

The church in Revelation

Group study 12



- The importance of the letters
- The greatness of the church
- What the church is to reflect
- When reality replaces shadows

The importance of the letters

The letters are important for two reasons:

Who they are written by

Apostles who are sent by Jesus (we have looked at this already).

Who they are written to

What is striking in the New Testament is the number and variety of churches across the world and how central these churches are to God's purposes. Notice the importance God places on each congregation. This is summed up in the book of Revelation.

'Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.' I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone 'like a son of man', dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest (Revelation 1:11-13, NIV).

The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (Revelation 1:20, NIV).

It is here that the Triune God now shows off his wisdom and glory.

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold witness of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 3:10, NIV).

This is the reason churches are to be so different from the world around them.

Questions:

1. Read Ephesians 4:17-24. Why are they different from the world? How are they to behave differently from the world?

Remember the word 'Gentiles' in the New Testament is the same as the 'nations' in the Old.

2. Can you think of occasions in the Old Testament where the church tried to be like the nations?

Pause for thought

How are we tempted to copy the world?

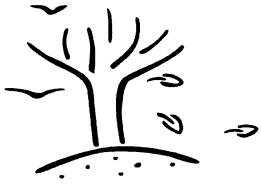
What were congregations like in the New Testament?

Each church was made up of people just like us. The individuals who made up each church were all seen as important (notice the lists at the end of the letters, particularly Romans 16). Each church had problems like the ones we face – problems of people not getting on (Philippians), problems of leadership, problems of finance, problems of morality (1 Corinthians) and problems of heresy (nearly all the letters).

It was the job of ministers and elders to teach the people and to rebuke false doctrine so that they would be what God had called them to be.

The church in Revelation

Home study 12



Day 1

Read Revelation 1: 9-20

What is so great about churches like ours?

Day 2

Read Ephesians 3: 1-13

What is so special about the church?

Day 3

Read Ephesians 1: 1-14

Who is involved in forming the church?

Day 4

Read Galatians 5:13-26

What is the difference between the church and the world?

Day 5

Read Philippians 3:12 - 4:3

Where does the church belong and how should this affect our behaviour?

Day 6

Read Revelation 20:11- 15

What happens on Judgment day?

Day 7

Read Revelation 21:1-5 and 21:22 - 22:5

What are the new heavens and earth like?

The greatness of the church

For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:26-32, NIV).

What was so great about these flawed churches for Paul to give such a strong charge?

Each church is gathered by God (The word church simply means gathering)

Read Ephesians 1:3-4.

Each church is gathered by God around Christ's cross who forgives us our sins

Read Ephesians 1:7.

God speaks to each church he gathers

Read Ephesians 1:13a and 1 Timothy 3:14-15.

The Holy Spirit lives in each church he gathers

Read Ephesians 2:22.

Each church is to look like God

Read 1 Peter 1:14-16.

Each church is to reach the nations with the gospel

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:8.

Each church is to fight the devil who caused the fall

Read Ephesians 6:10-13.

3. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:28. Fourteen of the letters in the New Testament start and finish with a similar verse to this one. Why?

It is little wonder the Letters emphasize and model how we should pray. When we understand the above we can see why there are such detailed rules for church discipline and godly behaviour. (It is worth looking at the church course again and seeing why these issues are so important to God.)

When we see these promises we must realize they are written to individual churches - just like ours.

Pause for thought

How should this truth affect the way we pray?

Great quote

'A local church should not see itself as only a part of a wider church. Each congregation remains a full expression of the heavenly church: it is the Body of Christ in the particular place where it exists, not just a portion of his worldwide Body.'

David Broughton Knox (see also Peter T. O'Brian on Colossians).

What the church is to reflect

The church is a foreshadowing of the new heavens and the new earth.

Each church is gathered by God

4. Read Romans 8:30. How does the truth that we are a church gathered by God help us to look forward?

5. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 and Revelation 7:9-10. What will the reality (of what we foreshadow in Mount) be like?

Each church is gathered by God around Christ's cross who forgives us our sins

6. Read Romans 8:11 and Titus 2:13-14. How does our being gathered around the cross help us to have hope for the future?

7. Read Revelation 5:9-10. What will the reality be like?

God speaks to each church he gathers

8. Read Romans 15:4 and Titus 1:2. How does God speaking to us help us look to the future?

9. What will the reality be like?

The Holy Spirit lives in each church he gathers

10. Read Ephesians 1:13-14, Ephesians 4:30 and Romans 5:5. How does the Spirit of God living in us help us look to the future?

11. Read Revelation 21:3-4 and Revelation 21:22-23. What will the reality be like?

Each church is to look like God

12. Read Philippians 3:20-21. Why does our holiness give us hope for the future?

13. Read Revelation 7:13-15 and Revelation 22:3-4. What will the reality be like?

Each church is to reach the nations with the gospel and fight the devil who caused the fall

14. Read Romans 16:20 and 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Why do our struggles and evangelism give us hope for the future?

15. Read Revelation 12:9-11 and Revelation 5:9-10. What will the reality be like?

When reality replaces shadows

How awful it will be for those who don't know Jesus and are scattered for evermore

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15, NIV).

How wonderful this great gathering will be - a greater Eden, a greater Jerusalem, a greater temple, a greater church and a greater heavens and earth will have come!

Life in the new heavens and new earth

We will hear God speak from his throne (Revelation 21:5).

We shall see his face (Revelation 22:4).

God will make his home with the saved (Revelation 21:3).

It will be the perfect cube (Revelation 21:16-17).

There will be no shut gates between us and God (Revelation 21:25).

Because there is no curse of Adam's sin (Revelation 22:3).

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true' (Revelation 21:1-5, NIV).

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 21:22-22:1-5, NIV).

How we should long for this day when the church will be no more and the shadow will have broken into reality. How we should long for our church to reflect this great hope

'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever' (Revelation 11:15, NIV).

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: 'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)(Revelation 19:6-8, NIV).

Conclusion

We have seen in these studies that it is Jesus who is the first and the last and it is Jesus whose salvation is the same yesterday today and forever.

It is not enough to say we understand how the Bible fits together, but we should want to go on and read it and enjoy Jesus as long as we live. Then we will be able to say with the psalmist:

I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word (Psalms 119:16, NIV).

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law (Psalms 119:18, NIV).

And when this life is over we can spend eternity enjoying Jesus forever!

Summary Questions:

What did this study teach me about Jesus?

What did this study teach me about the Bible?

What did this study teach me about myself?

Jesus



