

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members to accept:

1. that all power in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ and that he reigns over the whole universe and the whole Church.
2. that Christ especially reigns in order to seek and save the lost

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Meditation

Worship is to adore and praise God.

Theme: To adore and praise God's sovereign rule

Read the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

Revelation 4:1-11.

1After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

2At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.

4Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

5From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits (or: the sevenfold Spirit) of God. 6Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. 8Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,

who was, and is, and is to come."

9Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

In a vision John saw the throne of God in heaven. It is so majestic and beautiful that he can find no words to describe it.

➤ *John saw **the throne** of God in heaven (4:2).*

It is not the earth, the sun or even a star constellation that forms the centre of creation, but God sitting on his throne. Everything that happens in the universe, on earth and in the history of the world is not determined by the rulers in this world, or by the rich, the clever and the mighty people in this world. Events are not determined by the mass media, non personal powers like the stars or personal powers like evil spirits. Everything is caused, determined or permitted by the God of the Bible sitting on his throne. God rules in sovereign power from eternity to eternity (Psalm 93:1-2; 145:13; 146:10). Nothing can be excluded from God's sovereign reign (Isaiah 14:24,27)! God has created everything because he wanted to create (4:11). He also created you because he wanted to create you!

➤ *John saw God's **radiance** (4:3)*

He did not see God himself. He does not describe the image of God or even the appearance of God. The One sitting on the throne outwardly looked like jasper and carnelian and an emerald rainbow encircled the throne.

The white colour of jasper represents the radiance of God's indescribable glory of his holiness. The red colour of carnelian represents the radiance of God's righteous (just, fair) judgement. The green colour of the emerald represents the radiance of God's merciful and gracious salvation. The rainbow represents God's beautiful character in his many-coloured plan of salvation (Ephesians 3:10) and his loving faithfulness towards those people who believe in him and obey him (Genesis 9:12-17).

- “From the throne came **flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.**” (4:5).

These powers in nature cause people to fear and stand in awe. They express God’s greatness, power and majesty when he reveals himself.

This also happened when God revealed the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16;20:18) and when he revealed his grace to Job (Job 37:2-7,13b). And in the book of Revelation it happens when God reveals his sovereign reign to John (4:5) and when he reveals his judgements (8:5; 11:19; 16:18).

- *John saw 7 **blazing torches (lamps)** burning before God’s throne* (4:5).

They represent the sevenfold Spirit, the fullness of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1:4-5). He also saw Jesus Christ standing in the middle of the throne, as a lamb looking as if it had been slain (5:6). Thus, John saw the Triune God in the centre of the universe.

- *John saw 4 **living creatures** in the nearest concentric circle around the throne* (4:6-7).

They are heavenly beings who represent the created universe with all its created beings (wild animals, domestic animals, man and birds) (4:7), which is under God’s constant supervision (all the eyes) (cf. Hebrews 4:13). Their task is to enhance the glory of God’s work in creation. They praise God’s holiness and eternal being (4:8).

- *John saw 24 **elders** sitting on 24 thrones surrounding God’s throne* (4:4).

In the Old Testament worship king David appointed 24 divisions of priests to serve God in his earthly sanctuary (1 Chronicles 24:1-19).

In the New Testament worship there are 24 elders who serve God in his heavenly sanctuary. These elders are one of the highest orders of angels who represent God’s Old Testament people (the 12 tribes of Israel) and God’s New Testament people (the 12 apostles of Christ) (21:12-14). Their task is to enhance the glory of God’s work of salvation (cf. Hebrews 1:14). Prostrating they worship God and acknowledge his sovereign reign in creation (4:10-11).

- *John saw a **sea of glass, clear as crystal, which lay stretched out before God’s throne*** (4:6).

In Revelation 4:6 we must think of the sea (a large basin with water) standing at the entrance of the sanctuary in which the servants of God had to wash their hands and feet before they entered and served in God’s earthly sanctuary (Exodus 30:17-21; 1 Kings 7:23-26). The sea is a symbol of God’s present salvation, which is completely transparent and fair (or just) due to the blood shed on the cross. Christians have symbolically washed their dirty

clothes in it and made them absolutely clean (cf. 7:14; Isaiah 1:18).

In Revelation 15:2-3 we must think of the Red Sea where Pharaoh and his soldiers were drowned (Exodus 15:1b). The sea is a symbol of God’s final and decisive judgements, which are also completely transparent and fair (or just), because he finally gives to the enemies of Christ and Christians what they deserve (15:3-4). Nothing that is wrong or evil can exist in God’s presence. God himself as well as all his words and deeds are perfectly righteous and transparent. He sees everything, even what people try to hide (Psalm 33:13-15).

- *John **saw the worship and heard the adoration of everyone in heaven*** (4:8-11).

God is continually adored and worshipped! All creation and creatures in heaven and on earth give glory, honour and thanks to God, who is holy, almighty and the ever living One. God is above time, because he is simultaneously the One who was in the past, is in the present and is to come in the future! By laying their crowns before God’s throne, God’s people during the Old Testament period and the New Testament period submit themselves to God and acknowledge that God created them with the purpose to live for him and glorify him (Isaiah 43:7; 44:23; Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16).

3. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to worship God (in one or two sentences) for his sovereign reign in the universe.

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

The theme for this meeting is: The sovereign reign of Christ

Read or explain in your own words.

1. Jesus Christ has now all power

After his resurrection from the dead Jesus Christ appeared in his glorious human nature for 40 days to his followers. He said to them: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18).

2. Jesus reigns now

After his ascension and enthronement in heaven Jesus Christ reigns over the whole universe with all its powers and authorities (including: governments) for the sake of his Church (Ephesians 1:23; 1 Peter 3:22)! God the Father has placed everything in his hands (John 3:35).

He rules over all people and all kingdoms on earth (1:5). He rules over all the living and the dead (1:18). He reigns with sovereignty, power, justice and love.

He rules especially to seek and save the lost. “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them (Hebrews 7:25).

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

Theme: The sovereign rule of Christ

- Day 1 Psalm 110:1-2
Christ’s enemies become his footstool
- Day 2 Hebrews 9:23-26.
Christ intercedes for us
- Day 3 Romans 8:31-39
Nothing can separate us from God’s love for us in Christ
- Day 4 Revelation 1:9-20.
Christ is present and active in the midst of all congregations
- Day 5 Revelation 2:1-7
Christ leads his congregation in Ephesus
- Day 6 Revelation 3:14-22
Christ leads his congregation in Laodicea
- Day 7 Revelation 8:3-5
The incense offered causes fire to be thrown from heaven onto the earth
- Day 8 Revelation 9:13-21
Trumpets warn unbelievers that they should repent
- Day 9^{BS} Revelation 12:1-18
Satan’s war against Christ
- Day 10 Revelation 14:14-20
The double harvest

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.
If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: Explanation of Revelation

- Why do you think that the book of Revelation uses visions and symbols to represent literal events in history?
- Which symbols are explained in the book of Revelation?
- How do you explain the numbers in the book of Revelation?

- With which period of time does the book of Revelation deal?
- What is the structure of the book of Revelation?
- What is the division of the fourth section (chapters 12-14)? What belongs to the beginning? What belongs to the long period? What belongs to the short period? What belongs to the end? And what belongs to eternity?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following questions and record their answers:

- Jesus is asking you: “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15),
- “Who or what rules over all your relationships, events and circumstances in life?”
- “Do you believe that Romans 8:37 and Revelation 17:14 are really true?”

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review of previous Bible verses

Let pairs of group members review each other’s previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

THE SOVEREIGN RULE OF CHRIST
1 Corinthians 15:25

For he must reign
until he has put all his enemies
under his feet.

1 Corinthians 15:25 (NIV)

3. Memorisation of the Bible books

The 8 general letters and 1 apocalypse:
Hebrews, James, 1&2 Peter, 1&2&3 John, Jude, Revelation.

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

Theme: The struggle of Satan against Christ

1. Bible Study

Make use of the 5 step method and study:

Revelation 12:1-17; 13:1

¹A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ²She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.

³Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. ⁴His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born.

⁵She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. ⁶The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

⁷And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God Day and night, has been hurled down.

¹¹They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

¹²Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”

¹³When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a

time, times and half a time, out of the serpent’s reach. ¹⁵Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. ¹⁶But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

¹⁷Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

¹And the dragon (or some late manuscripts: ‘And I’) stood on the shore of the sea.

2. Emphasis

- The background of the struggle of Satan against Christ is the struggle of the world against the Church!
- Chapters 12 to 14 describe this constant struggle and its outcome. Christ and Christians are more than conquerors!

3. Explanation for the group leader

➤ *The symbols in Revelation chapter 12*

The woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of 12 stars on her head (12:1). Her pregnancy (12:2) is threatened by the enormous red dragon. He has 7 heads (12:3), 10 horns and 7 crowns on his heads (12:3). With his tail he swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth (12:4). She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre. The male child is suddenly snatched (caught) up to God and his throne (12:5). The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of 1260 days (12:6). There was war in heaven between Michael and his angels against the dragon and his angels (demons) (12:7). The dragon (that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray) was hurled together with his angels to the earth (12:9). He is the accuser of our brothers (and sisters) (12:10). By the blood of the Lamb and their testimony they overcame him (12:11). The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle and flown to a place in the desert where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time (12:14). The serpent spewed water like a river to sweep the woman away with the torrent (12:15). But the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river (12:16). The dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring (those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus) (12:17). The dragon stood on the shore of the sea (13:1).

➤ *The theme of Revelation chapter 12.*

The real cause of the struggle of the world against the Church is the struggle of Satan against Christ.

➤ *The message of Revelation chapter 12.*

(1) The historic background. Chapter 12 shows that the struggle of the world against the Church (chapters 1 to 11) is the outward and visible form of the struggle of Satan (the dragon) against Christ (the male child).

‘The woman’ in verse 1 is a symbol of God’s people during the Old Testament period (Israel with its 12 tribes) from whom the Messiah (Jesus Christ) would be born (John 4:22).

‘The dragon’ is a symbol of Satan (12:9). Throughout the whole Old Testament period Satan tried to prevent the Messiah from coming to into the world (12:1-4).

‘The male child’ who will rule (literally: shepherd) all the nations with an iron sceptre is a symbol of Jesus Christ. The birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ is depicted in one verse as ‘a being snatched up to God and his throne’ (12:5). He reigns over all nations and will finally destroy them (cf. Psalm 2:7-9; Revelation 19:15).

(2) The first consequence of Christ’s completed work of salvation on earth is that Satan is bound (his power has been curbed, curtailed, limited) (cf. Matthew 12:28-29). As accuser of Old Testament believers (cf. Job 1: 6-11) Satan is being evicted from heaven because perfect atonement has now been made for all the sins of his people (cf. Romans 3:25-26). Satan’s accusations have no more legal right! He is smacked onto the earth (cf. 9:1) where he continues to lead the whole (evil and unbelieving) world astray (12:7-9; cf. 1 John 5:19).

Since the first coming of Christ the reign of Christ is made a visible reality in the salvation of believers, the power of transformed lives and the daily kingship (kingdom) of God in their hearts and lives (Colossians 1:13; Luke 17:21; 1 John 5:21). God’s sovereign reign through Jesus Christ is convincingly affirmed by the events of God’s history of salvation within the history of the world.

The gospel (good news) concerning God’s kingdom (kingship) is now proclaimed to all the nations in the world (Matthew 24:14) and people from every tribe and language and people and nation are drawn to Jesus Christ (John 12:31-32; cf. Revelation 5:9-10). The victory of God through Christ is an unalterable fact of history. What happens now is that this victory is being worked out (unfolded) in human history. Satan and all his allies (the antichrists, the false prophets, the immoral world and the people bearing the mark of the antichrists) cannot prevent this triumphant advance of Jesus Christ and his message (the gospel, the eternal plan) (12:11).

(3) The second consequence of Christ’s completed work of salvation on earth is that Satan and his allies persecute the Church. Throughout the period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming Satan and his allies will try to cause as much damage as possible to the Church (12:13-17).

Christians (12:12-13,15) as well as non-Christians (cf. 17:16) will suffer under his anger, attacks and lies. The militant Church on earth will be oppressed and persecuted, but God’s means (cf. 12:16) will protect the Church as an institute beyond the reach of Satan.

The original text of Revelation 12:6 says: “where *they* will take care of her for 1260 days”. ‘They’ refers to God’s means: his angels, his co-labourers, his sovereign control of circumstances; ‘the place in the desert’ (cf. Deuteronomy 1:29-33), ‘the two wings of the great eagle’ (Exodus 19:4) and ‘the earth opening its mouth’ (cf. Numeri 16:28-33; Isaiah 5:14). These examples prove that Satan is really bound (curbed, curtailed, limited) during almost the whole period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming (cf. 20:1-3).

‘Satan spews water like a river to sweep her away with the torrent’ (12:15; cf. 16:13-14). Satan will utilize all his means like lies and deception to lead the Church away from Christ (cf. Luke 8:14; John 8:44; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 4:10; 2 Peter 2:20; 1 John 2:16-17).

But the (evil) powers of this world will be so divided that they cannot work together to destroy the Church as an institute. They will frustrate one another’s plans, work against one another and break one another’s power (cf. 1 Samuel 23:26-28). Every time God’s enemies lift up horns to smash and scatter God’s people, God raises craftsmen to throw down these horns (Zechariah 1:18-21; cf. Isaiah 54:16-17). It is impossible to deceive God’s elect (Matthew 24:24) (12:16)!

Then the dragon turns his anger against individual Christians (12:17).

(4) The struggle lasts throughout the New Testament period. The period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming is symbolised with the number ‘1260 days’ or ‘a time, times and half a time’ (12:6,14). In the Bible this number is a symbol for a period of oppression (1 Kings 17:1; Daniel 7:25; 9:27; 12:7; Luke 4:25; James 5:17).

The real length of this time is determined by the beginning and end of this period. This period (1260 days) *begins* with the first coming of Christ (the birth of the male child) (12:5-6) and *ends* after 42 month of oppression (trampling) or 1260 days of witnessing (prophesying) (11:2-3) with the final judgement at

Christ's second coming (11:18; 14:14-20) and the beginning of the final phase of God's kingdom on the new earth, which would last forever (11:15-19).

The message of Revelation chapter 12 is that through his first coming Jesus Christ conquered Satan and that Satan can no longer prevent the advance of the gospel in human history.

Satan would make war against the Church and individual Christians from Christ's first to his second coming.

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.