Simon J. Kistemaker

Satan is a real creature. God created him. See, Jesus is uncreated and therefore is much, much higher than Satan. In fact, if you go through the passages which speak about Jesus being the Creator — John 1 and then Hebrews 1:2, and in Colossians 3 — you find that Jesus is the Creator. So, he is the creator of the angel world. And the angel world is millions of millions of creatures. Satan is one of them. Now we would like to have a lot more information about Satan. What happened? All we know is that Satan at one time said, enough is enough and I want to be in charge, not just a messenger, but I am going to rule. And then he took one-third of the angel world with him... Now, is Satan a creature? Oh yes he is. A fallen creature.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

Anyone who enters into and embraces the supernaturalist worldview of the Christian faith must ask themselves whether Satan is a real creature. Or perhaps, alternatively, a mythic, and now obsolete personification of what are, in fact, simply impersonal forces of evil, principalities, powers in the world today. Now, the first disclaimer is that in affirming that Satan is a real creature, we are not endorsing many of the very superstitious and imaginative caricatures of Satan in Western literature and thought. The second thing, I think, as an important disclaimer is that in affirming the existence of Satan as a real creature we are not suggesting that all evil and all pain and all suffering is a direct consequence of Satan’s activity. The human condition is afflicted by many faces of evil, of which Satan is just one, and our own sinful nature is a very large other. But having said that, we come back to affirm that Satan is a real creature on this basis: that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in his earthly ministry appears to operate on the assumption that Satan is, in fact, not mythic but real, and addresses him in those terms.

Dr. Mark Strauss

Satan in Scripture... means “the adversary,” and Satan shows up in the book of Job as the adversary. And then certainly in the New Testament Satan appears again and again to tempt Jesus. Jesus refers to Satan falling from heaven. So I think from Jesus’ perspective, Satan is a real being, is an adversary of God and therefore an adversary of God’s people, an opponent of Jesus, the tempter and tester of Jesus... Then we come to learn later in the biblical testimony that he was the serpent in the Garden and that he was the tempter of Eve and the one who in that sense provoked the fall of humanity. That is only learned progressively as we read through the testimony of Scripture... The origin of Satan and in terms of his fall, are not explicitly or clearly set out in Scripture. But I think that the real existence of Satan as a person in opposition to God who will be ultimately be destroyed, cast into the lake of fire at the end of Revelation, is pretty much a clear teaching of Scripture.

Question 7:

What are some of the millennial views that Christians have held throughout history?

In Revelation 20:1-6, we read of a millennium — a thousand year period — during which the dragon, or Satan, is bound, and faithful Christian martyrs reign with Christ. From the time of the early church up to today, these verses have given rise to several different schools of thought. What are some of the millennial views that Christians have held throughout history?

Dr. Craig S. Keener

I think sometimes we Christians who come from particular traditions, we tend to assume that everybody has always held our view. And I think it's instructive to see what some of the different views have been of Revelation, for example, with reference to the millennium, the thousand-year period in Revelation 20. You have many of the earliest church fathers, Justin Martyr and Papias seem to have believed in a future thousand-year period after the tribulation. They believed that Christians either were in the tribulation or were about to go through it. Some later church fathers believed that Christians were in the millennium. Especially from the time of Constantine onward, Christians believed they were in the millennium. Eusebius talks about how they found some premillennialists who were in error, but unlike other heretics, they were able to be talked out of their erroneous views. And Augustine was a very strong amillennialist, and that view predominated through the middle... usually through the middle ages. Luther, Calvin, and many others, also were amillennial. Then you had some other people who were premillennial again, Isaac Newton for one. In the eighteenth century we already have a number of postmillennialists, Jonathan Edwards and the first Great Awakening — postmillennialism was already coming to the fore. It became even more dominant in the nineteenth century, Charles Finney and others associated with the second Great Awakening. So, in American evangelicalism, postmillennialism was a very prominent view in that period... They believed that we would advance the kingdom of God on earth and things would get better, and so we would prepare the throne for Jesus, and then he would come back. And then around 1830 something arose called dispensational premillennialism, which said that there would be a future thousand years. Jesus would come back before that, but he would also come back seven years before that to take the church out, which had never been taught before that period in church history. And today we actually have a variety of views among scholars, probably amillennial and premillennial, or non-dispensational... well, some dispensational scholars too, but you have a variety of views today, and I think what that tells us most is we can't just say, well, everybody has always held our view. We need to really... we need to recognize that there are Christians that God has used who hold different views than our view.

Dr. Thomas J. Nettles

Interpretation of the Bible is a quite challenging task, and I think this is one reason that when people are called to ministry, one of the things they have to do is they have to be apt to teach, and God gives these gifts. When Christ rose from the dead, he ascended on high, and one of the gifts he gave were teachers... One of the areas that we can see this very profoundly is interpretations of the book of Revelation and has led evangelicals in particular to have three different views and perhaps nuances within each of these views in such a way that even people who agree in one of these three views have certain specific interpretations upon which they disagree... And so we have amillennialism, we have postmillennialism, and we have premillennialism and various views within each of those... In these differing views of the millennium, we have tremendous areas of agreement in which all agree the Bible is perfectly clear on, and we disagree on the meaning of certain language whether it is literal, or whether it is symbolic. What is the thousand years? Is this a literal thousand years? Does the text indicate Christ is going to come back before that and we'll have the reign of peace only because of his personal reign? Is the reign of peace actually the preaching of the gospel now so that we see God gathering his people and they have peace in their hearts and peace among themselves because of forgiveness of sins? That's basically amillennialism. And then postmillennialism, though, is the preaching of the gospel going to be so powerful that Christ reigns through it and there is the era of peace and then Christ comes visibly to take his throne? Well that's built upon certain ambiguities we might say in our mind, not in the Scripture, but ambiguities in our mind as to the meaning of these symbols.

Question 8:

What are some central theological ideas shared by all evangelical forms of premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism?

Evangelicals sometimes disagree about the thousand-year reign of Christ in Revelation 20, but still, these views often overlap. What are some central theological ideas shared by all evangelical forms of premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism?

Dr. James M. Hamilton

Whatever perspective you take on the millennium, whether you're premillennial or postmillennial or amillennial, everyone is going to agree that the fulfillment of God's purposes is going to be realized and that the prophecies of the Old Testament are going to be fulfilled, and that everyone is going to agree that as God's Word is brought to fruition, Christ is going to return, he is going to reign, and this is all going to result in the glory of God covering the dry lands as the waters cover the sea.

Dr. William Edgar

I would say all evangelicals, whether they be pre- or post- or a-mill, share first of all the fundamental idea that Christ will return visibly, in person. And that connected

with his return will be the judgment, the squaring of all accounts, and then the resurrection of the dead for eternal bliss, and the resurrection of those who have not trusted in Christ to spend their lives away from the presence of God. The details, of course, they differ about, but the central idea of the second coming, the judgment, the resurrection is shared by all of them.

Dr. David W. Chapman

In the evangelical church today, there's a variety of different eschatological perspectives, perspectives about what the book of Revelation is telling us in terms of what to expect in the future, and yet there's, I think, a core that we all agree on, that we've agreed on for two thousand years. First of all that Christ is returning, secondly, that Christ is Lord of the universe even now and certainly in the future, and thirdly, that the new age has already begun, that we are already living in the end times because Christ has come, has died on the cross, he's raised again, he's ruling, he's reigning, we are his people, we are following his lead. And those aspects are true for all eschatological perspectives.

Dr. Matt Friedeman

I hope one of the central understandings of Revelation that we can all share together, no matter what our theological tradition is, is mystery. There's plenty of mystery there. These experts in Revelation — of course we have some, and I love the fact that they spend a good bit of their time in Revelation — but I'd like to think that at the end of the day the experts could even say there's plenty of mystery there. We don't know exactly what it means. We don't know exactly how it's going to turn out except in the very end, and so at the end of the day we look there and say we don't know about a good bit of this book; we just flat don't know. But we praise God that he is our God of mystery.

Dr. John E. McKinley

The major evangelical interpretations of the return of Christ and what he does in relationship to a millennial reign, whether that's symbolic or literal or whatever, they all affirm the same basic things. One, that Jesus is going to come back. A bodily return of Christ to the earth has not happened yet. We're still waiting for that. Second, everybody affirms that he is going to rule over creation, whether that is just the eternal state or the here and now. Third, that he is going to complete salvation. So there is going to be resurrection of the dead; there is going to be a restoration of everything and end of evil. And last, that he is going to deal with evil conclusively as the conquering King, he is going to judge all of his enemies and put an absolute end to evil at final judgment. So these are things that are held in agreement. It's lesser details that we disagree about.

Question 9:**How can a loving God send anyone, even his enemies, into eternal condemnation?**

In the book of Revelation, we see God sending his angel to crush his enemies in the winepress of his wrath. But in a number of other places in the Bible, we read that God is love. To many unbelievers these two depictions of the same God are simply not compatible. They ask, how can a loving God send anyone, even his enemies, into eternal condemnation?

Dr. Steve Cowan

Many skeptics of Christianity question the doctrine of eternal punishment, or the doctrine of hell, as Christians have traditionally believed that doctrine, and wonder whether the doctrine of hell is compatible or consistent with our belief that God is loving. How can a loving God send people to eternal condemnation? I think that is a very, very important question, and it's a tough question. But I really think that if we think about it for a little bit and ponder even some examples in our own culture and in our own background, we'll be able to see that there really is no incompatibility between a loving God and the doctrine of hell. Imagine a judge who is sitting behind his bench, and he's got various criminals coming before his bench, and he's having to make decisions about their punishment. And on one occasion the bailiff says, "I've got a criminal waiting in the wings. He's a heinous murderer, he's been caught in the act of a very vicious and terrible murder of an innocent person, and he's really arrogant. He has no remorse. He shows no regret at all over doing what he's done, and in fact, he even is back there in the wings boasting that you're going to let him off scot-free. He doesn't think that you're going to condemn him or have the courage to send him to jail or put him to death, or anything at all." And the judge says, "What arrogance! Bring him before me now!" And then the bailiff brings the criminal before the bench, and it dawns on the judge now why the criminal was so arrogant, because the criminal standing before him is his own son who is a vicious, lifetime criminal who has been estranged from his father for many years. But the judge knows about his crime and with tears in his eyes, he raises his gavel and says, "I condemn you to death." I believe that story is perfectly coherent. It is very plausible. That story is a realistic story about a judge who loves his son but yet knows that justice has to be done, and actually gives justice, I would say, as an act of love. I believe in that situation, it would actually be unloving for the judge not to punish his son, to let his son persist in thinking that there are no consequences to his evil deeds and that his arrogance can go unchallenged. I believe that that analogy, this story, can help us understand how a loving God can send people to hell. We have to understand that people who go to hell go there, if they go there, because they are sinners. God doesn't send innocent people to hell. He sends unrepentant, arrogant sinners to hell. Those are the only people who ever wind up there, and it would be unloving for God not to send them to hell given their unrepentant condition.

Dr. John E. McKinley

When we look at the Bible, we have a depiction about eternal condemnation, hell, and we think how can it be that a loving God sends people there? How does this fit with his love? Because it's clear that he does cast people into hell. One way of thinking about this is that love is self-giving; God is giving himself to these people. And for the nonbeliever, the person who has resisted God his entire life, to live in God's presence is going to be experienced as pain. So in a sense, God hasn't stopped being loving when they experience him. It's because they are resistant to him that they experience God as a burning, consuming fire and a spiritual burn, a pain that they're not ready for, and they don't want, and is suffering for them. So it's not a problem of God's love versus his wrath, it is the problem of the sinner who cannot stand to be in God's presence as he is.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

One of the most sobering doctrines we have to deal with is the destiny of the lost. And this is a doctrine that we can never address without feeling the deepest pain. John Stott said that no evangelical Christian should ever address it without being close to tears. There's also a great deal of mystery to the meaning of Scripture with respect to the actual lost state and all the dynamics of that, but we can certainly agree that the strong message of Scripture is that the prospect of going out into eternity outside of Christ is a peril to be avoided at all cost and with the greatest urgency of any crisis or emergency that a human being will ever experience. That's certainly the tenor and tone of, and intent of, the biblical descriptions of the lost state. One of the most difficult issues, though, is to reconcile what we read of the horrific lost state with the character of our all-powerful, all-loving God, and how we can make sense out of the thought that this God could send a loved image bearer into that state forever. This baffles us to some degree. This is one of the things at which we look as through a glass darkly. But I think that the imagery of God intentionally and deliberately sending, and in a sense approving of and affirming of, such a perilous destination, needs to be nuanced very carefully. It is true that we have biblical imagery of God in his justice sending people to punishment or to heavenly bliss. We see this "sending out" to punishment. But when it comes to sending people to eternal conscious torment, I think perhaps the deliberate intention of God is not really there... These are people who are against God's desires, against God's love, falling forever outside the locus of his grace... I think it's important for us to purge our sanctified imaginations of the image of a loving God who in some fiendish way delightfully sends people to the horrors of eternal suffering. I think the dynamic is more like a reluctant release of lost sinners to the inevitable consequences of their choice of estrangement from the source of life and goodness.

Question 10:**Are there similarities between the first-century Roman Empire and the modern world that can help us apply Revelation to modern life?**

Many times it's easy to think that too much has changed in the world over the last 2,000 years for us to make strong applications from the Bible today. But, are there similarities between the first-century Roman Empire and the modern world that can help us apply Revelation to modern life?

Dr. Dan Doriani

There are many similarities between the Roman Empire and modern life, and they all are telling. Certainly in those days people were prone to follow the same false gods that we are, things like power and pleasure, and even looking to religion, false religion, for direction. There's a passage in Revelation 11:8 that says this in a very striking way, speaking of the death — the murder, really — of two prophets of God that were found intolerable by those who listened to them, and it says this: it says, "Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where ... their Lord was [also] crucified." Well let's see. What city is "Sodom and Egypt and [Jerusalem] where Jesus was crucified"? The answer is there's no city like that. What it's saying is all the cities in the world, all the people in the world long ago and today are prone to the same sorts of ways to rebel. So "Sodom" represents materialism, and people are always prone to materialism. "Egypt" is forced brutality or trusting in force or strength, and of course, that's something people do today. And the "city where the Lord was crucified" is false religion, human religion, and people turn to false religion today. Now those three, materialism, power, false religion, those are three ways in which people turn away from God. They're the three places *to* which people turn to find comfort and meaning, and those are always the big three, long ago and today.

Dr. James M. Hamilton

We can apply the book of Revelation to our modern lives because as in the first century John is clearly critiquing the Roman Empire, and what we see in the Roman Empire is an impulse to exalt either Caesar or Rome as an ideal that Satan is ultimately using as a sort of cheap imitation of God and his kingdom and his Messiah and his realm, his reign. And so that same thing is happening today... Those who are not worshiping God often fall prey to the vice of exalting the state into the place of religion. And so for these people the religion will dictate what everyone is to believe and how everyone is to behave and what people should do with their money. And for Christians, we serve God. We render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, but God is the one who owns us, and Revelation is critiquing that worship of the state.

Dr. Vern Poythress

Are there similarities between the Roman Empire and today that could help us? I believe there are. One is that in the Roman Empire there was pluralism, plurality of religions, plurality of cultures, plurality of ideas. We're facing that today. Another

thing — and it's in some ways probably a constant through the centuries — there's always the threat of totalitarian use of power particularly government power, governments growing in their interference with the citizens. And we can see that today particularly in cultures and in nations where Christianity is heavily persecuted. It's often government threats. The second area is the area of temptation to pleasure, to immorality. The cities of today are full of opportunities for illicit pleasure, and that was there in the first century as well.

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

I think there are clear similarities between the first century world in which the book of Revelation was given and the modern world, and these similarities really can help us know how to apply the book of Revelation to our lives. If you think, for example, of the three figures that are introduced in Revelation 13 and following. You find the dragon of course first, but I'm thinking of the three figures of the beast, the false prophet, and then the harlot Babylon, which in a sense are the instruments through which the dragon is waging his war against the church. The beast represents military power and political power run amuck, going beyond its bounds as God had set it and really claiming divine power and using coercive power to threaten those who would not submit. The false prophet represents all sorts of false religion, certainly in that setting, religion that contributes to the power of the beast. And then the harlot represents the allure of pleasure, of luxury, of material affluence. All of those things were true in the Roman world. The Roman Empire in the first century had not fully embraced the worship of the emperor as divine, but it was moving certainly in that direction. And in fact, in the province of Asia among these churches, there were at least temples in some of these cities devoted to the spirits of departed emperors such as Augustus. So the State as divine was clearly there. False teaching, false doctrine in a variety of ways were there, including the emperor cult growing in some of those cities. And then Rome was the economic hub of the whole world, and so all the affluence, all of the pleasure was flowing to Rome, and the whole empire was dependent upon Rome. Now, let's go to the modern world. Do we find those things today? Well we certainly do. We find aggressive, violent, coercive insistence on the worship of the State, more evident in the mid to late twentieth century with Marxism but clearly there. But then we have the rise of Islam, both in countries that are dominated by Islam and elsewhere, insisting on a kind of an allegiance imposed by coercive power. False teaching of all sorts threaten the church as well. And then perhaps in America in particular, and in the West, Western Europe as well, the temptation to — which is more subtle, harder to see — to be distracted by the allure of material comfort or sensual pleasure. Rome was a radically sex-crazed culture. Increasingly through the media and entertainment and, frankly, just our own sinful appetites, too many believers, as well as obviously the unbelieving world, are being led into that form of bondage and slavery thinking that it's freedom. So in all of these ways we do see still today another expression of the beast, the false prophet and the harlot; not just limited to Rome then, not just limited to us today, but in every generation these things threaten the church.

Question 11:**What was the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the first century?**

In both the Old and New Testaments, the Jewish people played a key role in redemptive history. And yet, the majority of Jews at the time of Christ didn't see him as the Messiah. So, what was the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the first century?

Dr. James D. Smith III

Well insofar as an emerging Christian movement was identifying itself and living as a Jewish sect, there was often a warm relationship there. I mean, the detailing of that, the ebb and flow of that, is there in our New Testament records, of course.

Increasingly, it seems to us, that a watershed in that relationship was really focused on the issue of Titus and the conquest of Jerusalem, the Jewish wars. And in that situation it seems evident that any number of Jewish people really wanted the Christians as a Jewish sect to come to their aid and sense that Jerusalem and the temple were the preeminent issue in spiritual life. When Christians didn't do that, when in fact they said that relationship with the Messiah in this emerging community was the key that was one problematic issue. It's also the case that numerically, as the Christian mission increasingly became a Gentile mission through the efforts of the apostle Paul, and Peter later in his ministry moving in that direction, that influence becomes a major question, and the Jewish influence goes into eclipse. So there's often a significant positive relationship there. I think the epistle to the Hebrews indicates that, later first century for example. But there are strains and stresses that take place.

Dr. John E. McKinley

The relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the first century starts out okay and then deteriorates from then on. Initially all the first Christians were Jews. We have the apostles and many of them after that they see themselves as fulfilling Judaism with belief in the Messiah. This wasn't a huge problem for the synagogues and that sort of thing initially, but then as time goes on you have places in the Greek world where synagogues had been established, they had won converts among the Gentiles called proselytes or God-fearers. Often it would be the case where a whole family would become attached to the synagogue. The wife, mother, and the children would become Israelites because there isn't so much of a commitment to get circumcised as a child — women wouldn't need to be circumcised — and they would accept kosher diet, and that was considered an extension of Israel to them. But the men would not. They would remain God-fearers. So when the gospel comes through and Paul's preaching to people, this is not only the more accurate way to follow God and know God through Christ, but it is a much easier and more appealing way because now there is no need for circumcision, there is no need for Jewish cultural forms like kosher diet, and so it's not just the father who leaves the synagogue, but it's the whole family that leaves. And so, this causes a lot of irritation for the Jews

where they are seen as losing their people to the Christians. And so the jealousy of that loss, on top of the Jews thinking that the Christians are preaching blasphemy that the Messiah is God the Son. So that sort of thing raises a lot of tension between Jews and Christians, and in addition, the Jews had a protected status under Rome as an ancient religion, and they didn't like that Christians were living off of that status. So they wanted to distance themselves from the Christians, and that would open the Christians to persecution. And so this action of not working together and competing with each other made relations really deteriorate. And finally, when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., Christians came to interpret that in some times and places as God's judgment on Israel, that he'd rejected the Jews, and that's probably a reaction to their own hostility experienced from the Jews. So it's just history and culture and changes that all kind of conspired together to rip apart Jewish groups and Christian groups from the beginning.

Question 12:

What attitude should we have towards unbelieving Jews in the modern world?

By the time John wrote the book of Revelation, the relationship between the church and the Jewish community had deteriorated. We can see this particularly in the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia where some unbelieving Jews were called a "synagogue of Satan." But does the advice given to those two churches still apply today? What attitude should we have towards unbelieving Jews in the modern world?

Dr. Greg Perry

The apostle Paul, who was a Jew, and who opened his heart to say in the book of Romans that he would that even he could be accursed for the sake of his own people. And I think that's very revealing for us in terms of the kind of attitude that we should have towards unbelieving Jews in the modern world, as people who are image-bearers of God, and also a people who have received the oracles of God, the promises of God. And certain responsibilities come with that, both in terms of a call to recognize the Messiah Jesus, and to believe in him, and to benefit from the great promises. The way Paul puts it is that he wants to see the nations provoke Israel to jealousy. And so as we live a life of peace, of *shalom*, of flourishing, of wisdom, of mercy and love in relation to our unbelieving neighbors, and to especially unbelieving Jews who have God's Word and can recognize some of these promises and see them — that God would use that, that the Holy Spirit would use that to again provoke them to jealousy and to bring them to faith, and to embrace these covenant promises again as they're fulfilled in the Messiah Jesus.

Dr. Craig S. Keener

In Revelation 2:9 and Revelation 3:9 it speaks of those who say they are Jews but are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan. It's very strong language. But we need to keep

in mind that this was an intra-Jewish polemic. This was Jewish people speaking about other Jewish people. It's not necessarily a model for how we dialogue with people who disagree with us today. It was similar to the language that you have in the prophets where some of the prophets of Israel were denouncing Israel's sins. And you have even in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which everybody acknowledges is a first century Jewish document or earlier than a first century Jewish document, they speak of the rest of Israel as the congregation of Belial, the congregation of Satan. So it's very strong language that was used in intra-Jewish polemic. Part of what is happening also in the book of Revelation, you see how the seven churches are portrayed; they're portrayed as lampstands. That was the basic symbol for Judaism throughout the Roman Empire. And what Revelation is saying is that there's nothing more true to the heritage of Israel than to follow the King of Israel, the rightful King of Israel Jesus Christ.

Rev. Michael J. Glodo

What attitude should we have toward unbelieving Jews in the modern world? Well, at the very minimum, we should see them as neighbors in the way we see all people as neighbors who share in the image of God and who are people with whom we should share the good news of Jesus Christ. But I do think it helps to remember that we who are Gentiles are sharing in the promises that came to us through the Jewish nation of the Old Testament... The church of the first century was a predominately Jewish church which began to, in a dramatic way as it had never before, engrafting Gentiles into those promises. This was a great mystery that Paul talks about, that the promises to Israel were not just for Israel alone but for the nations. And so out of the seed of Old Testament Israel, through Jesus Christ who is the perfection and the true Israel, those promises have now come to those who were far off, as Paul says in Ephesians 2. We've been brought near. And so, as we look at unbelieving Jews today, we should be appreciative in a certain sense, because we're sharing in the blessings of the things that were promised to them as descendants of Abraham. And we should have a desire and a longing in our heart for them to also share in what was theirs first but which has now come to us as well. We have to insist, however, that as Paul said, he who is a Jew is not one who is a Jew outwardly but one who is of faith in Christ, that whether you are born a descendant of Abraham or a descendant of the Gentiles, it's faith in Christ that reconciles someone to God and gives them a stake in God's blessings and God's promises. John the Baptist said to the Pharisees in Matthew 3 that God can make children of Abraham out of stones. And Paul uses the image of the vine which has branches cut off while other branches are grafted in. And then he says a very important thing that should affect how we relate to unbelieving Jews today, that God can also graft back in those natural branches which have been cut off. So we should always have hope. We should always have expectations that people who are ethnically Jewish, descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, might embrace the promises that were first theirs by birthright but then given to us in the age of the Spirit.

Question 13:**How should the church respond to the suffering and persecution we endure?**

It's clear that John wrote the book of Revelation to encourage his readers to be faithful to Christ in the midst of suffering. And just as suffering and persecution were a reality for John's original readers, they are also a reality for many Christians throughout the world today. So, how should the church respond to the suffering and persecution we endure?

Rev. Larry D. Cockrell

Well, suffering a lot of times is viewed as being negative. However, from a Christian viewpoint, suffering is seen as a discipline, and is a discipline that the Lord uses to mold and shape believers more and more into the character of God. Solomon spoke well of it in Proverbs when he talks about we were made for the crucible, meaning the crucible being something that is hot that you put clay pots into fire and to obviously not purify them but in essence harden them. And again, God does the same, you know, if you will, with suffering. In addition to it being a discipline that he uses to shape and mold us more and more into Christ, it is also seen as an opportunity for fellowship. And Paul spoke well of this in Philippians 3 when he was explaining that he wanted to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, but he doesn't stop there. He talks about the fellowship of sharing in his suffering. And so believers can fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, and also we can fellowship with one another as we encounter sufferings in life as well, knowing that what Paul said in Romans 8:28, God is able to cause all of this to work together for good. And so, therefore, we can have a different perspective perhaps than the world as it relates to suffering and its impact in the life of a Christian.

Dr. Simon J. Kistemaker

The church of Jesus Christ here on earth is suffering because of the opposition of Satan, and you find that everywhere. What we as Christians have to do first of all is be in constant prayer for those who are suffering persecution, asking the Lord to send his good angels to guard the suffering Christians. You find that everywhere, well, throughout the centuries, but especially today, when you see the suffering which is going on in North Korea, people suffering not only physically but also spiritually. They know that the Lord Jesus Christ is alive, but when food has run out, where do you go to? And then you have the suffering in Islamic countries, and I can mention many of them. But throughout Asia, throughout Africa, fellow Christians are suffering on a daily basis. And then you have countries of Hinduism. At one time I thought that Hinduism, well, that is, Hindus are such gentle people. Then I met an American missionary working in India, and I sort of mentioned that, well, the Hindus are such kind people and they always smile. And he exploded and said, "You don't know what you're talking about!" I said, "Well, that's how I perceive it." "No," he said, "Hinduism says we have 100 gods... and if we have 101, so what. You know, 'Welcome aboard!' But if you say 'Jesus is the only Lord and Savior,' off comes your

head.” And if you follow the news at all, this is exactly what is happening in India today where the Hindus are persecuting the Christians. One more. The Buddhists. Buddhism is actually not a theistic religion. It doesn’t have a god. Buddha was a man, and the statues you find of Buddha are of a man, a bit oversized but nevertheless a man. But the Buddhists are violently opposed to Christianity. Must I go on? One more: Communism. No use for Christianity in many countries that are communistic. Nevertheless, we move on because the Lord Jesus Christ is saying in the book of Revelation, “I am the victor; I am victorious over all my enemies,” and with that, we as Christians keep moving on.

Dr. John E. McKinley

Suffering has a lot of different functions in the life of a Christian, and we can’t always know exactly what is going on. Sometimes we might, but suffering is something God might use to bring about good to us or good through us to somebody else. So in the case of persecution or martyrdom, particularly martyrdom, suffering is not really going to benefit us but it’s going to be a demonstration of our faithfulness to God, and it’s going to be to God’s glory. It might be a witness to other people. But suffering, for us, when we’re not being killed in the midst of it — minor sufferings, adversities, major things, various trials — we can still be joyful in these things because through them we are learning to let go of the things that distract us from God and daily life. So, suffering has the effect of focusing our awareness on what is truly important because of pain, getting us to realize this is not all that there is. There’s something more that I’m living for, and I still trust God in the midst of it because I know that the reality of what I have in Christ is greater than my comfort, my safety, and my happiness and those that I care about.

Question 14:

According to the letters to the churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, what characteristics does Jesus want the church to manifest?

Most Christian churches today have both admirable qualities and points of conflict. And the seven churches in the book of Revelation were no different. This shouldn’t surprise us when we remember that the church has always been made up of fallen, but redeemed, human beings. Still, according to the letters to the churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, what characteristics does Jesus want the church to manifest?

Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

In Jesus’ letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, he shows what he wants to see in his churches, both in what he commends and praises in many of the churches and in what he identifies as serious weaknesses that need to be addressed. So, for example, he commends the church at Ephesus for their doctrinal discernment, that they could see through false teachers and expose them. At the same time, he has to rebuke the church at Ephesus for having lost that love that they had at first, I suspect

probably for one another, because they are loyal to him but have lost that love. In the doctrinal disputes they have perhaps lost love for one another. Part of the reason I think that, is that when you get to the church at Thyatira, the fourth church, Thyatira is commended for their love, love shown in action, in deeds. But Thyatira is rebuked for failing to be theologically discerning, failing to see through false teachers. Some of the churches are praised. Smyrna and Philadelphia are praised for standing fast in the face of persecution. In fact, Jesus has no word of rebuke for those churches. The churches that are suffering most are the churches that apparently are most pure and most faithful. Other churches are rebuked, Sardis for example, because even though they have a reputation for being alive, they're fundamentally dead. They need to wake up. Or Laodicea which is enjoying affluence and think they're self-sufficient, but they're deluding themselves; they're fooling themselves. They don't know how needy they are, and so in their outward self-sufficiency they've missed and lost their deep spiritual poverty and bankruptcy, and they need to repent and seek from Christ what only he can give. Of course, among the themes that pervade these churches are warnings against indulging in sensual pleasure outside of the commands of God. There's the appeal, not just of sexuality, but of luxury and affluence and materialism that the churches need to be warned against as well. And so, again, we're called to seek our treasures in heaven, to use the language that Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount, and that's what Christ is looking for in his churches. So in those commendations and in those rebukes we see that Christ is indeed walking among the churches. He knows our strengths and recognizes them. He also points out to us our weaknesses and calls us to repentance.

Dr. Dan Doriani

Jesus wants the church to show both orthopraxy and orthodoxy in equal measure. That is to say, we should live the right way — that's orthopraxy — and we should think or know or confess the right things — that's orthodoxy. This is maybe clearest in the case like the church of Ephesus which struggled with good deeds, and boy, they tested doctrine to make sure it wasn't false, but their love had grown cold. So maybe we should add even a third thing: orthopraxy, orthodoxy *and* right affections. You've got to believe the right things. Some churches didn't. You've got to live the right things. Some churches went from false doctrine to false practice — antinomianism. But if you have love and knowledge and deeds together, then you're going to be the kind of church Christ wants then and now for us to be.

Question 15:

Why is it important that our love and zeal for Christ be coupled with strong doctrine?

In the book of Revelation, we read that believers in the church at Ephesus were strong in their understanding of Christian doctrine, but they had lost their “first love.” And the Thyatirans had an increasing love for Christ, but tolerated false teachings. Jesus’ words to these churches made it clear that we need both love and

doctrine. But, why is it important that our love and zeal for Christ be coupled with strong doctrine?

Dr. Craig S. Keener

When we emphasize the doctrinal or conceptual dimensions of Scripture, we want to avoid what people call “intellectualism.” But that’s not the same thing as avoiding intellect or avoiding the mind. When I was a young Christian I actually thought that it was the same as avoiding that, that you just needed to kind of get a sense of it emotionally or something on that level. But then I began realizing, for instance in Matthew 13, what differentiated the good ground from the other soils was that they heard the Word of God and they understood it. Jesus wanted people to understand — “Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.” And Paul speaks of not just the Spirit bearing witness together with our Spirit, but he speaks of the mind of the Spirit. He also speaks of the renewing of the mind, that the mind plays an important role... The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, the beginning of wisdom, Scripture says. And so, starting with that love for God and that devotion to God, we read Scripture, we use our minds to try to hear the message. And then when we do that, we submit our lives.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

The reason truth and doctrine is important for our love and zeal with Christ is because relationship is grounded in truth. There’s a fundamental connection between belief and behavior, but also love and knowledge. The deeper your love for someone, the more you’re going to want to know them. And the more you know someone, the greater your capacity to love them. So this connection between love and knowledge is vital for us to realize, that to have a relationship with someone and not know them very well, it just doesn’t work. We realize that at a human level, but we need to realize it in our relationships with God as well.

Understanding the structure and content of the book of Revelation provides a solid basis for our interpretation of its difficult passages. And for this book in particular several topics stand out, including John’s use of imagery and his use of recapitulation. Once we grasp these ideas, the purpose of the book becomes all the more clear: to encourage suffering Christians to remain faithful until Jesus returns.

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