

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Book of Revelation (2)

Monday October 20th: Chapter 5: Host Toyin, Lead Toyin: A reminder about picture language: The pictures pick out key characteristics, not precise details. If we are invited to be doves, this does not mean sitting in a tree cooing and eating worms! Christ as lion (lion of Judah Genesis 49) and Christ as lamb (lamb is used 29 times in this Book) juxtaposes powerfully kingship+ power and sacrifice + meekness. Christ was crucified at the time that the Passover lambs were being butchered. Christ chose. The lambs had no choice.

Ezekiel 2 features the scroll. As a parchment scroll, the Book of Revelation would have been about 15 feet long. Seals were used on scrolls to discourage opening by the wrong person. The number 7 yet again. Isaiah 11 gives us “the root of David”. Atonement is a very difficult concept to grasp firmly. It IS NOT “satisfying the wrath of God” – which must be one of the most unsingable hymn lines. Though this chapter gives the inspiration for about 35 hymns! Sin divides us from God with a barrier: a barrier that only God’s sacrificial love can destroy. The rescued people theme is also found in Daniel 7 and, of course, in the Book of Exodus.

The inclusiveness of this chapter stands out. This is the holy of holies, but it is filled with our prayers! Note that God uses our prayers for His purposes, rather than us trying to use God!) People from all over the earth are involved; and the numbers quoted are basically “too many to count”. (Remember this when we come to the 144,000 later on.) Instead of a small number of special people, we are all (in Message Bible terms) priest kings. All top people. Everybody can sing. (Some would argue that in this life everybody can sing. Certainly, everybody can do something useful.) We are not just audience of all this. We are participants in it.

Not sure we in any sense deserve heaven; but we can offer humbly deeds, knowledge, faith. Big numbers, but the collective requires the individual. Work is an important form of praise. Praise is an important aspect of work. If you want to tread deep water: How do we reconcile God’s master plan with our free will?

Monday October 27th: Revelation Chapter 6: Host David, Lead Miranda: I wonder whether the answer to the question “Why not keep it simple?” is that in speculating about the unfathomable and the indescribable simplicity is going to be hard to come by? Here we have conquest, strife, famine and pestilence. I like the thought that if this were music rather than narrative, the author could interweave the four disasters. In real life, they do not come one after the other. We are bound to ask Why does a good God allow bad things, Our personal perspective on this? (I only drop in the reflection that religious people are not unaware of the bad things!) I treasure the statement that Kingsley Amies was asked whether he believed in God; and replied “No; and I hate him.”

Verse 6 is about poor people suffering more than rich people – a reality in many cases and many places. 12-17 is about the opposite situation: everyone suffering equally in natural disasters. Incidentally, this passage makes more sense if seen as being about natural disasters, rather than the end of the world. No point in taking shelter from the end of the world.

Maybe the martyrs are crying out for evidence that there is purpose in their suffering, rather than crying out for revenge. God's timetable is not necessarily our timetable. Four generations from Abraham for the Jews to occupy the Promised Land; and then.....

Monday November 3rd: Revelation Chapter 7: Host David, Lead Oliver: Hard times coming! But suffering, while very real, does not have the last word. The tail end of this chapter is popular at funerals. A square world seems odd to us, With this concept went four diagonal (not North, South, East and West) bad winds. Some groups take the 144,000 as the number of "elect" who would rule over the rest of us in the new world. 12 times the twelve Jewish tribes is an odd concept for Christians; and the tribes themselves are odd. Judah comes first (the Jesus tribe), although Reuben was the first born. Dan is left out. Joseph and one of his sons (Manasseh) are both included. His other son (Ephraim) is left out. Much more important is the huge crowd much too big to count.

Some faith groups did bathe in blood, but the reference here is much more likely to be linked to the priestly sprinkling of sacrificial blood on the congregation. Again, this all more about free grace and active involvement than about Chose//Elect irrespective of merit. Think about the Christian slave when you read verse 16: someone with extended experience of heat, hunger, thirst, pain and oppression.

I loved the thought of God pitching His tent/tabernackling with us

Nestling in here is the concept of the natural creation suffering from human behaviour, and redeemed in our participative redemption. The Lamb as Shepherd.