

Revelation Bible Study

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. Revelation 1:8

This study utilizes as its primary materials:

- Explaining All the Scary Stuff in Revelation* with Rev. Ken Klaus (The Lutheran Hour); this study sets the stage for being able to understand Revelation
- God's Word for Today: Revelation* by Dale Griffin, Julene Dumit, Rodney Rathman, and Robert Baker (Concordia Publishing House); we focus on these 13 lessons as we move through the chapters of Revelation
- A variety of other resources and handouts

The Basic Structure of this booklet:

Due to there being three main sections, there are three sets of page numbers.

- I. Introductory Material/Discussion Questions related to "Scary Stuff" Video
- II. Lessons from Revelation Study
- III. Appendix

Lesson 1 of Introductory Material Who's Afraid of the Book of Revelation?

Welcome

View Video *Explaining All the Scary Stuff in Revelation: Scary Stuff Part I* (7:20)

1. Would anyone like to share some initial thoughts or questions concerning the Book of Revelation?

2. Has there historically been a high level of interest in the Book of Revelation?

3. What about today? Why do you think that so many people are interested in learning about/the events in the Book of Revelation?

4. How is the Book of Revelation often portrayed in popular culture? In the context of American Evangelicalism?

Two examples stand out that have greatly impacted American thought and culture concerning the Book of Revelation and the End Times (referenced in the Introduction Essay):

The Late, Great Planet Earth (1970) by Hal Lindsey and Carole C. Carson
This book has sold over 35 million copies! Other follow up books were written to this volume as well. A television special based on the book in 1975 drew an incredible 17 million viewers and it was later adapted for film release in 1979.

-Left Behind by Tim LaHaye (Bible Scholar) and Jerry B. Jenkins (fiction writer) began with the first book being released in 1995 (titles continued to be released until 2007). Originally a series of 12 books, it later was expanded to 16. The books are fictionalized account of the Last Days that (according to the theological positions of the authors) are how Revelation could unfold in a modern context. This series has sold an impressive number of over 80 million copies, 7 of which reached #1 on the New York Times Best Seller List! The franchise has also spawned numerous other projects including a children's series, music, merchandise, non-fiction books, films, and even video games. From 2000-2005 three mid-budget movies were made (starring Kirk Cameron). In 2014, the film was rebooted with a wide-release bigger budget version starring Nicolas Cage.

Notes: These are the most well-known, but many Christian films have been produced centered on the events of the Book of Revelation.

There have also been many failed attempts/predictions (Christian and non-Christian) concerning the end of the world.

5. Have you read or viewed any of the materials from either of these two franchises? Do they follow a Lutheran/Scriptural understanding of the Book of Revelation? How should we approach them? Note: Issues concerning these works will also be discussed in greater detail in later classes.

6. While many people are very interested in the Book of Revelation, some are not. Even some Christians avoid reading/studying it. Why?

7. Revelation certainly contains information about the future as it culminates with the return of Jesus and the New Heavens and New Earth. However, is Revelation the only source material we have from the Bible concerning the End Times?

8. As the study goes on, we will examine different interpretations of Revelation in more detail. But obviously what exactly everything in Revelation means is something that not all Christians agree on. When it comes to the End Times/Return of Jesus what are essential doctrines? What things are “secondary” doctrines? Remember the difference between “orthodox” and “heterodox”.

In answering this is it helpful to look at what the Historic Creeds of the Church Say.

Several years ago I preached a sermon, “What You Need to Know about the Second Coming”, which outlined 5 Key Truths to remember when pondering the End of the World/Return of Jesus:

1. Jesus is coming back!
2. We don't know exactly when this return will occur.
3. Be ready at all times!
4. We should pray for His return and share Christ with others in the meantime.
5. Christians need not live in fear of the Final Judgment.

Luther, Lutherans, and the End Times:

What has been the Lutheran approach/interpretation of the End Times and Book of Revelation? This is something, of course, that we will be discussing in this study. So we will not go through a detailed explanation here. However, we must remember that Luther and our Lutheran forefathers did not endeavor to create a new form of Christianity. Rather they sought to return the Church back to what was correctly

taught in the early centuries of Christianity. It was not about discovering new doctrines, but rather proclaiming the old (and true) ones.

So with this in mind, it makes sense that Lutherans did not and have not bought into some of the newer teachings concerning Revelation that have become popular in recent centuries. The Lutheran Church has preached and taught a fairly straightforward approach to the End Times (see my sermon points above). We confess what a vast majority of the Church has believed and confessed through the centuries.

In terms of resources from the Reformation Era concerning Revelation, we do have some but not a complete arsenal to refute some of the bad/false teachings of today. No one in the time of Reformation taught about a “secret rapture” so obviously it was not addressed. There were those that taught a form of Millennialism at that time and there are documents speaking against that.

What about Luther himself, who wrote so extensively on just about everything? Luther’s works on Revelation are pretty thin. There is no Luther commentary on the Book of Revelation nor extensive sermons or other writings going through chapter and verse. Luther’s view of Revelation is an interesting one and one, that like his view of the Book of James, evolved over time. Early in the Reformation, Luther was not so sure that Revelation should even be included in the Bible (as he thought about James). He did not view it on the same level as the Gospels or Epistles. He did include it in his translation of the Bible into German, though the forward to it he wrote was less than a ringing endorsement.

However, as time went on Luther began to hold Revelation in higher esteem and see it as divinely inspired Scripture (as he did with James). Evidence of this is that he replaced the original 1522 preface he wrote to Revelation in 1530 with a stronger and more favorable one that affirms it as Scripture. As his life went on, Luther began to see more contemporary fulfillments of Revelation in the context of his times. He viewed many of the prophecies concerning the Anti-Christ and the Last Days as coming to pass with the Pope and Roman Church (more on this later in the study). He came to view the return of Christ as imminent, even saying, *“Since the Gospel is so despised, I suppose that Judgment Day is not far away, not over a hundred years.”* So even Luther was not immune to viewing Revelation with as is said today, “Bible in one hand and newspaper in the other.”

Fortunately, later Lutheran scholars have put forth some excellent resources concerning properly interpreting Revelation (especially as incorrect interpretations concerning it have grown). Not all Confessional Lutheran scholars even agree on every little point, but they agree on the key and broad themes. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has produced some excellent commentaries, studies, and resources that rightly examine what the Book of Revelation really teaches us.