

The
New
Testament
in a Year

Week 50
Revelation 9-13

This week's writer is Orville James, of Wellington Square United in Burlington. He still plays Oldtimers Hockey, and delights in hanging out with his grown-up children. (Praise & thanks for SKYPE). Sometimes he wonders if George Bernard Shaw was correct when he called Revelation 'the ravings of a drug addict'.

Monday

Revelation 9

The 5th and 6th angels, locusts and massacres. Readers can tend to fixate wildly on details, mainly because John relied so heavily on symbols to express his meaning in this book.

When Spanish artist Pablo Picasso painted his massive *Guernica*, he attempted to express what had happened in war-ravaged Spain on April 28, 1937. He created a work of art, not a photographic record. The painting does communicate the tragedy at Guernica, but artfully, symbolically.

John poetically renders human events so strange and climactic as to be otherwise inexpressible. Phillip Yancey suggests that readers of Revelation should start by viewing scenes as a whole, looking for an overall meaning.

Verse 20 here suggests that these judgements are for a purpose: to convince humankind that its rebellion is futile and encourage it to repent. The judgments are similar to the 10 plagues against Egypt (Exodus 7-11). Neither work to bring repentance.

What modern day realities does the imagery of these plagues bring to mind for you? How might they have applied equally well in John's day?

Tuesday

Revelation 10

The codes in Revelation are so effective that few people today agree on exactly what they mean. Readers are tempted to respond in one of two ways.

Some judge the book so perplexingly weird and dismiss it. Others pore over Revelation and conclude they have discovered the secret explanation of each obscure detail.

We're given the description of a spectacular and good angel. This angel is like a superhero. Jerry Seinfeld suggests that, for little boys dreaming of growing up to be Batman, Spiderman or Superman –'these are not fantasies ... these are options'.

At some internal level, the male psyche actually believes that we are (or can be) a 'superhero'. I confess that was true for me, when I was a boy. Sometimes it still is, but now I know that it's a fantasy. Only one Saviour, only one Messiah, and it ain't me. That's a relief.

The angel delivers a scroll that tastes sweet, but turns sour in the stomach.

What is an experience you once savoured for a moment, but that later turned sour? How can a revelation from God be both sweet and bitter?

Wednesday

Revelation 11

“There never has been a book provoking more delirium, foolishness, and irrational movements, without any relationship to Jesus Christ,” concluded Jaques Ellul about Revelation. He’s right about the delirium and foolishness, and yet I don’t completely agree with him, because allusions to Christ are all over this book.

Look at verse 15, and if you know Handel’s *Messiah*, tell me you can’t hear the Hallelujah Chorus.

“The kingdom of the world
has become the kingdom of our Lord
and of his Christ,
and he will reign for ever and ever.”

Also in this chapter, God’s witnesses experience significant success for a time. *When, & How, have you felt especially empowered by God in your spiritual journey and in sharing your faith?*

But the witnesses are overpowered and killed; only later does God restore, and receives them into heaven.

What do you learn in this passage about what it means to be a witness? What has been toughest for you about living out your faith at work? At school? At home?

Thursday

Revelation 12

Christmas Day. We celebrate and remember it many ways. With crèche scenes, and pageants re-enacting shepherds and wise men and a stable. Some scholars interpret chapter 12 as describing Christmas Day also, but its point of view differs radically from the Gospels. Revelation does not tell of shepherds, a crazed king bent on infanticide (Matthew 2:16-20), and a stable; rather, we see here a murderous dragon leading a ferocious struggle in heaven.

The message of Revelation is that every inch of this planet is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan. Revelation draws the contrasts sharply: good versus evil, the Lamb versus the dragon, Jerusalem versus Babylon.

As Revelation tells it, events that appear tragic can work great good. Have you ever experienced that in your life?

Friday

Revelation 13

Who do you think of as a charismatic leader living today? Obama? Mandela? Depending on your political leanings, they could be seen as a messiah, or a beast. Mandela certainly was viewed by white Afrikaners as a beast.

V. 5 has prompted much speculation. Could it refer to 42 literal months of great persecution against the church? Did this take place during the Roman era? Or are persecutions still in the future?

The 42-month period is called ‘the great tribulation’. Several schools of thought have developed around the tribulation.

Pre-tribulationists believe that Jesus will remove the church from earth just before the great tribulation. Post-tribulationists believe the church will go through a time of trials before Jesus returns. Mid-tribulationists believe the church will be taken away during the tribulation.

Not part of our United Church thinking, but a generation ago during the charismatic renewal in mainline churches, these ideas were in play. Hal Lindsay’s *‘The Late Great Planet Earth’* speculated that the end was coming soon. Hal also took his book royalties and bought real estate in Southern California. Hmmmn??!