



30 DAYS WITH

the book of

REVELATION

A toolkit for you and your church

Introduction to Bible Month

This booklet, *30 days with Revelation*, is part of a series to help you and your church focus on one book of the Bible in any one month. Its aim is to develop biblical literacy across the breadth and depth of your community: everyone can have their own copy and dig deep into the book of Revelation, at the same time!

Bible passages form the basis of a series of four weeks of Bible notes written by Helen Miller to guide your sermons. There are four sets of small group resources by Abi Jarvis that invite every home group to join in; and the four sets of all age resources, by Gail Adcock and wider team, include imaginative activities.

The reflection by Gary Hall provides a useful overview of the text. The further resources by Michael Wadsworth invite you to dig deeper into context and commentary.

Ministers, worship leaders and preachers of all denominations find the Bible Month material invaluable in deepening understanding of scripture, building community cohesion, and in outreach to share the word of God. Whether joining online or in person, everyone who is part of your main church service will be able to relate to the content during a Bible Month four-week programme.

The booklet is the primary resource for equipping people to join Bible Month and is often a catalyst for personal thinking and prayer. Other resources include author videos with additional insights; training events online and in person; a bespoke YouTube channel; and a dedicated Facebook group with weekly input. You can order the booklets at preachweb.org/biblemonth, you can find links to other resources at methodist.org.uk/biblemonth.

Bible Month resources are produced as a partnership between The Methodist Church (methodist.org.uk) and LWPT (Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust lwpt.org.uk).

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How to run a small group

Small groups are a place to discuss the teaching in a Sunday sermon, to reflect on how what you've heard, read and discussed affects your life, and to encourage (and challenge) one another in discipleship. Here are a few tips for running a small group.

Before: review the material and decide what will be most useful for your group (you don't need to do everything). Check if there is any advance preparation to do. It might be helpful to circulate a summary of the sermon.

At the start: introduce the topic and ask someone to summarise the key sermon points. Pray together, asking the Holy Spirit to open your eyes and your hearts to fresh revelation today.

During the meeting: lead the group through your chosen questions and activities. Be open to other thoughts and queries that come from the group but also help the group stay focused.

At the end: Pray together for things relating to the week's theme and things on people's hearts. Pray that everyone would continue to grow closer to Jesus and be open to the work of the Holy Spirit.

After: Check in with each other via text, email, phone, other meetings. Continue to pray for one another.

For more advice on how to lead a small group, visit methodist.org.uk/smallgroups.

Revelation and the love of life

Gary Hall

John of Patmos is both seer and artist. Artists invite us to linger over things we might not ordinarily see or choose to gaze upon, gradually revealing what is not easy to communicate. Learning to trust what art and scripture can reveal begins with attention without understanding, and a capacity to abide with unresolved tensions. In the strange apocalyptic landscape of Revelation, we may learn to see differently and therefore to inhabit life differently once we have mustered the kind of courage and curiosity that led Lucy through the wardrobe, or Alice through the looking glass, or that led Neo to take the red pill in order to see the Matrix unveiled.

The apocalypse is not safe territory. Traces of paranoia and dreams of vengeance cling stubbornly to the contrasting images of joyful restoration beyond mourning and crying and pain. In the seer's imagination, the way of the Lamb and the way of the predatory beast sometimes mingle uncomfortably – and this very fact may be a clue about how the prophetic drama can energize and guide us.

If we set aside our instincts to resolve or avoid every tension, we can discover a text that reflects back a world where beauty and horror, wonder and sorrow, always co-exist. Revelation can help us abide creatively with the tensions experienced by all who dare to

trust in the risen Christ and the restorative work of God, while facing the indisputable facts of everyday grief and horror, and the contradictory impulses which lurk within us and our institutions.

When we turn away from the mesmerizing drama of cosmic warfare and the sinister lure of militarized force, we notice the irony of a slain lamb on a throne who reveals the blasphemous heart of death-dealing cultures with their deceptive ideologies of redemptive violence, or wealth as salvation. Alongside the Lamb are his comrades who are neither deceived nor allured, who (despite all they have suffered) know that living is more than self-securing, even in the face of death. Their faithful witness to the martyred Lamb is a gateway to eternity. They love life, but they do not love their own lives too much (Revelation 12:10-11).

In contrast, those who entrusted their futures to the idolatrous empire of the prostitute (another predator) and her economy of meaningless luxury (Revelation 18:11-15), now mourn the collapse of Babylon/Rome. Among the mourners are rulers whose own power depends on alliances with the death-dealing superpower, and merchants who have grown rich through plunder and a corrupt economy built and sustained at devastating cost to

human lives (Revelation 18:13). There are other mourners who we may feel sympathy for, surely these seafarers are just ordinary workers trying to earn their keep (Revelation 18:13-17)? It is not so simple; for without them the corrupt, dehumanizing system cannot flourish. Their collusion, whatever the reasons, sustains injustice and devastation. More to the point, their concern is not for the prophets and saints and every victim whose blood stains the ruined city (Revelation 18:24), but with securing their own lives (Revelation 18:17-19). They do not love life after all; they love their own little lives too much to take a costly stand alongside the Lamb.

The prophetic art of Revelation can guide us in the ways of peace and justice, mercy and hope when we focus on the art of navigating the tensions and ambiguities of everyday living. The decisive end to injustice and pain is in God's hands not ours. By grace, we can learn to live through transient victories and defeats against the predators of this world with hope, faith and love.

The company of the Lamb is for those of us who are learning not to love our own little lives too much, so we can go on learning to love life in all its fullness.

*For the Lamb at the centre of the throne
will be their shepherd;
"he will lead them to springs of living water."
"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."
Revelation 7:17*

Introduction to the book of Revelation

Helen Miller

"Please couldn't I have just one piece of Turkish Delight to eat on the way home?" "No, no," said the Queen with a laugh, "you must wait till next time."

This quote is from C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Edmund has just met the Queen of Narnia and is lured by the promise of Turkish Delight to lead his siblings to her house. Edmund thinks that the Queen will make him heir to her throne, and his siblings duke and duchesses. The reader knows that this is a trap. The Queen is not a benevolent ruler. She is the White Witch who makes it always winter but never Christmas, until Aslan brings her wicked rule to an end.

Lewis' story is engaging fiction, but it also points to deeper truths. Aslan's death on behalf of Edmund's treachery speaks of Jesus' death to atone for humanity's sin. Aslan's resurrection and defeat of the Witch speaks of Jesus' defeat of sin and Satan. The children's participation in the battle brings to mind the role that Christians play in the outworking of Jesus' victory.

Why start a study into Revelation with an overview of a children's story? Revelation's vivid and, at times, disturbing imagery can put us off approaching the book. Though called 'Revelation' we may wonder if 'obscuration' or 'mystification' would be a better title! However, imagery can communicate truth in a way that stirs our hearts as well as our minds, so comparing Revelation with Lewis' story is not a bad place to start.

However, Lewis' story doesn't clear everything up. While the image of a witch as an archetype of evil is familiar to us, Revelation's pictures of beasts, locusts and lampstands may be less familiar and their meaning less clear. How do we make sense of these images? If we can understand what Revelation's imagery meant to John and the churches he was writing to, we're better placed to understand how to interpret and apply Revelation today.

The writer's cultural context

John, the disciple who Jesus loved, wrote Revelation as part letter and part prophecy, and we need to examine the cultural context that he was writing in. Revelation comes at the end of the Christian canon and John is steeped in the revelation that comes before him. Scripture flows out of John as he translates his vision into written text. To appreciate Revelation's meaning and richness, we need to read it in light of the biblical texts that John alludes to. John does not simply quote Scripture, however. Rather, he reinterprets Old Testament texts through the lens of Jesus, who is the one to whom the biblical witness points.

Revelation 1:6a provides a good example of this. John alludes to Exodus 19:6 in his description of believers as 'a kingdom and priests' (Revelation 1:6), but there are important differences. In Exodus, God addresses a single nation. In Revelation, believers are depicted as coming 'from every nation, tribe, people and language' (Revelation 7:9). In Exodus, the promise is conditional and future, 'if you obey me fully and keep my covenant ... you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:5-6a). In Revelation, the promise is already achieved, 'To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father' (Revelation 1:5b-6a). Promises that the Old Testament looks forward to in hope are achieved in and through the person and work of Jesus. There are 'now' and 'not yet' elements to this fulfilment. Revelation 2-3 reveal that not all those John is writing to are living faithfully as a kingdom and priests. In addition, although Jesus' victory is celebrated in Revelation 5, battles rage until the final two chapters.

The writer's key message

In the midst of the temptations and challenges that Christians face while living between Jesus' ascension and future return, Revelation's readers are called to be victorious. The word victorious comes from the Greek *nikao*,

which can also be translated as conquer, overcome, triumph or prevail. What does it mean to be victorious? The verb *nikao* appears twelve times in reference to believers. The first seven are in Revelation 2-3, where the repeated refrain 'To the one who is victorious' is followed by a promised reward for those who persevere. Similarly, in 15:2 and 21:7, those who inherit the New Heavens and New Earth are described as being victorious. In contrast, *nikao* refers in two places to the beasts' triumph over believers. In 11:7 the beast attacks the two witnesses and kills them. In 13:7 the beasts cause believers to be killed (13:15) and prevent them from buying or selling (13:17). The beasts' victory is temporary, however. In chapter 11, after being killed, the witnesses are raised to life and taken up to heaven. In chapter 12 the dragon, Satan, whose power lies behind the two beasts, is hurled down from heaven. In 12:11, the nature of the believers' victory is revealed, 'They triumphed (*nikao*) over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.'

Therefore, for all the complexities of Revelation's imagery and structure, its message is clear: be victorious by standing firm in the salvation that comes through Jesus and bearing witness to this salvation whatever the cost. Revelation conveys this message by immersing its readers in an alternative perspective on reality. For the seven churches to whom John wrote, it may have looked as though the fledgling church would not survive, let alone thrive. The threat of persecution loomed and the lure of a conflict-free life tempted believers to compromise their allegiance to Jesus. By revealing reality from God's perspective, however, Revelation challenges distorted perceptions. It is not the Roman Empire that is victorious, but the Lamb. Believers' afflictions, though real, are temporary. The White Witch is not to be trusted. The temptation of Turkish Delight is to be resisted. Aslan has triumphed and our allegiance is his.

WEEK 1

The Church Then and Now (Revelation 1-3)



Helen Miller

“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen.’ (Revelation 1:7)

If we’re not familiar with the books of Daniel and Zechariah, these words may seem quite cryptic. What is the significance of the clouds? Why do people mourn? Examining the Old Testament references clarifies John’s meaning.

Jesus: The Eternal King

In Daniel 7, Daniel has a vision in which he sees four beasts coming out of the sea. These beasts represent human kingdoms. Though they look powerful, they are cast into the shadows by the vision of the Ancient of Days, surrounded by fire that pours from his throne, with brilliant white hair and clothing (Daniel 7:9-10). Unlike the false pretenders represented by the four beasts, the Ancient of Days is the rightful ruler of his creation. And yet, as the vision continues, Daniel sees that the Ancient of Days is not alone. He is approached by ‘one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven’ (Daniel 7:13). In the Old Testament clouds are associated with God’s presence, for example, when Moses encounters God on Mount Sinai and when the people of Israel are led through the wilderness by a divine cloud. In addition, God is depicted as riding on clouds in the Psalms and prophetic texts (e.g. Psalm 68:4; Psalm 104:3-4; Isaiah 19:1 and Nahum 1:3). Therefore, ‘the clouds of heaven’ indicate the Son of Man’s divine identity; as Tremper Longman

notes, ‘He is riding the cloud chariot, which is the prerogative of God alone.’ (Longman, *Daniel*). The Son of Man is given full authority and receives a kingdom that cannot be destroyed (Daniel 7:14). The eternal and immovable nature of the Son of Man’s kingdom contrasts with the ephemeral rise and fall of the four beasts.

In Revelation, the application of Daniel 7:13 to Jesus reveals that he is the Son of Man with sovereign authority who establishes a kingdom that will never pass away. The rest of Revelation sheds further light on the nature and unfolding of this kingdom.

PREACHING POINT

How does our hope in God’s kingdom encourage and challenge us in our daily living?

Jesus’ divine identity and sovereign power is highlighted further in the second half of Revelation 1. John’s vision of Jesus draws on language used in Daniel 10 to describe the radiance of an angelic being. In addition, Jesus’ long robe, his white hair and the description of his voice as ‘like rushing waters’ bring to mind Isaiah (6:1), Daniel (7:9), and Ezekiel’s visions of God (Ezekiel 1:24 and 43:2). When Jesus describes himself as ‘the First and the Last’ it tallies with God’s self-designation as ‘the Alpha and Omega ... who is, and who was, and who is to come’ (Revelation 1:8).

Jesus and the Church then

The divine Son of Man stands among seven golden lampstands, which represent the seven churches to

whom John writes. Though Jesus is the rightful lord of these churches, not all are living in accordance with his kingship. Only the churches in Smyrna (2:8-11) and Philadelphia (3:7-13) are faithful without exception and are spared Jesus’ rebuke. These churches are praised for their faithful endurance in the face of opposition and persecution. The church in Laodicea (3:14-22) receives only reproach. This church is ‘lukewarm’ which, in contemporary English, brings to mind apathetic indifference. John’s reference is Laodicea’s lukewarm springs, which were useless in comparison to the hot springs at Hierapolis, which were seen to have medicinal benefits, and the cold springs at Colossae, which provided drinking water. The church is ineffective because it fails to recognise its dependence on Jesus (3:17). The churches in Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis receive words of encouragement and reprimand. Ephesus has resisted false teaching but has lost the fervency of its first love (2:1-7). Pergamum has remained faithful through suffering but has not dealt adequately with deceitful doctrines (2:12-17). Thyatira has shown fervency in its service but, like Pergamum, has allowed false teaching to pull people away from truth (2:18-29). Sardis appears to be faithful but, underneath this façade, the church is dead (3:1-6). The church does have some who truly walk with Jesus. As Mitchell Reddish puts it, these faithful Christians provide a faint heartbeat for an otherwise lifeless corpse (Reddish, *Revelation*).

**PREACHING POINT**

Which aspects of Jesus’ challenge and encouragement to these seven churches most apply to us today?

Richard Bauckham highlights the importance of reading the whole of Revelation as a letter to these seven churches, rather than separating Revelation 1-3 from the rest of the book.

In doing this, attention to the diversity of these seven churches is important. A common perception is that Revelation was written to encourage persecuted Christians to persevere in their faith. This is true, but it is not the whole truth. Not all the Christians John writes to are being persecuted. In fact, the main problems that

Jesus identifies are compromise and complacency. The polytheistic religion of the Roman Empire infiltrated all aspects of life, from the incense offered to gods and goddesses at public celebrations to the rituals that took place within business associations. First century Christians had many opportunities to betray their allegiance to Jesus in order to receive the benefits of the Roman Empire and succeed economically. Therefore, alongside encouraging those facing opposition to persevere, Revelation challenges those who are compromising to repent.

Jesus and the Church now

Both Revelation’s encouragement and its challenge are important for the church today. For some churches, persecution is devastatingly severe. Revelation encourages these

churches by showing that the power of the beasts opposing them is real, but temporary. The ultimate victory belongs to Jesus and his faithful followers. The New Heavens and New Earth, where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Revelation 21:4), is their eternal home. For other churches, the problem is compromise and complacency. Revelation challenges these churches to pay attention to Jesus’ call to repent.

How can we respond? Let’s pray that, through the grace poured out in Jesus and the power of his Spirit, lost love is reignited, dead hearts are brought to life, deceitful doctrines are challenged, and self-centred dependency replaces prideful, self-sufficiency.

Small Group Resource

The Church Then and Now (Revelation 1-3)

Abi Jarvis

LEARN

Revelation 1-3 uses lots of visual imagery (like clouds and lightstands) which the original readers would have understood to be signs of the divine, kingly role of Jesus. What symbols might represent this today? What other term instead of 'king' might John have used in our time?

Tips for further engagement: you might want to call out a list, fill a piece of paper with drawings that represent authority and power, or print out pictures in advance for people to choose from.

What do these symbols say about what it means to be a ruler? What does it mean for Jesus to be our divine ruler?

ENCOURAGE

Read Revelation 1:10-18.

Revelation 1-3 describes seven churches who are each facing difficulties, but only two remain faithful to Jesus. Perhaps one of them sounds a bit like your church. First, go through the list and note the obstacles faced by each community. Then, picture Jesus walking amongst these 'lampstands' as in 1:12, tending to their needs. How can you draw comfort from knowing that Jesus is walking alongside your church and community amongst whatever difficulties you might be facing?

CHALLENGE

Read Revelation 3:14-22.

The church in Laodicea is criticised as being like 'lukewarm' water – neither medicinal like hot springs, nor drinkable and refreshing like cold springs, but instead

ineffective because it fails to recognise its dependence on Jesus. Do you think your church is hot, cold or lukewarm? How do you think your church is perceived by those who are involved on the margins, or visit occasionally? If it's lukewarm, how might this change?

Revelation is sometimes considered to be a letter to persecuted Christians, but not all those to whom John writes are being persecuted. In fact, the main problems that Jesus identifies are compromise and complacency to culture and idolatry. The first century Christians were betraying their allegiance to Jesus by taking part in social events with religious elements in order to receive the benefits of the Roman Empire and succeed economically. What might compromise and complacency look like in our culture today?

Tips for further engagement: ask each person to get something out of their bag to represent this, or an image on their phone. If they struggle to answer, encourage them to think about things in society and culture that draw their attention away from Jesus.

What might it mean to be 'a kingdom and priests' (Revelation 1:6, 5:10) and resist these temptations?

PRAYER

Pray for your church's relationship with the community and culture around you. Pray that you would be 'in the world but not of it'. Ask God to help you to remain faithful to Jesus amongst trials and temptations. Thank God for tending to the church and walking alongside us.



All Age Activities

Gail Adcock

BIBLE WORDS

Revelation 1:12-16 and 1:19-20

Summary

What incredible images we discover here: golden lampstands, a mighty figure, stars and flames. It conjures an awesome picture in this letter that John is writing to seven churches. Each church has its own experience – some are comfortable, others are being persecuted – and there is something to say to each one. Some lights are shining more brightly than others.

As we explore Revelation, we'll think about what this final book of the New Testament says to the church today. We'll ponder on the powerful images and have opportunities to make, create, pray and act. Are you ready for an adventure?

Points to ponder

- Why do you think the writer John is talking about lamps and stars?
- What is it like in your own church?
- Do you have connections with churches in other parts of the world? What might it be like to be part of a church there?

ACTIVITIES

• Write a letter

Imagine John was writing a letter to your church. Are there particular things that would be noticed or mentioned? Using a roll of paper with the words 'Dear (insert the name of your church)' written large at the top, invite everyone to draw/write the positive things about your faith community. Then invite them to draw/write the things that need working on. Households could do this activity at home, using your church name or family name.

• Lights galore

Gather a selection of different lights such as: a battery tea light, torch, bike lights, desk lamp, mobile phone light, dimmable lamp or light. Notice how each gives off a different type of light and that they are used for different purposes e.g. it's no good carrying a big standard lamp while riding a bike! Ask the group: where are we shining the light of our faith? Is

it the right kind of light? For younger children, collect various light and reflective objects and place them in a treasure basket to be explored.

• Create a figure

Divide the group into smaller groups to work together drawing and creating their own figure inspired by what they read in the passage. Give each group a large sheet of paper and different craft and collage materials such as wool, shiny paper, sequins, fabric, tissue paper; and paints, pens and glue. Afterwards, consider what the images have in common, and how different they are.

PRAYER

- Using a map of your local area and battery tea lights, invite people to place a tea light on the place/street where they live and pray for that place and their neighbours. Ask God to help you shine as bright lights in that place.
- Explore prayer through our senses. At the start of Revelation, we read 'Blessed are those who hear', ask everyone to be quiet and to tune in to God. Does anyone sense God speaking to them or putting a picture in their mind? A few verses later it says 'every eye will see him', invite everyone to imagine Jesus beside them. What is he saying? This would work well with other physical senses. Invite people to draw or write down what they see, hear, touch or sense. For groups with disabled people, you could adapt the words (use 'understand' instead of 'hear', use 'everyone will know him').
- Write or draw prayer letters on behalf of those you know in other places, who may be finding life difficult.

LET'S ACT

- You could contact the person or group you wrote to. What could you say or do that would encourage them? Could it be a simple gesture or working together with others in your church to make a difference?
- Using the map of your area for inspiration, think about how your church or household could be a blessing to the wider community. Generate some ideas that could let people know their local church cares.

WEEK 2

The Triumph of the Lamb (Revelation 4-5)



Helen Miller

'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.' (Revelation 5:9-10)

A change in perspective

On Google Earth you can zoom right in to see where a car park entrance is located or see how nice or not the beach you're planning to go to looks! You can then zoom out so quickly that, in an instant, the beach becomes a tiny dot and the whole

globe spins before your eyes. With a similarly sharp change of perspective, after Jesus' messages to the seven churches, John is taken up to heaven, to the very throne room of God. The beginning of Revelation 4 therefore marks a significant shift in the location of John's vision. However, there is a link: the future enthronement that Jesus promises believers as a reward for perseverance (Revelation 3:31) is shown as a present reality by the faithful elders seated on thrones (4:4).

This continuity between Revelation 3 and 4 is emphasised by John's use of a structural feature that Richard Bauckham calls 'interweaving' (Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*).

Interweaving is when a new section is introduced before the current section ends. The messages to the seven churches conclude with the refrain 'Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches' (Revelation 3:22). Just before this conclusion, the reward for those who overcome is stated, 'the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne' (Revelation 3:21). The reference to Jesus' throne and to his Father's throne introduces the next section when John's vision lifts from earth to heaven and John sees the Father on his throne (Revelation 4) and the Lamb sharing this throne (Revelation 5).

Interweaving linking Jesus' promise of a throne with John's vision of a throne**Messages to the seven churches****God's people**

(3:21) "To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne"

The Father

(3:22) Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches

(4:1-2) After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven... and there before me was a throne

The Father

in heaven with someone sitting on it... (4:4) Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them

God's people

were twenty-four elders... (5:6) Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne"

Jesus**PREACHING POINT**

In what ways might the praise offered to God and the Lamb in Revelation 4 and 5 inspire our praise in our churches today?

Look who's in the throne room

The descriptions of God (4:2-7) and the Lamb (5:5-7) in God's throne

room are followed by exclamations and prostrations of praise (4:8-11; 5:8-14). John's throne room vision brings to mind Ezekiel's vision of God (Ezekiel 1). However, there are noticeable differences. Most significant is the new and surprising presence of twenty-four elders, who are also seated on thrones. These elders represent the people of God and their presence in God's

throne room gives us an insight to the blessings that await 'the one who is victorious'. They have won the right to sit with Jesus around his throne, just as Jesus was victorious and sat with his Father on his throne (Revelation 3:21). Perhaps too John's vision of elders on thrones paints a picture of Paul's claims that, even while living on earth, Christians are citizens of heaven (Philippians



3:20) and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6).

PREACHING POINT

What are the practical implications of believers' living in light of their heavenly identity?

Look who's on the throne

John's vision of the Lamb explains why the elders are in heaven. At the start of Revelation 5, John sees a scroll in God's right hand. As the scroll is unrolled, we see that it contains God's plans and purposes for the world, which include both judgement and salvation. Initially, no one can be found who can open the scroll, leading John to weep. One person's tears alone would not convey the hopelessness that would ensue if God's plans could not be accomplished. Relief comes quickly, however, as one of the elders interjects, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is

able to open the scroll and its seven seals' (Revelation 5:5). Relief turns to surprise as John looks and sees not a lion but 'a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain' (5:6).

Richard Bauckham contends that this contrast between what John hears, the Lion, and what he sees, the Lamb, is central to understanding John's vision (Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*). The image of the Lion recalls the messianic promise to Judah when, after likening Judah to a lion, Jacob prophesies, 'The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his' (Genesis 49:9-10). The Lion is also identified as 'the Root of David', evoking the messianic hopes of Isaiah 11 where the Messiah is described as a shoot growing from the stump of Jesse, from whom comes a branch bearing fruit (Isaiah 11:1). Bauckham argues that this combination of imagery (Lion of Judah and Root of David)

raises expectations for a messianic king who defeats God's enemies in power. Therefore it is surprising that when John turns to look at this roaring lion, he sees a slain lamb. A lamb who triumphs through sacrifice, not force.

We need to consider Jesus' death in light of his resurrection, ascension and future return. We also need to note that, in Revelation, Jesus is presented as judge and king as well as saviour (e.g. Revelation 6:15-17 and 19:11-16). In Revelation 5, however, the focus is on the victory that Jesus achieves through his blood, which has 'purchased for God persons from every tribe, language, people and nation' and 'made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God' and 'reign on the earth' (5:9-10). As we'll explore in the next study, from the messages to the seven churches onwards, Revelation reveals what it looks like for God's people to live as 'a kingdom and priests' and share in the Lamb's triumph.

Small Group Resource

The Triumph of the Lamb (Revelation 4-5)

Abi Jarvis

LEARN

Tips for further engagement: in advance: ask every person to bring a depiction of a lion or a lamb that reminds them of Jesus to your meeting. It could be a cuddly toy, an image on a phone, a video clip, or a cartoon on a t-shirt!

Read Revelation 5.

This describes Jesus as both lion and lamb. In what ways is Jesus like a lion and a lamb? What might we learn from the differences between how Jesus sounds and how Jesus appears? Ask everyone why they chose their image – what does it say about Jesus?

ENCOURAGE

Revelation 5 says that Jesus' death has saved people 'from every tribe, language, people and nation'. How many different tribes, languages, peoples and nations can you name? What excites you about this vision of all these people worshipping God together? How might we encourage our churches to look and sound like this vision?

CHALLENGE

Read Revelation 4.

The author depicts God's people (represented by twenty-four elders) sitting on thrones with Jesus. Close your eyes and imagine this scene.

- How does the throne feel under you? Does it feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
- What do you look out and see?
- How does it feel to be sitting on a throne next to Jesus? Do you feel welcomed, intimidated, worthy, unworthy?
- What is Jesus saying to you as you sit next to him?

If this is a challenging image – don't forget that no one is perfect. Only Jesus is worthy to unfold the scroll of history in Revelation 5. Even if the throne feels uncomfortable, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and God's love for us allow us to sit enthroned with him.

PRAYER

Pray for people from your community and across the world, that they would experience God's love and know the truth of Jesus' death and resurrection. Pray for people who might feel excluded from the kingdom of God, that they would know they are included in this vision. Thank God for God's love for us.



All Age Activities

Gail Adcock

BIBLE WORDS

Revelation 4:5-7 and 5:2 and 5:6-7

Summary

This is a scene of epic proportions, the sights and sounds are on a grand scale, it might be difficult to take it all in! It might remind us of a big action movie with superheroes battling together or of a fantastical tale with characters embarking on a quest. At the centre of all that's taking place are three things that especially draw our attention: the throne, the scroll and the Lamb. An unlikely trio brought together in a moment of triumph as the Lamb is able to break the seal. Jesus is the worthy one because his sacrifice conquered death and made it possible for us to know and be known by God again. He compels us to draw close to God, expressing praise and wonder.

Points to ponder

- What impression do you have of the throne? Who sits on that throne?
- How does the image of the lamb surprise or shock you?
- What animals do you think are the most powerful and why?
- Does a lamb seem to be the right creature to be sitting on the throne?

ACTIVITIES

- **Act the scene**
Beforehand gather a few props such as different coloured thin strips of fabric or crepe paper. Invite people to physically recreate the throne scene. Someone can crouch down to be the throne, others can use their hands to shoot lightning using the paper streamers, others can represent the lion and eagle.
- **Make sealed scrolls**
Provide sheets of paper to write a short message, word of encouragement or thanks to someone else. Roll up the notes and seal the 'scroll' by using a wax candle to drip wax onto the edge of the note. Magnetic letters or cookie cutters could make an imprint in the wax. Other ways to seal the scroll are with crayons and a hairdryer or air-drying clay. Be careful with hot wax, adults should supervise this if children are involved.

Find the key

With everyone gathered together, present a box which has a padlock on it. Invite people to come and try opening it with their own keys (house, car, bike, maybe work lanyard passes!). When none work, give everyone the clue LAMB and explain that somewhere in the space is the right key. Hide or place the key with an image of a lamb or around the neck of a cuddly toy sheep. Ask everyone to hunt for the key. Celebrate opening the box by sharing some treats found inside.

For younger children, create the throne room scene using Duplo or dolls house furniture, using model animals to act it out.

PRAYER

- Use the words from Revelation 5:13 to create a prayer of praise by decorating the individual words written on large sheets of card. With a large group, sub groups could take a word to decorate before they are reassembled and read out together. Rejoice and give God the glory as you join in praise together.
- Revelation 5:13 describes how every creature in heaven and earth praises God. Say, sing or shout these words in different ways. Groups of people could say one word or phrase and create an action to do at the same time. Perform these one after another so the whole verse is said. Then learn to say it altogether, trying it quietly or loudly, quickly or slowly, with different hand actions, and end with 'forever and ever AMEN'.

LET'S ACT

- Sometimes we might feel powerless to change a situation. Reflect on a circumstance in you or your household's life and think about a step you could take to make a change, however big or small.
- Reflecting on the climate crisis across the globe, we can often feel helpless to make a difference. Listen to the song 'Drop in the ocean' by Harry and Chris (find it on YouTube). Ask the question 'What would be your drop in the ocean?' and invite people to share their suggestions or commit to one thing to do.

WEEK 3

Witness, Worship and Waiting (Revelation 10-13)



Helen Miller

One way to hear what a biblical text is saying is to use colouring pens to highlight different features. In Revelation 10, you could highlight repetition. If you did, you'd spot that there is an angel from heaven (10:1) who has one foot on the sea and the other on the land (10:2). You'd then notice that the positioning of the angel's feet is repeated twice (10:5 and 10:8). You'd wonder why the location of the angel's feet is specified three times. Your curiosity would grow when you noticed that the angel swears by the one 'who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it' (10:6). Why, you'd wonder, is God's kingship over the heavens, earth and land emphasised? When you read on, you'd find out. Two chapters later, John sees a dragon being hurled from heaven (Revelation 12), a beast rising up from the sea and another beast appearing on land (Revelation 13). These ferocious creatures can inflict harm on the Lamb's followers. Even before they appear, however, the angel's location assures the reader of their ultimate defeat by reminding us of God's sovereignty over heaven, sea and land.

The call to witness

The angel holds a scroll (Revelation 10:2). This scroll connects to the scroll in Revelation 5, which represents God's plans for his creation – the unfolding of his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. John is told to eat the scroll, reminding us of God's command to

Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3) which represents the call for repentance that Ezekiel is to bring. Similarly, the scroll that John eats refers to his role in proclaiming God's kingdom, which includes a call to repentance alongside assurances of hope.

This image of John's witnessing role (Revelation 10) is followed by John's vision of two witnesses (Revelation 11) who are described as 'the two olive trees and the two lampstands.' In Zechariah 4, Joshua (the high priest) and Zerubbabel (who oversaw the temple's rebuilding) are described with similar imagery. In Revelation 1:6 and 5:10, the Lamb's followers are referred to as 'a kingdom and priests'. So it's appropriate that the two witnesses are depicted in language that has previously described a leader and a priest. Although Joshua and Zerubbabel are individuals, the use of the lampstand images in Revelation 2-3 to depict the seven churches suggests that the church is in view. The experience of the witnesses aligns with that of Jesus: they witness, are killed, are raised to life and then ascend (Revelation 11:3-12). Just as Jesus is victorious through his sacrificial witness, so the church participates in Jesus' victory as it bears witness, even when its witness is rejected. The two witnesses' ascension is followed by an earthquake, after which 'the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven' (11:13). Richard Bauckham observes that, following God's judgement earlier on in Revelation, people 'still did

not repent' (Revelation 9:20-21). Following the church's witness, people do repent (Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*).

Good and bad witnessing

Revelation 2-3 shows that the church's witness is compromised when we allow behaviours that are displeasing to God to take root in our lives. Our witness is also corrupted when we worship other gods. In this regard, in the UK at least, we may not face the same challenges as the Christians John wrote to. For example, we can probably go to our local fete without worrying that we're taking part in a festival in honour of the town's local god or goddess. However, even if the idolatry around us is less obvious, it is just as prevalent. We can be tempted to put God second to our careers, the things we buy, the way we appear to others, physical pleasures, or any other aspect of God's good creation that we give first place to. By the grace poured out through Jesus, and the gift of God's Spirit, we have the hope of forgiveness and transformation. God's Spirit works in us to help us become more Christ-like in our thoughts, desires, words and behaviour. Through the Spirit, we are empowered to be Jesus' witnesses to those around us.

PREACHING POINT

What forms of idolatry are Christians today most tempted to give in to?



Witnessing though worship

Alongside bearing witness to Jesus, the church's role involves prayer and praise. If we got out our colouring pens again and went through Revelation highlighting praise passages, we'd see that exclamations of praise punctuate the book.

'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power' (Revelation 4:11).

'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign' (Revelation 11:17).

'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!' (Revelation 19:6-7)

To give just a few examples!

Punctuations of praise are also found in Paul's writings. He gets so caught up in the wonder of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done that he launches off into prayer and praise (e.g. Ephesians 1 and 3). This is an excellent model for anyone studying theology! My hope at Moorlands College is that as we (staff and students) read, write essays, teach and mark, we'll be so impacted by God's grace and splendour that we'll be stirred to praise and prayer. Indeed, my hope is that all Christians live day-to-day lives that are filled with praise and prayer.

Witnessing through patient endurance

The church's role also involves waiting. Revelation 12-13 show the dragon and beasts waging war on the Lamb's followers. The Lamb's followers have the hope of the New Heavens and Earth, where there

is 'no more death or mourning or crying or pain' (Revelation 21:4); but they're not experiencing the fullness of this now. Revelation's call to 'be victorious' includes a call to wait. This doesn't mean that we should stay in situations of suffering or abuse when others can help us move to safety; we should look for support and assistance. The call to wait means that we stand firm in our commitment to Jesus even when the blessings of the New Heavens and New Earth seem far off. It means that we praise God when life is going well and persevere in praise when it's hard. It means that we acknowledge our dependency on God and cry out to him for justice and strength.

PREACHING POINT

What does this 'call to wait' look like in practice?

Small Group Resource

Witness, Worship and Waiting (Revelation 10-13)

Abi Jarvis

LEARN

Give everyone a piece of paper with a copy of Revelation 10-13. Ask them to use one colour to highlight every time the angel's feet are mentioned, another colour for the sea, a third colour for the heavens, and a fourth colour for the earth. What do we learn about God's sovereignty in the world? How does this make us feel about our own 'ownership' of things and places? How does it affect our relationship with the rest of creation?

Read Revelation 11:1-14 and Zechariah 4.

Can you spot the similar imagery? In Zechariah 4, the imagery refers to Joshua (the high priest) and Zerubbabel (who oversaw the temple's rebuilding). What do you think this similarity could mean? There are also similarities between the two witnesses in Revelation 11 and the earthly life of Jesus (they are killed, raised to life, and ascend to heaven). If the two witnesses are representatives of the church (including the seven represented as lampstands in Revelation 1-3), what might this similarity tell us about how our own lives relate to Jesus?

ENCOURAGE

Read Revelation 21.

It describes a New Heavens and Earth, where there is 'no more death or mourning or crying or pain'. What does this look like to you? Why not try to picture it as a group.

Tips for further engagement: you could create a shared drawing with everyone contributing; close your eyes, picture the new heavens and earth, and describe what you see, hear and feel; write down all the things that wouldn't be part of the new heavens and earth on pieces of paper, scrunch them up into a ball, then throw them all into the recycling bin.

CHALLENGE

Tips for further engagement: in advance: print out Revelation chapters 4:7-11, 11:15-19 and 19:1-10 on separate pieces of paper. Give everyone (or pairs) a passage and two different coloured pens. Ask them to highlight every praise verse in one colour and every judgement verse in another colour.

How do you feel seeing praise for God next to passages that might seem judgemental or even violent? How can we grapple with this tension? Could you pray using these passages for the next week, perhaps writing them on a sticky note or in your journal? Use them now as a prompt for prayers.

PRAYER

Pray for the things you have included in your picture – ask God for them to come to pass. Pray for the things you have rejected from your picture – ask God to bring an end to them. Give praise to God for all God is doing in the world.



All Age Activities

Gail Adcock

BIBLE WORDS

Revelation 12:3-4a and 12:17

Summary

Yes, there is a dragon in the Bible! The seven-headed dragon arrives to attack the followers of the Lamb. A dragon that illustrates how we are often tempted away from God and put God second to other things in our lives. This passage shows us how often the dragon (and its defeat in chapter 19) is a reminder to always stand firm in our commitment to Jesus – whether life is going well or life is hard.

This week's material invites everyone to explore the imagery of the passage through a series of activity stations. Encourage people to move around and take part in these as they wish.

At the end, either present the things created or ask people to move around the four stations and discover what has been developed.

Points to ponder

- How does the description of the dragon in verses 3 and 4 make you feel?
- Imagine the dragon as a symbol of the things that draw us away from God. What things in the world pull others and yourself away from God?
- Do you sometimes feel there is a battle going on as you try to make good choices?

ACTIVITIES

The following activities explore the imagery of the dragon and can be set up as activity stations. At each station provide suitable resources for young children so that everyone can work together.

• Sound of the dragon

Provide a range of musical instruments, percussion or homemade percussion. Invite people to bring their instruments along. Encourage everyone to use their voices or to use body percussion. Display the words of Revelation 22:3-4 and signs that say, 'Can you create the sound of the dragon using the instruments?'; 'Can you use the instruments to show how the dragon makes you feel?'

• Comic strip dragon

Print out comic book templates and lay these out with lots of pens and pencils. Ask the group to illustrate this scene as if it's appearing in a comic. What action could be captured in each frame?

• Dragon thoughts and words

On a large sheet of paper draw the outline of a dragon and provide coloured pens. Above the dragon write, 'What words and phrases do you think of when you hear the description of the dragon? How does the dragon make you feel?' Encourage people to write their responses inside the dragon outline.

• Build a dragon

Create a group model of the dragon. Provide piles of Lego, Duplo or wooden bricks or create a junk model dragon using cardboard boxes, card and other items from the recycling. Work together to create the dragon.

PRAYER

- On sticky notes ask the group to write down things that distract them and others from focusing on God. Fix these on to the brick or junk model dragon. Look at the dragon and as you do ask God to help each of us keep our eyes fixed on him and not be distracted by other things. Shout out a loud 'Amen' together and as you do, pull the dragon apart!
- In Revelation 12:14, the woman is transported to a safe place. Ask everyone to close their eyes and picture the places they feel safe. Can they see how God is with them in these places? If people find this difficult because of their own circumstances, encourage them to seek a trusted person for further support

LET'S ACT

- Is there one practice that you could adopt each day this week to keep your focus on God? This could be looking out for signs of God on your way to school or work; listening to a passage from the Bible each morning or sharing a faith story at bedtime as a family.
- During the coming week, share with someone else why God is important to you.

WEEK 4

Heading Home (Revelation 17-22)



Helen Miller

In Revelation 12, John sees a vision of a pregnant woman about to give birth. He then sees an enormous red dragon standing in front of the woman to devour her son. It seems impossible that the child will survive. When the woman gives birth, however, her son is snatched up to heaven and the woman flees to the wilderness. War breaks out in heaven and the dragon is cast down to earth.

Cosmic tales of good versus evil

To the contemporary reader, this imagery seems weird and wonderful. To John's first readers, though, it would have been familiar. The myth of a dragon (or serpent) who tries to kill an infant just after their birth was common in the ancient world. In John's day, the best known version was Python's attempt to kill Apollo. Python's plan is foiled when Apollo's mum is carried to safety. When Apollo is four days old, he tracks down Python and kills him.

Roman emperors were associated with Apollo in imperial propaganda. This association implies that the emperor is the saviour who defeats chaos and evil. In Revelation 12, John's vision challenges this imperial ideology. Jesus is the saviour, not Apollo. In addition, since the images of beasts implicate the Roman empire, not only is the emperor not the saviour, he is on the dragon's side.

The dragon is identified as 'that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray' (Revelation 12:9). This takes us to Eden and the snake's luring of Adam and Eve away from obedience to God (Genesis 3). Deceit is one

of Satan's main weapons, as is emphasised when the beasts appear to form a counterfeit trinity with the dragon. The beast from the sea has a fatal wound that has been healed (Revelation 13:3). In this he parodies the slain Lamb (Revelation 5:6). The beast from the land is a dragon in sheep's clothing (Revelation 13:11). He deceives people and makes them worship the beast from the sea (13:12-14).

Satan's other weapon is accusation (Revelation 12:10). In Zechariah 3, Joshua is wearing filthy clothes. Satan accuses him but is rebuked by God who takes away Joshua's sin and provides clean clothes for him to wear (Zechariah 3:4). Jesus' work in freeing people from their sin is celebrated in Revelation 1:5. Attention to Zechariah 3 suggests that the same truth is also conveyed by the white clothes that the elders, martyrs, multitude and heavenly army wear (Revelation 4:4; 6:11; 7:13 and 19:14).

The celebration of Satan's fall from heaven confirms that his power lies in deceit and accusation. Christians triumph over him 'by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony' (Revelation 12:11). Satan is not done yet, though. He starts 'to wage war against the rest of her offspring – those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus' (Revelation 12:17). John sees him watching a beast arise from the sea and another from the land. Their power doesn't last forever though. The evil characters meet their demise in reverse order to that in which they are introduced. They are defeated

in final battles that are over before they even begin, with the beasts (Revelation 19:19-20) and dragon (Revelation 20:7-10) thrown into the lake of fire. The dragon's demise means that God can now set about the restoration of creation. Before we turn to this, though, there is one other image of evil to examine: Babylon.

Unpacking the imagery

The depiction of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 is troubling. Babylon is portrayed as a prostitute who is devoured by the beast. It's an image to handle with care since, without adequate explanation, the Bible could be seen as endorsing abusive violence. It's important to note, therefore, that the image of an adulterous woman or prostitute in the Old Testament is a negative direct comparison to the marriage metaphor that is used to show God's positive relationship with his people (see Hosea in particular). In the marriage metaphor, unfaithfulness to God through idolatry is likened to unfaithfulness to a spouse through adultery. In John's first century Roman world, the prostitute Babylon may also be a parody of the goddess Roma, providing another warning against the pretensions of Roman polytheism and propaganda.

PREACHING POINT

How does Revelation's depiction of political power (and its abuse) shape your understanding of God and the life of the church in the world?



The reference to Babylon's wealth and cargos leads Richard Bauckham to see the Roman Empire's economic oppression and injustice implicated (Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*). Chillingly, amongst the list of items traded is 'human beings sold as slaves' (Revelation 18:13). The power of the images in Revelation means that they burst beyond their original context. Readers of all eras can identify the beasts and Babylons of their day, just as John could see his. The challenge is to 'come out of Babylon' (Revelation 18:4), not sharing in her sins. It is important to wrestle through what *coming out of Babylon* might mean for everyday matters such as our shopping habits, political engagements, and what we will and won't watch on TV or look at on the internet.

Preparing for a new home

Babylon is juxtaposed with the New Jerusalem. In contrast to Babylon,

the New Jerusalem is described 'as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband' (Revelation 21:2). When John describes what he sees in more detail, however, he depicts not a woman but a giant gold cube (Revelation 21:16). Here, as elsewhere, Revelation is using images to depict profound truths. This image of a cube brings to mind the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and temple. This was the place where God's presence dwelled most tangibly. It was so holy that only the high priest could enter and only on one day in the year, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). In the New Jerusalem, the whole of creation is the Most Holy Place (Revelation 21:22-23).

PREACHING POINT

How do we live out the values and characteristics of heaven while living in a broken world?

The pitting of the New Jerusalem against Babylon prompts the question: what does it look like to live as New Jerusalem people while in Babylon? How do we demonstrate the values and characteristics of heaven within a broken world? The defining feature of God's new creation is the intimacy of God's presence with his people: at the heart of being a New Jerusalem person is intimacy with God. As we spend time in God's presence, our hearts begin to break with the things that he is concerned about. Our passion for intercession grows. Our commitment to help those in need increases. Our desire to share the good news of Jesus in action and words is fuelled. We find ourselves crying out with John, 'Come, Lord Jesus' (Revelation 22:20).

Small Group Resource

Heading Home (Revelation 17-22)

Abi Jarvis

LEARN

Read Revelation 12.

In ancient times, there were many myths about dragons. Imperial propaganda made use of such stories to depict Roman emperors as saviours against evil and chaos, but John draws attention to Jesus the saviour instead. How might the first century Christians have felt upon reading this? Can you tell your own myth using a familiar story to you? Perhaps it involves superheroes, Disney characters, or video game characters!

Tips for further engagement: in advance, print out an outline of a dragon (search 'colour in dragon' for lots of examples).

As a group, add words and drawings that represent obstacles or barriers that prevent the church from being all that it is meant to be. This might include doubts, institutions, or cultural practices.

ENCOURAGE

Revelation 17 describes Babylon as a prostitute and Revelation 21:9-27 describes New Jerusalem as a bride. How can we live as 'New Jerusalem people' while in Babylon? One way we can be New Jerusalem people while living in Babylon is for our hearts to break with the things that God is concerned about. What might this include? How do we demonstrate the values and characteristics of heaven within a broken world?

Revelation, like Zechariah 3, uses clothes to symbolise that God has taken away our sins. Dirty clothes represent our sins, and clean clothes represent being washed clean by Jesus (Revelation 4:4; 6:11; 7:13 and 19:14). Imagine putting on warm, fluffy, clean clothes fresh from the dryer – how might 'putting on your faith' feel like this? Encourage everyone to pray about the temptations in their lives next time they put their laundry in the washing machine, and to thank God for forgiving their sins when they put their clean laundry back in the wardrobe.

CHALLENGE

Read Revelation 17 and 21:9-27

The depiction of Babylon as a prostitute and New Jerusalem as a bride echoes other places in the Bible where the relationship between the church and God is described as a (sometimes adulterous) marriage. What might it look like to 'cheat' on God, and be unfaithful in your relationship with God? Revelation 19:11 to 20:10 shows the beasts and dragon being defeated. What are the sins and injustices that you would like to be defeated, in your personal life, or in the world (some ideas are named in Revelation 18)? Only ask people to share if they feel comfortable doing so.

PRAYER

Pray about the idols and temptations that get in the way of your relationship with Jesus. In silence, name them before God. If the group knows each other well and there is adequate pastoral support, you could ask if anyone would like to share something with the group, as a way to be accountable to each other before God. Pray for people who might feel like their clothes are too dirty to be wiped clean. Pray for the rest of your Christian community. Thank God for forgiving our individual and community sins.



All Age Activities

Gail Adcock

BIBLE WORDS

Revelation 22:1-3

Summary

Revelation 22 begins with John's vision of hope, flowing like a river and bringing the healing of the nations. These verses encourage us to notice where we see signs of hope flowing and glimpses of heaven. How can we be part of this vision of hope and bring healing to a broken world?

The material in today's session can be adapted for use in an outdoor church setting.

Points to ponder

- What images and sounds do you think of when you hear the words 'the river of the water of life'?
- Where do you see glimpses of hope and the water of life in the world around you?
- How could you, and others, bring hope and healing to a broken world?

ACTIVITIES

River reflections

Collect together images of rivers of different shapes and sizes. Lay these out for people to look at, project onto a screen or share with others via their phones. Invite everyone to choose one river, describe it in their own words and talk with others about how their chosen river might reflect their life or life experience.

Walk in the water

Visit a local river or stream and walk alongside it together. If it is safe to do so, encourage everyone to put their hands or feet into the river and feel the water flowing. Alternatively create a 'river'. Lay out a tarpaulin sheet and create a river bed using large tubs, sand or soil. Line this with stones and twigs. Take jugs of water and flow the water through your river. Encourage everyone to put their feet or hands into the water as it flows.

Read the words of Revelation 22:13, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning

and the End.' As people listen to these words and feel the water, remind them that God is with each of us now and always will be.

Make kebabs

Make fruit kebabs together using a selection of fruits. Use fruits that are grown locally or ask those with allotments or gardens to bring fruits they have grown. Eat and enjoy the fruit kebabs together as you think and talk about how God is making each of your lives more fruitful. Invite people to name some of these ways if they wish.

Planting seeds

Suitable for young children. Think about the fruits and leaves that bring healing. Take soil, seeds and plant pots. Ask the children to plant seeds, take them home and, as they grow, remember the hope that grows from God.

PRAYER

- Invite everyone to take an ice cube and place it in their palm. Say, 'Watch as the ice cube melts and rivers of water flow across your hand. Look back over the last week and notice where you have seen God at work in your life. Now look ahead to the coming week and ask God to help you notice signs of hope through the coming days.'
- Provide everyone with a cup of cold water. Read Revelation 22:17, pausing and inviting everyone to take a sip each time you say 'come'. As you reach the end of the verse, ask everyone to drink the rest of their water and spend some time in God's presence.

LET'S ACT

- Go for a walk around your local area or imagine you are walking around. Where can you see glimpses of hope? Are there ways you could join in with what God is already doing there?
- Collect together a basket of fallen leaves and use them to create an outline of the globe. As you place each leaf down name a different place in the world and ask God to bring hope to the people there.

Further Resources

If you have found the notes in this booklet helpful and would like to explore the book of Revelation further, here are some suggestions of resources that might help you.

BOOKS

Guide Books:

- Ian Paul, *How to Read the Book of Revelation* (Grove, 2003) *
- Tom Wright, *Revelation for Everyone* (SPCK, 2011) *
- Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (Harper, 1991) *

Study Books:

- Craig Koester, *Revelation and the End of all Things* (Eerdmans, 2018) **
- David DeSilva:
 - *Discovering Revelation* (SPCK, 2021) **
 - *Unholy Allegiances: Heeding Revelation's Warning* (Hendrickson, 2013) **
- Darrel Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge* (CCLN, 2021) **
- Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza:
 - *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Augsburg, 1998) **
 - *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgement* (Fortress, 1998) ***
- Ian Paul, *Revelation in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (IVP, 2018) *
- Michael J Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly* (Cascade, 2011) **
- Richard Bauckham:
 - *The Theology of Revelation* (Cambridge, 1993) **
 - *The Climax of Prophecy* (T&T Clark, 1998) ***

Wider Understanding:

- Paula Gooder, *Heaven* (SPCK, 2011) *
- Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (Zondervan, 2010) **
- Evans & Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (IVP, 2000) ***

USEFUL WEBSITES

Simply type 'Revelation' into the website search engine for a wealth of useful info and resources.

- www.bibleproject.com * (includes videos, blogs, notes to help you explore Revelation)
- www.biblesociety.org.uk * (includes a variety of helpful articles related to Revelation)
- www.psephizo.com ** (includes a large number of videos, articles and links related to Revelation from one of the UK's leading scholars on the subject)

SMALL GROUPS & ALL AGE

- R Paul Stevens, *Revelation: The Triumph of God* (14-Week Study for Small Groups, IVP) *

Key:

* Introductory ** Accessible *** Advanced

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Bible Month provides a toolkit for you and your church to engage with the book of Revelation over four weeks. It includes Bible notes with preaching ideas; small group study guides, all age resources; a reflection on what Revelation says about the love of life; and suggestions for further study.

Written by Dr Helen Miller (Bible notes) with Gail Adcock (all age material), Abi Jarvis (study guides), Michael Wadsworth (further study) and a reflection by Rev Dr Gary Hall.

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