

Discover Hour
E100, Week 20
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Our E100 finished up this week with the book of *Revelation*. This book is often regarded as one of the most difficult books to understand in the Bible, yet this perception is typically based on a fundamental misunderstanding of it, in my opinion. When read as a pictorial roadmap of future events through which we can make confident and direction connections to current events, it is indeed very difficult. However, if we instead read the book with an understanding of its symbolic, rather than pictorial nature, it becomes much more clear and understandable. Hopefully our discussion of it in class can help make this distinction clear.

The book is cast as a struggle between good and evil – bringing to a point of completion the struggle begun in the garden: Christ/ Satan, Saints/ Beast, Bride of Christ/ Whore of Babylon, Lamb/ Dragon, Destruction of Babylon/ Establishment of the New Jerusalem. It captures not only the grande finale of the book of Revelation and of the Bible, but of human history as well. In addition, it is told in narrative form, with a rapid pace, with a conflict and drive toward the resolution of the conflict. As Ryken describes it: “The linear movement is not a smooth linear flow from one event to the next. The movement is much closer to the effects in modern cinema – a kaleidoscopic sequence of visions, pictures, sounds, images, and events, ever shifting and never in focus for very long.” *Words of Life*, 136).

To say the book makes use of symbolism is merely to point out the obvious, that characters and events described refer beyond themselves. For example, the opening of seven seals is about the progression of God’s judgment, not about the seals themselves. The references to the lamb and lion are references to Christ, not to a lamb per se.

Contrast drawn, adapted, and summarized from Ryken, pages 147 - 163

Olivet Discourse

1. Wars, earthquakes, feminine, and false teachers (Mt. 24: 5-8)
2. Persecution of Christians (Mt. 24: 9 – 22)
3. False Christs and false prophets (Mt. 24: 23 -28)
4. Natural disasters, the appearance of Christ, and the harvesting of the elect (Mt. 24: 29 - 31)
5. Final judgment (Mt. 24: 32 – 25:46)

Revelation

1. Prologue (Rev. 1)
2. Letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2-3)
3. The seven seals (Rev. 4-8:1)
4. The seven trumpets (Rev. 8:2 – 11)
5. The seven great signs (Rev. 12-14)
6. The seven bowls of wrath (Rev. 15-16)
7. The seven events of final judgment (Rev. 17-22)

Discussion Questions

We repeatedly see the appeal of end of the world teaching in groups and masses of people who check out of society, form a commune, and wait for the end of the world (e.g., Branch Davidians and People’s Temple). Why are these so compelling to people?

What drives the desire to match current events with the symbolic portrayal in the book of Revelation?

How does the description of the river of life and the new Jerusalem compare with the Garden of Eden both before and after the fall?

What do you think is the dominant visual image of heaven in Revelation 21 -22 and what is the dominant emotion you are left with after reading this passage?