Revelation Study 2
The Letter to the Seven Churches and the Heavenly Council

Read: Rev 2-3; 4-5

Features of Apocalyptic Writing and John's Revelation

A letter form & a visionary.
Dense symbolism of colours, gemstones and numbers.
Hearing and seeing: eg.

- 1:10-12 Hearing a loud voice and seeing the Son of Man
- 4:1-2 Hearing a voice calling and seeing an open door
- 5:5-6 Hears the "Lion of Judah" and sees the Lamb
- 6:1-8 Hears "Come" as the seals are opened and sees 4 horses

Some significant numbers in John's Revelation

3 – the number of divinity (Trinity)
"who is, and was, and is to come" (1:4, 1:8, 4:8,

4 – the number of the world (creation)
4 corners (7:1, 20:8)
4 divisions (5:13, 14:7)
"Peoples, tribes, languages and nations" (5:9, 7:9, 10:11)

4+3= 7 – the number of perfection or completion

7-1= 6 – the number of imperfection (one short of perfection)
Hence, the number of evil

3x4= 12 – the number for the people of God
12 tribes
12 disciples

1000 – the number of magnitude (too many to number)

7 Letters or One Letter to 7 Churches?
John may have known these particular Churches personally – but that is incidental to his choice of the number 7
In Revelation, the number 7 has a symbolic meaning – it refers to completion or wholeness. In the present context, it refers to the whole Church or all Churches. This, then, is one letter written to the whole Church.

The Letter
The Letter begins in 1:4. This is John's letter to the Churches.

In his letter, he tells how he has received instruction to write on behalf of another (1:11, 1:19).
From 2:1-3:20 we have the content of these letters he has been told to write.

Common Features of the 7 Letters

- An instruction to write
- An announcement of the sender
- A diagnosis of the situation (sometimes with threat, call to conversion, reward, encouragement or counsel)
- A warning to listen
- A promise to those who triumph/overcome/conquer

Structure of the 7 Letters

1) "To the angel of the church in…"

Who is the angel (messenger)?

- The leader of the church?
- The "spirit" of the church?
- The church itself?

2) Who is the sender who has instructed John to write?

Read 1:12-20 Is it Jesus?

Compare the following:

2:1 → 1:12-13, 16	3:1 → 1:16, 20
2:8 → 1:17-18	3:7 → 1:18
2:12 → 1:16	3:14 → ?
2:18 → 1:14,15	

3) Diagnosis of the situation

The diagnosis varies from place to place according to local conditions, reflecting the fact that John was pastorally aware of each church's situation. For our purposes it is helpful to consider how the situations described are symptomatic of all churches.

Eg: Ephesus

What is the problem? _

Where do you see this problem today –

In the Church (churches)? _

In believers? _

In yourself? _

What would the danger be with each of these situations if terrible trials were on their way?
What would the Spirit say to our church today?

4) "He who has an ear, let him hear…"

Throughout the book there is an emphasis on the importance of listening. This is more than an aural exercise, it is a spiritual one. There is furthermore an implication that the one who hears will also do (i.e. respond in action).

In the present context, the warning to hear means: ***"Read this Book!"***

5) "The one who overcomes/conquers"

What does it mean to overcome/conquer?

Gk: νικων "nikōn" (NIKE – Just do it)

Who is the one who overcomes? I.e. who can overcome?

The Heavenly Council (Rev 4-5)

The door in 3:20 is open and the visionary is invited into heaven to see "what must take place." What he sees is a heavenly worship scene. Worship sets the scene for all that is to be revealed in Revelation. It is important to note this from two perspectives: First, we must remember throughout that the one who is worthy to be worshipped remains so no matter what events may come to pass. Second, we must remember that the revelation takes place in the context of worship. To put it differently, our experience of all that is to come – frightening, encouraging, terrible and exhilarating – all takes place in the context of worship. Worship of God, then, is the context of our experience of life.

Worship Centers (Rev 4:2-8)

"People who do not worship are swept into a vast restlessness, epidemic of the world, with no steady direction and no sustaining purpose" Eugene Peterson

At the center of the Heavenly scene is the throne.

The one on the throne receives the worship of all those who are in heaven.

Worship Gathers (Rev 4:4-11)

24 Elders – 12 Patriarchs representing the 12 tribes, Old Israel
– 12 Apostles representing the New Church

4 Creatures – Representing the natural world.

- 4 signs of the zodiac?
- the noblest (lion), strongest (ox), wisest (man) and fastest (eagle) of creation are gathered and centred on the throne.

The crystal sea – A baptismal font?

The means by which people are gathered into the community that worships.

Worship Reveals (Rev 5:1-10)
If the throne is the central focus of the vision, then the opening of the scroll is the central event of the scene.
A scroll with 7 seals is presented in the hand of the one who sits on the throne. But no-one is found worthy to open it (in heaven, earth or under the earth).
The visionary weeps because he wants the contents of the future to be revealed. Why? Because the one on the throne is in control – the future is a future of redemption. It is the redemption that must be revealed.
The Lion of the tribe of Judah can open the scroll because he has conquered (nika).
In Rev 2-3 we asked, "who is the one who conquers?" Now this is revealed – it is the Lion of Judah, the Lamb who was slain.
In what sense has he conquered? In what sense is he worthy to open the scroll? (Rev 4:9-10)

- The lamb is worthy because he was slain – the Cross
- The lamb is worthy because he has bought people from every tribe, language, people and nation.
- The lamb is worthy because those he has bought are made into a kingdom and priests for God.

Worship Sings (Rev 4:8; 4:11; 5:9-10; 5:12; 5:13)
There are five songs in this vision of heavenly worship.
As one would expect, worship is offered to the one on the throne – from the 4 living creatures and from the 24 elders.
Song 1 (4:8) and song 2 (4:11) are addressed to this "one" who is identified as the Lord God.

> "Holy(1), holy(2), holy(3) is the Lord God Almighty.
> Who was(1) and is(2) and is to come(3)."
> "Worthy are you…to receive glory(1) and honour(2) and power(3)."

Surprisingly, the same creatures offer song 3 (4:9-10) to the Lamb.
The Lamb, like the Lord our God, is worthy of their worship!
Song 4 (5:12) and song 5 (5:13) are offered on behalf of the inhabitants of heaven and earth respectively.
In heaven they sing, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power(1) and wealth(2) and wisdom(3) and might(4) and honor(5) and glory(6) and blessing(7)!"
On earth they sing, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing(1) and honor(2) and glory(3) and might(4) forever and ever!"

Worship Affirms (Rev 5:14)
Worship ends with an "Amen". In worship we encounter God's "Yes" in creation and Christ's "Yes" in redemption through the Cross.
Our response is a "Yes" to God.
All worship can thus be summed up in the single word "Amen