

# GOD *REVEALED*



Part 9  
Jesus Returns as King

God Revealed, Session 9  
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# God Revealed: An Overview

## God Revealed?

Who is God? How can we know God? If we believe we have come to know God, how do we know we have found what is truly God? How can we be sure that we simply didn't have some personal emotional experience?

All civilizations around the world have possessed an awareness of the existence of God. These civilizations have expressed their awareness through varieties of ritual, prayer, and service. Some civilizations have produced written texts containing conclusions about what they believe God to be. Religious expressions are evidence of a common awareness of God's existence. However, which expressions are true? Even if we only take the three major world religions, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and not the thousands of other religions, we are still stuck with the problem of reconciling these three religions and their expressions. All three of these faiths believe in God's existence and that God can be known. They do not agree on foundational points about God's character, what God is doing, and what God desires of people. While God may be known, it doesn't seem that knowing God is simple and straightforward.

How can we know that proposed knowledge of God is true? How could we know this knowledge is truly of God? It seems to me that we should ask a few questions of any religion proposing to possess knowledge of God.

1. For what purpose have humans been created?
2. Why are there evil and suffering in the world that ruin and interrupt our happiness, potential, and destiny?
3. Where did evil come from?
4. Can people overcome evil and find their purpose? Can we find happiness?
5. How can we know that the answers to these questions are true?

# Why Read the Bible?

For thousands of years, the Bible has provided cultures around the world with substantive and convincing answers to these persistent questions. When read as intended, readers find a strong connection with its message to their experience. However, the Bible's misuse has been many peoples' negative experience, including...

- the support of racism and chauvenism
- its use as a science textbook
- the support of genocide
- justifying homophobia
- the elevation of religious authorities above legal authority
- twisting its message for fraud and personal gain
- justifying paying women less for the same work as men
- the support of unjust wars, and many other evils

This series seeks to correct much misuse by clearly unfolding the Bible's primary message. We're going to let the text speak for itself and let the text challenge us with its conclusions. To do this, accurate interpretation is necessary. Contrary to common assumptions, accurate interpretation is not only necessary, it is quite possible. It simply requires a set of skills no longer taught in most school experiences. This series will help us learn these skills.

*God Revealed* will unfold the message of the Bible according to the original authors' intents as expressed in the text. To do this, we will use the authors' literary devices and structures that guide us to their intents. Using this approach, we will see how the Bible's books, characters, and events contribute to that overarching message. In this way, we will come to an accurate understanding of the Bible. As a result, we will know the Bible's contributions to the answers above and let it, rather than someone's misguided agenda, challenge us to know God.

# Jesus Returns as King

In Session 5, when we were studying the prophets, we learned that God was going to bring a period of judgment upon Israel and all the nations of the earth for their rejection of God. This day was called The Day of the Lord. The New Testament contains additional teachings on this period of judgment. The final book of the Bible, Revelation, contains some of the most descriptive but also difficult passages in all of the Bible describing The Day of the Lord. However, it will also give the reader a very clear sense of God's continued and final work to bring about his promises to destroy the serpent, wipe out evil, and bless the nations of the earth through the Promised King of David. Jesus will come again and establish his eternal kingdom in Jerusalem and rule the nations in peace, just as God promised David so many centuries earlier.

## Study the Scriptures

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Revelation 1:1-3:22

Revelation 17:1-22:5

### **Think Through the Questions:**

1. How would you describe how the churches are to be thinking about and preparing for The Day of the Lord?
2. How is Jesus portrayed in the book of Revelation?
3. What are the problems that turn churches away from Jesus and threaten their ability to overcome the future Day of the Lord?
4. What are the things churches can do to become more faithful to Jesus and be more prepared for The Day of the Lord?
5. How does the Bible conclude in regards to the serpent, Jesus, the nations, and the people who have believed in Jesus, the Promised Child and King?



# Commentary

The study of the last things, which scholars call *eschatology*, has intrigued scholars and the masses for centuries. The reason for this is that the book in the Bible that teaches on these things, the book of Revelation, is quite unlike any other book in the Bible. It is so cataclysmic and bizarre in its description of the last days that it automatically prompts colorful speculation and emotional reaction. Even in the first century, in the first generation of churches 2000 years ago, speculation and reaction concerning the last days caused some to be anxious and live their life in constant fear, caused some to quit their jobs and tie signs to themselves warning others of the end of the world, or caused others to check out of reality altogether because Jesus was coming back any day. *The Left Behind* series, which is a 16 volume series of books about the end times, is one of the highest-selling Christian book series of all time, with over 65 million copies sold worldwide, showing the unbalanced emphasis contemporary Christians put on end-times concerns. We are going to avoid the speculation and emotion associated with the study of the last things and focus on those things that the text emphasizes, which will keep us on task in seeing how God's promises to man and woman, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David will be finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The first thing to note about the passages selected for this session's readings is that they are letters to churches. The book of Revelation also contains prophetic and apocalyptic literature, which are the passages that cause the speculation and emotion. Understanding that the apocalyptic and prophetic portions of the text are introduced by seven letters gives the reader the ability to more effectively interpret the rest of the book. Therefore, we are going to first look at the message of the letters to guide our understanding.

Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation contain letters directly from Jesus Christ to seven churches. These seven letters are essentially report cards. The fact that there are seven letters indicates that these churches are representative of all churches, as the number "7" represents completion or totality. Additionally, these letters are written with the purpose of preparing churches for The Day of the Lord, as they come before the description of how God is going to judge Israel and the nations of the world. All of Jesus' churches should read these letters with this in mind

and evaluate themselves with the warnings and encouragements that Jesus delivers to these churches.

An important thing to see in these letters to the churches is their literary structure. Of the seven churches, two are at risk of losing the Spirit of Christ in them, two are faithful churches with no problems, and three are compromised. The structure of these churches looks like this, which is called a chiasm and is a common literary device used in ancient literature:

- Church 1: Ephesus (at risk to losing Christ)
- Church 2: Smyrna (faithful)
- Church 3: Pergamum (compromised)
- Church 4: Thyatira (compromised)
- Church 5: Sardis (compromised)
- Church 6: Philadelphia (faithful)
- Church 7: Laodicea (at risk to losing Christ)

There are at least two conclusions to seeing this structure in the text:

1. The focus and center of the chiasm are compromised churches, which represents the majority group compared to the other two groups, which are at risk, and faithful. This means that most churches will be compromised or at risk in their witness to Christ, with only 2 of the 7 being faithful witnesses to Jesus.
2. Faithful churches are not “attention getting churches” in the chiasm. They are neither on the ends nor in the middle, but are hidden in the midst of compromised and at-risk churches.

The following chart summarizes the characteristics of the seven churches:

<b>CHURCH</b>	<b>STRENGTH</b>	<b>WEAKNESS</b>
Ephesus	Doctrine/Holiness	Lost “First Love”
Smyrna	Enduring Witness	None
Pergamum	Evangelism	Doctrine/Holiness
Thyatira	Sacrificial Service	Doctrine/Holiness
Sardis	A Few Good People	Living in the Past
Philadelphia	Missions/Holiness	None
Laodicea	None	Deceived by Riches

The following chart summarizes what Jesus prescribes to help each church overcome its weaknesses. Note that in each situation, Jesus is the source of power, life, and strength to overcome and address the problems.

<b>CHURCH</b>	<b>WEAKNESS</b>	<b>ACTION STEPS</b>
Ephesus	Lost “first love”	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Remember former “first love” experience.</li> <li>2. Repent (change course).</li> <li>3. Do the works they did at first that focused on Jesus.</li> </ol>
Smyrna	No Weakness	
Pergamum	Lazy in truth and sin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Confront and correct the idolatry, sin, and false teaching.</li> </ol>
Thyatira	Lazy in truth and sin	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Confront and correct the idolatry, sin, and false teaching.</li> </ol>
Sardis	Living in “glory days”	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wake Up!</li> <li>2. Build on the strength that remains.</li> <li>3. Remember the teaching and practice of the earlier faithful generations.</li> </ol>
Philadelphia	No Weaknesses	
Laodicea	Worshipping money	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Turn to Jesus as the giver of true abundant life.</li> <li>2. Be zealous in repentance.</li> </ol>

With this introduction to the events of The Day of the Lord, the reader should conclude the following:

1. Those churches that stay faithful to Jesus will be preserved from the judgment to come from God (3:10).
2. Those churches that do not stay faithful to Jesus will eventually

lose the Spirit of God, which means that they will be a gathering of religious people, and not the true family of God. The future generations of these churches will be deceived by their religious devotion and will face the same judgment that will come upon the non-religious.

3. Faithful individuals inside compromised and unfaithful churches will not be rejected by God, but will be delivered from judgment (2:13, 24-25, 3:4).
4. All people and churches have the option to repent and to fully enjoy the presence and power of Jesus Christ through his indwelling Spirit, through whom they will be able to overcome sin and escape judgment.

Chapters 4 through 18 of Revelation describe the judgment God unleashes on the earth for its rejection of Him and their continued idolatry, violence, sexual immorality, injustice, deception, and greed. While all of this section is worthy of far more attention than I am giving it here, it is important to note chapters 17 and 18. These chapters describe the destruction of Babylon, which has been an obstacle to God's purposes throughout the biblical record, beginning in Genesis 11, where humanity attempts to become gods through technology and government. However, chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation describe a metaphorical Babylon. This Babylon is a city consumed with pleasure, riches, and power and it is utterly destroyed in judgment. The most affected are the great merchants of the earth, the powerful politicians, and those who supported them. It is a city characterized by greed, sensuality, and power. It is a city that has deceived the nations of the earth with its luxuries and immorality. The warning to God's people is to come out of Babylon and resist the temptations of Babylon. These passages contain some of the strongest language in the entire Bible about the deceptive power of luxury, money, and power to distract and defeat Christians and churches.

The concluding chapters to Revelation, which are also the concluding chapters to the entire Bible, quickly describe Jesus' return to the earth. This time, Jesus does not come as a child, but as a Warrior King. He destroys the forces of the serpent, who is Satan, and casts Satan in the lake of fire, which is the place of eternal torment and judgment. After this, Jesus judges all who have ever lived. The names of those who have believed in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world are written in the book of life and these are saved from eternal judgment

and torment. Those who have rejected Jesus and who have continued in their sin do not have their names written in the book of life. They are cast into the lake of fire along with Satan to be tormented forever in judgment. After the judgment of all people, death itself is thrown into the lake of fire, and in this final act of judgment, Jesus fulfills the prophecy made about him in Genesis 3:15. Jesus has destroyed the serpent, sin, and death. He has crushed the head of the snake and humanity has been delivered of Satan's influence once and for all.

After destroying Satan, sin, and death, Jesus establishes a new heaven and a new earth and establishes Jerusalem, characterized as the people of God, as the city of his dwelling and rule. In this new heaven and earth, God the Father and Jesus dwell with people and illuminate the heavens and the earth. As the prophets said, the knowledge of God will fill the earth. All people will find eternal peace and joy in God's presence as the final promises to Israel and the nations are fulfilled. The Promised Child Jesus has destroyed the serpent, delivered Israel and the nations from Satan, sin, and death, built the family of God, and established the rule of God over all things in peace.

The message to the churches and to all people is quite simple, as Paul's admonitions to the Thessalonians show. People are to avoid speculation about the timing of The Day of the Lord, as it will come as a surprise and startle the world. Readers of the Bible, if they are not Christians, are called to repent and follow Jesus as the Promised King over all things and as their only means of overcoming their own sin and the judgment to come. Christians are called to lives of alert and sober witness of Jesus. They are to always be ready for his coming, being prepared to stand before him with confidence instead of shame and fear. Christians are to avoid the emotional sensationalism common in immature Christians and should work hard at their work, in loving their families, in ministering in their churches, and in being hospitable witnesses of Jesus in the world. In this way, they will overcome the temptations of Babylon and overcome sin. In this way, they can look forward to the eventual coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Read and Reflect on Key Quotes:

The following quote is taken from *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, by Richard Bauckham. It consists of some of the conclusions he makes about Revelation and how readers, both Christian and non, should understand this very important book.

(6) Revelation does not respond to the dominant ideology by promoting Christian withdrawal into a sectarian enclave that leaves the world to its judgment while consoling itself with millennial dreams. Since this is the standard caricature of the apocalyptic mentality, it must be strongly emphasized that it is the opposite of the Revelation's outlook, which is oriented to the coming of God's kingdom in the whole world and calls Christians to active participation in this coming of the kingdom. In its daring hope for the conversion of all the nations to the worship of the true God it develops the most universalistic features of the biblical prophetic tradition. In its conception of the church's prophetic witness as standing for the true God and his righteousness against the political and economic idolatries of Rome it is faithful to the prophetic tradition's conviction that the true worship of the true God is inseparable from justice and truth in all aspects of life. It is in the public, political world that Christians are to witness for the sake of God's kingdom. Worship, which is so prominent in the theocentric vision of Revelation, has nothing to do with pietistic retreat from the public world. It is the source of resistance to the idolatries of the public world. It points representatively to the acknowledgement of the true God by all the nations, in the universal worship for which the whole creation is destined.

(8) Revelation's prophetic critique is of the churches as much as of the world. It recognizes that there is a false religion not only in the blatant idolatries of power and prosperity, but also in the constant danger that true religion falsify itself in compromise with such idolatries and betrayal of the truth of God. Again, this is the relevance of Revelation's theocentric emphasis on worship and truth. The truth of God is known in genuine worship of God. To resist idolatry in the world by faithful witness to the truth, the church must continuously purify its own perception of truth by the vision of the utterly Holy One, the sovereign Creator, who shares his throne with the slaughtered Lamb.

(9) Christian participation in God's purpose of establishing his kingdom is portrayed in Revelation as a matter of witness, primarily verbal, but sustained by life. It should not surprise us that possibilities

of changing society by the use of power and influence in accordance with the values of God's kingdom are not envisaged....But Revelation's reminder that Christian participation in the coming of God's kingdom is not dependent on power and influence remains important. The essential form of Christian witness, which cannot be replaced by any other, is consistent loyalty to God's kingdom. In this powerless witness the power of truth to defeat lies comes into its own. Legitimate power and influence are certainly not to be despised, but the temptations of power are best resisted when the priority of faithful witness is maintained.

(10) In Revelation's universal perspective, the doctrines of creation, redemption, and eschatology are very closely linked. It is God the Creator of all reality who, in faithfulness to his creation, acts in Christ to reclaim and renew his whole creation. Because he is creation's Alpha [beginning] he will also be its Omega [end]. The scope of his new creation is as universal as the scope of creation. It is as Creator that he claims his universal kingdom. It is as Creator that he can renew his creation, taking it beyond the threat of evil and nothingness into the eternity of his own presence. An important contribution of Revelation to New Testament theology is that it puts the New Testament's central theme of salvation in Christ clearly into its total biblical-theological context of the Creator's purpose for his whole creation. This is a perspective that needs recovering today.<sup>1</sup>

## Think Through the Issues

As we have seen, five of the seven churches were somehow compromised. That is the majority of churches. These churches claimed to have Jesus. They were "Christian churches." And yet, they were running the risk of facing the judgment of Jesus. The state of "Christian churches" is no different now than they were 2000 years ago, when Revelation was written. The same idolatries and temptations lure Christians and churches from a pure devotion to Jesus Christ. The same idolatries and temptations threaten to lure "church goers" and their future generations into judgment. How can sincere and devoted people that go to "Christian churches" be so deceived?







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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 161-164.

# Dinner Table Discussion Guide

## Meal 1: Jesus Returns to Take His People Home

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1. What happens to those who have died before Jesus comes back?
2. What happens to those who are still alive when Jesus comes back?
3. Why do you think these are comforting teachings?

## Meal 2: The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Read Revelation 1:1-8

1. Who is the book of Revelation from?
2. Who is the book of Revelation dedicated to?
3. What does this passage say about God the Father and Jesus?
4. What does the text say about those who read this book?

## Meal 3: The Judgment of God

Read Revelation 19:11-20:15

Discuss this passage with your family. Explain what is happening in this passage and why.

## Meal 4: A New Heaven and Earth

Read Revelation 21:1-4

1. Try to imagine this place. What do you see?
2. What do you look forward to in the eternal kingdom of God?
3. What should we be doing in the world to help those we love be prepared for The Day of the Lord?

# Sermon Notes

