

the end...

exploring the book of Revelation.
questions answered.
and more questions raised.

Purpose: *To explore the book of Revelation as a group, and to enlighten teenagers to the ideas that Revelation can be interpreted in a number of ways, none of which are salvation issues.*

Recap & Questioning

The types of writing styles used in Revelation – Epistle and Jewish Apocalyptic

The four methods of interpreting Revelation – Historic, Preterist, Idealist, Futurist

Who has read the book of Revelation completely over the past 3 weeks?

What can you tell me about the numbers found in Revelation?

A Look at Numbers in Revelation

To look at numbers in Revelation, we must first start by reminding ourselves that numbers in Revelation are subjective due to the nature of Apocalyptic Imagery. There are many, many numbers in Revelation that some people try to shoehorn into literal interpretations that just do not work. There are many numbers that we brush off as meaning one thing when they mean something completely different, and we can only find this out by exploring some of the numerology at play in Apocalyptic Literature.

Divide the group into pairs (or individuals if you like) and assign them passages that deal with some of the more prominent numbers passages:

Revelation 5.1, Revelation 7.1, Revelation 20.8, Revelation 7.4-8, Revelation 21.12-14, Revelation 21.16-17, Revelation 21.19-21, Revelation 4.4

After the passages are read, invite groups (or pairs or individuals) to share their findings. What numbers are present in that particular passage? What do they suppose the numbers mean? Do they know of any significance that particular number might have?

Some numbers at play in Revelation:

- ✓ **2** – There were two witnesses, the disciples were sent out by 2 to witness (Mark 6.7), two witnesses are required to establish truth (Deuteronomy 17:6, John 8:17, 2 Corinthians 13:1).
- ✓ **4** – Typically would be used in symbolizing the whole of the earth (four points of the compass) The four angels standing at the corners, holding the winds back (Revelation 7.1 & 20.8). The 4 beasts in Revelation 4 are incredibly close to the four beasts found in Ezekiel 1 (not to mention the throne room is remarkably similar in description here to the vision of Isaiah in chapter 6 of his book).
- ✓ **6** – Typically assigned as a value number to man, as man was created on the sixth day
- ✓ **7** – Shows up at least 55 times in Revelation and typically implies completeness, wholeness. Seven days in a week, seven bowls, seven trumpets, seven seals, seven churches, seven lamp stands, etc.
- ✓ **12** – Twelve often is referred to as another number of completeness. There were 12 apostles. 12 tribes of Israel. 12 gates on New Jerusalem. 12 stars on the crown worn by the woman in 12.1.

- ✓ **24** – 24 thrones and 24 elders – a completion of OT believers and NT believers (apostles and tribes, side by side). The church as a whole referred to as a priesthood, a redeemed people. In the OT only one tribe of Israel had priests. As a redeemed and completed church, all are part of the priesthood.
- ✓ **144** – The result of 12 multiplied by 12.
- ✓ **12,000** – Another multiple of 12.
- ✓ **144,000** – A multiple of 12. $12 \times 12 \times 1,000 = 144,000$

- ✓ **3 and a half years** – the amount of time that Elijah was cared for by God while on the run (1 Kings 17.1-14; 19.1-8 & James 5.17)
- ✓ **3 and a half years** – persecution shown to have happened (or will happen) in Daniel 7.25 and 12.7.

These are the bulk of the numbers that show up in Revelation. And they can only be explained so far. But if we know the history behind some of them, and the context that John uses them in, we can really begin to see that Revelation is firmly rooted and offers more than just what happened before or what happens down the road.

The End of It All

There is one other major element of Revelation that I want to touch on before we wrap up our series. What happens at the end of it all? When Jesus does come back, what can we look for to happen in the world?

The idea of the rapture has a major weakness in that it sets us up for a theology of evacuation. What does it mean to evacuate? According to Webster's Dictionary, evacuate means:

Transitive Verb

- 1: to remove the contents of: empty
- 2: to discharge from the body as waste: void
- 3: to remove something (as gas or water) from especially by pumping
- 4 a: to remove especially from a military zone or dangerous area
 - b: to withdraw from military occupation of
 - c: vacate <were ordered to *evacuate* the building>

Intransitive verb

- 1: to withdraw from a place in an organized way especially for protection
- 2: to pass urine or feces from the body

Do you catch that each one of these definitions implies that you are either getting away from something bad or that you are getting rid of something undesirable? Within the rapture the implication is that we escape from the bad before it gets really bad and then we stay with the good forever in heaven. But if God is just going to destroy the earth because it has gotten too bad, and we are going to live forever in the clouds, then why did earth exist in the first place? Why is it important to still take care of it?

I want to present to you an alternative theology of the end of everything. This should make your head spin in a good way. I submit to you that according to Revelation we will not live in heaven as we believe it forever. How do I argue this to you? Let's look at Revelation 21. (read chapter 21 aloud to the group).

Within Jewish apocalyptic literature everything is subjective. But here we are given a few things to look at as physical. The new heavens and new earth can be – and should be – translated as renewed. God show John a vision of a literal city of Jerusalem that many interpret as the church coming as the bride. And it might be. It might be a literal city. There are a bunch of literal measurements given of the city which show it to be a perfect cube that comes down to take up residence on earth. There is great intentionality from John to show

that it is descending from heaven to join a renewed earth. Everything in the city shows restoration. Everything is shown as being physical.

No lights that zip around saying they are the body of believers.

No earth destroyed by fire never to be seen again.

No mansions in heaven where we hang out in the clouds all day long.

Instead what we see within the city very strongly reflects the Garden of Eden. There are trees of life bearing 12 crops of fruit. The one tree we were prevented from tasting in Eden. In 21.3 we are told there is no more curse. In Genesis 3 mankind is cursed for defying God and breaking the relationship. Here it is restored. The people will see God's face as they did in Eden, walking with Him daily.

Revelation does not show the church leaving earth to take up residence at the end of it all. It shows us in restored bodies, enjoying God's presence in a restored earth. One that is just like Eden was, as the earth was intended to be originally. It comes full circle.

Now, whether or not you believe this to be true, it really doesn't matter in the end. It will not remove your salvation from you. But think about it this week. And come back next week with questions as we host a special Real Talk: The End edition. All your questions about the End Times and Revelation will be fair game, and we will try to answer as many as we are able to.