

The
New
Testament
in a Year

Week 49

Revelation 4-8

This week's reflector is

Greg Smith-Young.

*He is on the Ministry team at
Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge.*

*As a fan of Toronto sports teams, he is
finely attuned to apocalyptic literature
that speaks of doom and gloom. And,
uncrushable hope.*

Monday

Revelation 4

Eugene Peterson, by no means a wide-eyed end-times fanatic, has said that the Apocalypse of John (aka "Revelation") will be the most important biblical book for the 21st century church!

This writing speaks to the imaginations of a church that is too often devoid of imagination. Times are a-changing. In times such as these, we need to be freed to imagine the new things God is doing. Might the Holy Spirit be ready to use Revelation to open our imaginations of God's future, and God's present?

Open our imaginations? Revelation blows them open!

The Apocalypse (an unveiling of that which is hidden) is not a photograph. It is more like a painting. Designed carefully to evoke feelings, to create wonder, to seed hope, to forge faith.

Chapter 4 is perhaps the centre of the whole piece. God is on the Throne, surrounded by worship. Unreal worship. Or, maybe the most real thing in all creation. The worship of God. Anything divorced from such worship is unreal.

*How is your worship – yours personally
and in your church – like and unlike this
scene?*

Tuesday

Revelation 5

Crisis! A seven-sealed scroll that must stay sealed, because no one is worthy to open it. John is deeply distressed!

But wait! There is One! The Lion, the Root—images of a conquering Messiah. But wait! The crowd parts, and we see the One . . . a Lamb? Slaughtered? Yet alive? How can he be worthy?

Yet he is. Because he has been slaughtered, to ransom a God-people, to ordain a priesthood from all nations, for all nations. (See Exodus 19:5-6.) This is the Passover Lamb, the Suffering Servant Lamb (Isaiah 53:7), the Saviour Jesus, the Crucified Christ. He is worthy!

But what is in this scroll that needs to be opened? We don't know, not yet. The seven seals are still intact. (As they are opened over the next few chapters, we might wonder if it would have been better to keep the seals in place!)

This chapter ends in worship. Of course! The Lamb has been revealed. The Revealer has stepped forward. No passive victim, he has proved to be worthy. No one else has. No one else need be. He is! Worthy! By his death. For us and our salvation.

Worship!

Wednesday

Revelation 6

The Lamb starts unsealing the scrolls. This unleashes Conquest; War (notice it is people, though, who do the fighting); Famine; Death (with his henchman Hell). Then comes a vision of long-suffering martyrs (martyr means “witness,” in this case to Christ.). Finally comes cosmic destruction.

Are these future events? Or, are they imaginative interpretations of the calamities that sweep through history, and an unveiling of the larger picture behind them all?

The hope of the Apocalypse is that all these things are within the hands of the Lamb, who was slaughtered for the sake of the world. Our human-planetary experience is chaotic, unruly, and destructive. This vision is hope for the powerless victims of this. There is a greater Power over all of these things!

Amid such horrors, two groups cry out. The martyrs cry “How long?” They are calling for more judgement on the earth!
Is God’s judgement good news?

The rest (from greatest to least) cry out, “Who can stand?” It reminds me of the disciples’ question to Jesus, “Who then can be saved?” *Look at Jesus’ answer, in Matthew 19.23-30.*

Thursday

Revelation 7

Now, a pause in the destruction. The horsemen are now depicted as winds (see Zechariah 6.2-5) Why? So that some could be sealed. This is different from the seals in the previous chapters. It signifies ownership by the Lamb and his Father (14.1).

There seems to be 2 groups here: one with 144000 people, the other with an uncountable multitude. Yet are they in fact the same group?

Apocalyptic literature has its own “dictionary.” The number 12 symbolizes completeness, and also the entire nation of Israel. So 12 x 12 (or better still, 12 x 12000) signifies all of Israel. It is an expansive number, not a limiting one.

Hearing this, John the Seer looks and beholds a crowd beyond counting. The People of God. Not just ethnic Israel (NB, neither exclusive of ethnic Israel). Truly inter-cultural! Worshipping.

Also, wounded. Some teachings of the “End Times” imagine Jesus’s followers being rescued away from suffering. That is not the vision of the Apocalypse. By totally identifying with the Lamb, they have entered into his ordeal/tribulation. Yet with the promise of hope and peace spread before them. (See John 16.33)

Friday

Revelation 8

The seventh seal. Then, after tonnes of action and anguish, silence. Perhaps it is a breather. It builds suspense.

Then begins another group of seven: seven trumpet-blowing angels. The fanfare seems to be in response to prayer. Beware! Prayer is powerful!

Each group of seven seems to spring from the previous set: trumpets from seals, later bowls from trumpets. I get a sense of gathering chaos, of things tumbling out of control.

With each trumpet, part of an environment is despoiled and many its inhabitants are destroyed.

Earth – trees, grass

Sea – marine life, ships

Rivers – people who drink their water

Heavens – celestial objects.

It seems like creation in reverse. In Genesis 1, God creates the environments (days 1-3) and then populates them (days 4-6). Here, environments are destroyed and depopulated.

Does this resonate with our growing sense of crisis in our environments?

But remember, through all this, the One who sits on the Throne. And the Lamb.