

## Revelation by Tommy Lee

**1** - The very first verse contains the title of the whole book: "*The revelation of Jesus Christ.*" This book is a *revelation* (or "unveiling") of God's plan for the history of this world in which we live. And that plan has everything to do with Jesus! Jesus shows this plan to the Apostle John, who now shares it with us (v.2). And one thing that we see right out of the gates—in v.3—is the first of seven blessings this book pronounces. Make sure you inherit this blessing! (The other six blessings of Revelation are found in 14.13; 16.15; 19.9; 20.6; 22.7; 22.14). Verse 4 tells us that John addressed this book to "*the seven churches that are in Asia.*" But the number seven symbolizes completion and wholeness in the Bible; these seven represent **all** of the church, including DPC. It is written to us! Soak in every word. Now, notice that in v.12 the churches are represented as lampstands. Why lampstands? To remind us that the church is called to be a light-bearer in this dark world. Remember what Jesus said to his church in Matthew 5.14: "*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.*" See also Matthew 5.15&16.

**2**- The Lord Jesus now writes seven letters to the seven churches—which, as we said yesterday, represent the whole of the church. Let us note what this means. It means that the conditions in these churches that Jesus here addresses occur over and over and over and over again, throughout all of history. The church must take these seven letters very seriously. To help think through each one, we can note a general pattern to the letters: a salutation, a description of the author (Christ himself), Christ commending the church for something it is doing well, Christ rebuking the church for some unfaithfulness, a warning or a threat—meant to invite repentance, an exhortation, and then a promise. There are some occasional variances to the pattern. In Laodicea, Christ apparently finds nothing to commend. In Smyrna and Philadelphia, he apparently finds nothing to condemn or rebuke. Each letter is a powerful sermon, full of truth, beauty, wisdom, grace, and opportunity. DPC... you've got mail.

**3**- For today's reflection, let's briefly consider the last of these seven letters, the letter to the church in Laodicea (vs.14-22). Laodicea was situated near hot springs (nearby Hierapolis), but also near notably cold and clear streams of water (nearby Colosse); however, it also had to use a long viaduct for its own drinking water whenever the River Lycus dried up in the summer. And sometimes the water in that long viaduct would become tepid or impure or even foul, causing one to spit it out. So, the images in vs.15&16 were well known to the Laodiceans. What exactly is it that Jesus finds so disgusting (*this is a very strong image!*) that he threatens to spit them out of his mouth? A heart that is proud and boastful in its own goodness and riches (v.17a). Laodicea was also a city of ancient-world billionaires; they once even declined government aid after a destructive earthquake. They were famous for their wealth, and they were unbearably arrogant over their wealth. But ponder the five ways that Jesus describes them in v.17b. Even the church itself was characterized by this conceit. Compare to Luke 18.9-14. In light of that background, carefully consider every single gracious line.

**4**- Just being in this world means that, as a consequence of sin, the church is going to suffer the tribulations of life in a fallen domain. And then, in addition to the "common" horrors of the curse, the church will also face persecution and antagonism in this corruption-filled world, *if it is faithful*

*to its calling and is bearing obedient and steadfast testimony to the truths of God.* The next few chapters will speak of these realities. But in preparation for those contemplations, where does Revelation 4 begin? *Not* by reflecting upon life on earth. *Rather*, by taking us into the vision that John is given, as he is shown a door standing open in heaven (v.1)! Remember: all the created magnificence that we see on earth is just part of God's "footstool" (Isaiah 66.1; Matthew 5.35; Acts 7.49). Don't let our absorption with the footstool cause us to forget the throne! Don't forget where ruling control of the tiniest events and the destiny of the whole universe resides. Not with men, on earth. But with a Sovereign God, on his throne. *"Behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne"* (v.2). We start here.

**5-** The next thing we see in John's vision: *"Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals"* (v.1). This scroll, resting in the Father's right hand, represents his eternal plan for the entire universe. It is full of writing on both sides, for it is a far-reaching plan, extending to all creatures in all places for all eternity. But it is completely *"sealed,"* with seven seals (again, the number seven symbolizing wholeness and completion). God's plan remains unrevealed and unexecuted, unless someone is found worthy to open the seals, and thus execute the plan. Thus, the question of the *"mighty angel"* in v.2. But no worthy person is found anywhere, in the whole universe (v.3). John can only *"weep loudly"* (v.4), for if God's redemptive plan for his church is not carried out... no justice, no mercy, no salvation, no triumph over sin and death, no new creation, no glorious inheritance... evil wins. But behold the lion (v.5). Behold the lamb (v.6). This is Jesus, and he alone is worthy (vs.7-14).

**6-** We saw yesterday that the entire universe is governed by the One who sits on the throne in heaven. The Lion-like Lamb reigns and rules, for the glory of God. As a result, believers need not fear trials, tribulations, persecutions, sufferings, etc. *"Fear is not a Christian habit of mind,"* as Marilynne Robinson says. But these tribulations are real, nonetheless, and the seals described in chapter 6 symbolize them. Space limitations here do not allow a thorough study of the seals, but permit me to heartily recommend one of my all-time favorite books to you: *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, by William Hendriksen. The very enlightening and edifying details can be found there, but in brief: the rider of the white horse is the Lord Jesus, riding forth triumphantly, conquering and to conquer. The rider of the red horse represents slaughter, but specifically persecution against the children of God. The rider of the black horse represents other kinds of persecution: economic hardship and poverty due to injustice. The rider of the pale horse represents Death. And trotting behind Death you find Hades. But remember: the throne rules over all!

**7-** The opening of the seventh and final seal will wait until chapter eight. There is a delay because something very important must happen first. Notice the tension in this wait: the four angels are *"holding back"* (v.1) these winds of judgment. What's going on? Why the interruption to the action? All seems to be ready. As we're wondering about this, dramatically, John then sees *"another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, 'Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads'"* (vs.3&4). The woes that are coming next will be a

judgment for the wicked, that is, for those who have not repented of sin and trusted in the Lord Jesus. But these judgements will not be allowed to harm the children of God, those who have the seal of God on their foreheads. Why not? Because the Lord has laid on Christ the iniquity of all believers (Isaiah 53.6). *"This sealing is the most precious thing under heaven"*—William Hendriksen. And it's given to the true church, throughout all of history.

**8-** In the last chapter we saw that the true church was sealed from all harm, with regard to what's about to happen. And now the Lamb opens the seventh seal (v.1a). Then there's *"a silence in heaven for about half an hour"* (v.1b). Why the silence? Great and terrible judgment. Fearful and awful wrath. It's all about to be thrown down upon the earth. See Habakkuk 2.20, Zephaniah 1.7, Zechariah 2.13, Luke 19.41, Lamentation 3.33, Ezekiel 33.11 to get a proper sense of the emotional character of the moment. And now... it begins. Seven angels are given seven trumpets (v.2). (Notice how often the word "given" occurs. It's a reminder of who is in sovereign control here.) The judgment of God is a very serious thing, of course. But notice that these are not *"final"* judgments. These judgments are warnings of the greater judgment still yet to come. These are calls (trumpet calls!) to the ungodly: to repent of sin, to cease their opposition to King Jesus, to follow him and live. And these trumpet calls of warning are all around us, all the time. There is a final doom that is coming. This is not yet it. But it is coming. Repent. Believe. Live.

**9-** Yesterday's chapter ended with these words: *"Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, 'Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!'"* The meaning is pretty plain: the final three woes will be worse than the first four. (And the first four were pretty terrible!) The first four trumpets represented various *physical* sufferings; these final three represent *spiritual* judgments. All of them come upon sinners who do not repent of sin, but rather persecute the church of Jesus (remember 6.9-11). But let's now come down to 9.20,21. In spite of all the trumpeted warnings, there are those who absolutely refuse to repent and believe. They continue to sin against God (v.20) and against man, who is made in God's image (v.21). The dictionary defines impenitence as "not feeling regret about one's sin." And it is this foolish and stubborn impenitence that brings about the wrath of God (see Romans 1.18).

**10-** In the Bible the word *"mystery"* does not refer to something that will remain entirely unknown forever. Rather, a *"mystery"* in the Bible is something that would have remained entirely unknown forever, if God had not revealed it to us. See, for example what God reveals about the *"mystery"* of marriage, in Ephesians 5.22-33: *"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church"* (v.32). Here in Revelation 10 we meet another of the Bible's mysteries, in v.7: *"in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."* The mystery here revealed is God's decree of final judgment for this world—that day when God's church will receive its glorious inheritance of full salvation and God's enemies will receive wrath, both of which God announced through his servants, the prophets. And what did the prophets (and John, and the church, both then and now) receive for making this announcement of God's Word? Persecution. God's Word is sweet as honey in our mouths (v.10a), but when it is truthfully proclaimed, there is cross-bearing and bitter persecution (v.10b).

**11-** In the first two verses John (who is still "inside of" this vision) is instructed to measure the temple and the altar and those who worship in connection with it. But the court outside the temple must not be measured; it is rejected. What this means is that the true *"temple of God"* (v.1)—which is God's people, the church, all who have Christ dwelling in their hearts, by the Spirit—is being set apart from the rest of the world, so that they might be protected from the great judgment which is about to come. But notice that those who dwell in *"the court"* (v.2) are not thus measured and protected. This refers to those who only "outwardly" belong to the church, those who do not truly follow Christ, who do not truly believe. Nominal, theoretical, supposed Christianity protects no one. God has determined that the false church will be given over to the world, and the world will trample upon it (v.2). Believer, never never ever ever have anything to do with a false church, a church which welcomes and celebrates the opinions of the world, to the mockery of God's Word. There are many such churches in our land. They will not be protected. See James 4.4.

**12-** From here until the end of the book we'll see many symbolic pictures of what has *really* been happening in this world, ever since the first promise that one day a woman will give birth to a child who will crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3.15)... *as well as pictures of what will continue happening in this world*, until the great day of judgment arrives, at the second coming of the Christ. It is the captivating story of the Lord Jesus (and his people) versus the dragon and all of the dragon's allies (which include evil forces here symbolically represented as a sea beast, a land beast, the harlot Babylon, those who bear the mark of the beast, etc.). Again our space limitations urge me to recommend William Hendriksen's wonderful book *"More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation."* In v.1 we have a glorious, powerful, radiant woman. This is how the true church (meaning all of God's people, from both testaments) appears, from the perspective of heaven. In vs.2&5 she gives birth to a male child, destined to rule. This is the Lord Jesus. In vs.3&4 we have a terrible dragon, who wants to devour the child as soon as he is born. This, of course, is Satan.

**13-** This chapter shows us two of the dragon's (that is, Satan's) allies. The first is the sea beast (v.1), which is described as a monstrosity of great horror, vile and repugnant. The second is the land beast (v.11), which has a completely innocuous and innocent appearance (*"two horns like a lamb,"* v.11), but—as William Hendriksen writes in his wonderful commentary—"for that very reason is even more dangerous than the first." Both of these beasts are instruments of Satan and both will attack the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, but in differing ways. The sea beast represents all the church-persecuting governments of the many nations of this fallen world. From the perspective of ancient Israel, the strong Gentile nations are associated with the sea (Mediterranean), and are often hostile and dangerous, like the sea. The land beast represents false religion, the false church. I recommend reading all of the references to *"earth"* as *"land,"* which is more literal and also full of meaningful allusion to Israel... *but during this era the religion of Israel viciously opposed the church.* The false church appears like a lamb. But note that it speaks with the voice of the dragon (v.11b).

**14-** The book of Revelation is packed with profound pictures of God's eternal truth, and all of these pictures are here for our blessing (see 1.3). But to understand them we have to grasp something of the symbolic "language" that the Bible has spent 65 books constructing before it

gets to Revelation. For example, the 144,000 (v.1) who have been "redeemed from the earth" (v.3) and who now "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (v.4). Why only 144,000? Surely, from all of history, the number of the redeemed exceeds 144,000. Yes, certainly it does. But 144,000 is symbolic of a precious reality that the whole of the Bible has repeatedly testified to, demonstrated, and confirmed.  $12 \times 12 \times 1,000 = 144,000$ . The first 12 represents God's redeemed people in the Old Testament era. "Israel" is repeatedly symbolized by the number of its tribes. The second 12 represents God's redeemed people in the New Testament era. Jesus chose 12 disciples—"Israel" was now being reborn and re-centered around Jesus. And the number 1,000 represents immensity, fullness, a vast and seemingly boundless enormity. The dragon and his allies will not succeed. **All** of God's people will be saved.

**15-** John now sees "another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished" (v.1). Those who worship the dragon are now coming to their final doom, the final judgment. Seven angels, seven plagues. In the Bible the number seven symbolizes complete, whole, perfect fullness. This is a wrath that comes straight from God (vs.5,6). Each angel is given a golden bowl (v.7). They are golden because they are to be used in God's holy service. Each bowl is full (v.7). They are full because God's wrath against sin is fierce, "forever and ever" (v.7). The sanctuary is suddenly filled with smoke, bearing witness to God's immediate presence (see Isaiah 6.4; Psalm 18.8). This is a serious and somber picture. What should be the posture of the redeemed towards all of this? "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed" (vs.3,4).

**16-** We now come to "the seven bowls of the wrath of God" (v.1), ready to be poured out upon those who follow the dragon (Satan). Notice that the command for judgment to commence is given in a "loud voice" (v.1). The Bible speaks about the Lord's zeal. He is zealous for righteousness, which makes us realize afresh how staggering the lengths he is willing to go—so that we might be covered with saving grace—really is. In past reflections we contemplated certain allies of the dragon. But there's another ally mentioned here which we haven't yet considered: "Babylon the great" (v.19). What does Babylon represent in Revelation 14.8, 16.19, 17.5, 18.2,20,&21? She symbolizes seduction, such as the seduction of sexual immorality... which has always proven to be a powerful ally of the dragon, has it not? William Hendriksen: "the symbol indicates that which allures, tempts, seduces and draws people away from God.... It reminds us of the pleasure-mad, arrogant, presumptuous Babylon of old." We'll discuss further in our next reflection, but mark again 16.19: "God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath."

**17-** "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute.... on her forehead was written a name of mystery: 'Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.' And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (vs.1,5,6). By this symbol the Bible is pointing to the power of worldly seduction and enticement, all throughout history. This "prostitute" is always opposing the bride (the true

church, who will soon be celebrated as the bride, in Revelation). Have you seen her, *"holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality"* (v.4)? Of course. We all have. She is always seducing us to drink, enticing us to think that the drink she is offering will be the sweetest, most pleasurable drink ever. But. God's Word is telling us that this cup is full of nothing but abominations and unclean things. Hendriksen: "Whatever is used by the world in order to turn believers away from their God is in this cup: pornographic literature, sports in which one becomes completely absorbed, luxuries, worldly fame and power, the lusts of the flesh, and so on. Let everyone make his own list."

**18-** Our last two reflections have concentrated on what is meant by *"Babylon the great,"* this powerful ally and tool of the dragon (Satan). Today we see her destination. In vs.1&2 an angel with great authority and enough shining glory to light up all the earth comes down to announce her fall. In v.3 we see that all the earth has become drunk on their infatuations with her seductions. In vs.4&5 another voice from heaven is heard, and it is addressing believers: *"Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."* In all ages God's people have been summoned to leave and forsake what is represented by *"Babylon the great"* (see Isaiah 48.20; 52.11; Jeremiah 50.8, 41-44; Zechariah 2.7). Let's take this summons very seriously today, as we see where Babylon is headed. Abandon her! Escape her! Quit drinking of her cup of abominations and impurities (17.4). Do not be ensnared by her seductions. Come out, lest we take part in her sins and share in her plagues (v.4). It may seem as if God has forgotten Babylon's sins. But he has remembered (v.5).

**19-** This may seem odd to us, but the word *"Hallelujah!"* is only found four times in all of the Bible. And all four occurrences are right here in our chapter this morning: vs.1, 3, 4, & 6. Hallelujah means "Praise Yahweh!" Or, "Praise the Lord!" And note that all of these hallelujahs are found in heaven! What are "the hallelujahs of heaven" all about? The victorious and all-glorious Christ has finally come to take his bride, the church, to himself. Verse 7: *"Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready."* God has decisively conquered all that is represented by *"Babylon the great"* (see the last three reflections, and in particular chapter 18). She was *"thrown down with violence, and will be found no more"* (18.21). Immediately after this happens, John hears *"the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.'" (vs.1,2).* Finally. Hallelujah indeed.

**20-** The main theme of this book is the victory of Christ and the triumph of his church, over every single enemy. We have seen the defeat of various allies of Satan in the different visions; but now we come to end of the road for the final foe, Satan himself. When he is finally *"thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur"* where he will be *"tormented day and night forever and ever"* (v.10), the church will not have one opponent left standing. Rather, we will now live and reign with Christ forever. Imagine how encouraging the promise of this vision was for the early, persecuted Christians of the Apostle John's Day, living in the midst of a pagan empire. And

now let your imagination wander into the 1,000 ways that this vision is meant to strengthen your backbone as well. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8: *"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."* Lift up your head, Christian! Satan will not win. The paradise that was lost in Genesis 3 will be restored. Let's keep reading...

**21-** This is one of my favorite parts of the Bible. The long battle is finally over. The smoke of war is clearing, and there—upon the horizon—we see our first glimpse of the new world that Jesus has promised his people, a world now purified from all corruption, through the sacrifice of his own life and the eternal significance of his triumphant resurrection over death. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul wrote: *"The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* But that *"new creation"* Paul describes isn't merely individual and personal. It is absolutely cosmic. Now comes a whole world washed clean of every stain of transgression. All the scars of sin (save those scars that Jesus bears) have been healed. All traces of death have been erased. Not one hint of the long rebellion of sin remains. *"He who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new'"* (v.5). In the Bible the *"sea"* is often symbolic of that which is dark and dangerous and unknown and unpredictable and full of monsters. *"The sea was no more"* (v.1).

**22-** There are exactly four chapters of the Bible where the dreadful *"wrongness"* of sin is completely absent. And these four chapters comprise the two bookends of the Bible: Genesis 1 & 2, where sin had not yet entered the world and Revelation 21 & 22, where every speck of sin has been removed from the world, permanently. Revelation 21 & 22 are Part IV of the Bible's four-part story. Part I was Creation: Genesis 1 & 2. Part II was The Fall: Genesis 3.1-14. Part III was Redemption: Genesis 3.15 - Revelation 20:15. And now Part IV: Restoration. *"No longer will there be anything accursed"* (v.3). This is, at last, the return of the world for which we were made. And the best part of this world is that it is freely given to all who will receive it. *"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price"* (v.17). These words compose the final and crowning invitation that the Bible tenderly and beautifully extends, again and again and again. Come.

-Reflecting on Revelation-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Revelation. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Revelation before we move forward?

*"... since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God"* 1 Peter 1.23

