

[INTRO] STRANGER TIMES: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE APOCALYPSE (Adam Heather)

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

Revelation 1:1-12

The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. 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 – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

'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.

'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: '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...

The Book of Revelation is neither literal nor chronological. It is full of strange symbols (about 650 different in all!), none of which is explained. That is our job as readers. We must approach the book 'literarily' – that is, we have to read it as 'apocalyptic' literature. 'Apocalypse' doesn't mean the end of the world, rather it is an unveiling, an uncovering of an underlying reality. It is not meant to frighten people (even if it frequently does). It is a letter written to the pastors of churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). The author's purpose is to encourage the church in a troubled and uncertain time. And the message is that things are far more severe than you ever imagined, but, at the same time, things are far more hopeful than you ever dreamed. But more than anything, it is a revelation of Jesus – not as he was when he walked the earth with his disciples, but as he is now.

- *What comes to mind when you hear the word 'Apocalypse'? Is it some vision from 'Night of the Living Dead', 'Apocalypse Now', 'Mad Max', Cormack McCarthy's 'The Road', 'Left Behind', or something else? Why does the word tend to conjure up images of disaster and 'the end of the world as we know it'?*
- *When did you first read the book of Revelation (if you ever have – don't worry if you found it too weird)? What particularly did you notice?*
- *What has been your experience of reading the book of Revelation? Have you found it helpful, confusing, terrifying, encouraging – or all of the above? What have you found troubling?*
- *How have you been taught to read Revelation in the church tradition (if any) that you grew up in? Or, perhaps, it is it all new to you?¹*
- *What difference might it make if we read the book of Revelation looking for Jesus rather than looking for the answer to the question, what will happen in the future?*

¹ There are 4 main schools of thought: **Preterists** read Revelation as referring to events which happened back in the first century; **Historicists** see the prophecies of Revelation as being fulfilled through history, from the first century to the end of time (This was the view of most of the Protestant reformers); **Idealists** interpret Revelation as symbolic of existential truths which bring individual hope or which represent the general improvement of society; and **Futurists**, who read the book as referring to future events which are literal, physical, cataclysmic, and global in impact.