

## Confirmation 2020-21 Session 23 – Revelation

### Background Information

For contemporary Christians, there is no book in the Bible more confusing or controversial than Revelation. It has been used to create fear and intimidation to urge people to get on the "right" side of God before the events of the Bible unfold. It's been used to sell books, movies, ministries, and TV and revival evangelists. It has been used to motivate teenagers especially to commit their lives to Jesus before it's too late. The end-times imagery of Revelation has seeped into popular culture so thoroughly that even if you know almost nothing about the Bible, you probably know something about Revelation. So be prepared to be surprised to discover that in contrast to these popular and attention-grabbing misuses of Revelation, Revelation was actually written to inspire hope and even joy amid life's most crushing events.

Likely written to a community undergoing persecution at the end of the 1st Century or beginning of the 2nd, Revelation holds a powerful message about God's work to bring about life where there is death, and freedom amid oppression. Rather than it being a book with ominous predictions about the future, Revelation describes victories repeatedly emerging in the present; it illustrates what happens any time the Word of God comes into the world to create faith, justify the unrighteous, and give hope to the hopeless. It's what happens when God's Word in the Gospel and the Sacraments come up against sin, death, and the devil. When the word is spoken, revelation happens, such that the resulting faith brings the joy of the New Jerusalem and the end of crying and mourning. Rather than something to be afraid of, this revelation is something we sing about and experience every time we gather in worship, and in every place where God meets us to turn our tears into joy.

## What you need to know

The book is entitled, “Revelation”-singular; not Revelations.

Modern liberal scholarship teaches that the images and symbols that are described in Revelation are not to be taken literally, or prophetically, but historically. And furthermore, we may NOT be able to understand their meaning that is lost to time. Resist thinking that if we just try hard enough we can *crack the code* and figure out when the LORD will return or the world will end or who the beast is.

The author is said to be John of Patmos, although that is a safe answer since the author identifies himself that way in the first several verses. What is unclear is whether this John is John the Apostle, or John the Elder, or some other John, after all, John was and is a popular name. What is clear is that John, the author, was seen as a trouble-maker wherever he was from and so he was exiled to the remote island of Patmos where the Holy Spirit gave him the Revelation.

Revelation is written in the Biblical style of *apocalypse*, meaning an unveiling or revealing of something that was previously hidden. In his writing, John describes his vision but does not interpret what it means. Sadly, we likely will never know what all of it means.

Popular opinion about the book of Revelation has been primarily influenced by interpretations meant to induce fear and get people to turn their lives over to Jesus-or else! Making the book of Revelation so singular in meaning does not give proper context to or respect to the text.

Revelation is not predicting future events. It was written to a group of Christians who were finding out just how hard it was to remain faithful. It was written to provide an alternative lens through which to see their current reality. Where they saw oppression, suffering, and hardship, God was at work creating new life amid death, giving hope to the hopeless and faith to the faithless

The book is filled to the brim with signs and symbols. While they might be obscure to us today, their meaning would not have been lost on the communities for which the book was originally written. The readers/hearers would have been as familiar with these symbols and what they represented as we are with the brand logos we see so frequently today.

### **About the Lutheran Study Bible (LSB)**

Please turn to page 2026 and read the introduction to Revelation. Read the articles entitled “Background File,” “What’s the Story?” and “What’s the Message.” These articles can be found at the beginning of every book of the Bible and are very helpful in getting a basic understanding of each book’s content.

### **Essay Questions**

*In your own words, answer number one, and then any three of the other questions below in 100-150 words each and return them to Pastor Jesse by email at [pastor@zionohio.org](mailto:pastor@zionohio.org) no later than next Sunday, March 21.*

1. Reflect on what you knew about the book of Revelation BEFORE today's lesson. What had you heard? Was it scary? Ridiculous? Your thoughts please.
2. Read Revelation 2:1-7. Think about what has been written about this church that has done many things right, but yet has "abandoned the love you had at first." What could this mean? Give an example that you can make up that might explain what the author is warning about.
3. Read Revelation 7:1-8. The author makes use of the number of 144,000. With what you read in this passage and remembering what I have told you about holy numbers, what do you make of this passage? Go to Wikipedia and search the number 144,000 and read about the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, and other.

4. Read Revelation 17:1-6. "Whore" is not a word that we should use carelessly, even sex workers would be offended. Yet in this passage the term is used. How is it used? Who is the whore? Can you think of a person or authority or institution in our culture that fits this passages description?
5. Read Revelation 21:1-8. This is a favorite passage to be used at funerals. Why do you think that is? Where does God reside with God's creation? Does this change your idea of heaven? Is this passage a comfort to you today?
6. Read Revelation 13:11-18. Much has been made of the "number of the beast" given as 666 in verse 18. Are you aware of this number? What do you know about it? Where have you seen it referred to? Read the annotation in the left column and comment.