

The Book of Revelation

Page 1

INTRODUCTION

Revelation 1:1-8

Ground Rules

- Questions are encouraged.
- If we cannot prove something clearly within the pages of Scripture, we cannot stand on it. It is only a guess. You may think it is an educated guess or the only possible rational solution, but it is a guess nonetheless.
- As we move through the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ (or any other book of the Bible, for that matter) it is an adventure. In one sense it doesn't matter where we end up. We just want to have everyone involved in the process and go where God's word takes us, as we search together for truth.
- We may end up with a number of things in Revelation that we will be unable to nail down clearly. I think that is by design.

Type of Literature

- The type of literature or form of writing God chose to put this book in is different from most literature. We call it apocalyptic literature.
- It contains symbols and imagery (also seen in parts of books like Ezekiel, Zechariah, Daniel).
- This is God's breathed out word and it communicates truth, but you have to take into account the form in which it is written when you read it. Of course, God purposely did it this way.

A Promised Blessing

- This is the only book of the Bible where we are given a specific blessing for reading and heeding its words.
- A blessing is something for your good and happiness in your relationship with the Lord.
- The blessing that is to be had in reading the book of Revelation cannot be tied to nailing down specific details about every image. That is good!
- With this in mind, then, the truths for our blessing must be obvious and straightforward, so that every believer who reads it, will receive blessing from the truths revealed.

Some of the Main Themes

- The Sovereignty of our Lord
From our vantage point it can appear that history is running amuck. Yet, the book of Revelation tells us very clearly that all of history is in under the wise control of the One who made all things. What a blessing! When you read Revelation you realize all of history is choreographed to bring about a desired and planned end.
- Comfort and warning
To the unbeliever this is a book of warning. To the believer, it is a book of comfort, for not only is history under control, but you and I, the believers, are going to be perfectly cared for, no matter what. Thus, this book is for the strengthening of edification of the saints in its intent. The Revelation (Apokalupsis) is an "unveiling" - a revealing - that gives us a look behind the scenes. We are shown the victorious Lamb. To read about the victory of this Christ and His church fill us with comfort. All the Lamb's enemies will be utterly defeated and cast into the lake of fire and brimstone to be tormented forever and ever.

Understanding the symbolism

- Though apocalyptic literature is heavy in symbolism, it is "black and white" on a principle level. As we read Revelation in the context of the whole counsel of God, I think we can understand the book in its intent. If you approach Revelation with the goal of finding out what the headlines of today's newspaper means, I think you're going to be disappointed.
- If you spend your time examining current events to find the keys to unraveling the symbols and imagery, I think you are missing the intent - why God purposed symbols and imagery. God chose this type of literature so there would be no way possible to verify. God designed it so that you couldn't nail it down. So instead, let us hear what God did intend for us to grasp for a great blessing!
- Much of the imagery used in Revelation is not new with the apostle John in the first century. It comes from the Old Testament Scriptures. It is no accident that the imagery has its roots in the Old Testament Scriptures. Therefore, that is where we need to go - to the O.T. passage and see the context there to help us understand what is meant in the Revelation vision (as opposed to CNN or the local paper).
- Some people have tried to recreate the fascinating images in the Revelation. However, we must remember that when God gave John this imagery, He didn't give John a sketch pad. This revelation is designed to be read and thought out in your mind. The images are given to denote truth - not a picture. (i.e. We'll see when Jesus is described with symbolic imagery in verses 13-17 of the first chapter, it is not to help us get a mental picture or photograph of what Jesus looks like!)

Some Recommended Books

- *More Than Conquerors* by William Hendricksen, published by Baker Books, 1940 - paperback edition published in 2000 and available from Valley Gospel Mission, B.C. 216 pages
- *Triumph of the Lamb* by Dennis E. Johnson, published by P & R Publishing, 2001. 384 pages
- *The Bible and the Future* by Anthony Hoekema, published by Eerdmans, 1979. 343 pages
- *The Book of Revelation* by G. K. Beale, published by Eerdmans, 1999. 1,245 pages
- Of course the number one book is the Scripture itself. Read Revelation over again and again, sometimes in a single sitting.

Different Approaches to the Book of Revelation

1. Historicist Approach

This method views the Revelation as a symbolic prophecy of the entire history of the church down to the return of Christ and the end of the age. The numerous symbols of the book designate various historical movements and events in the western world and the Christian church.

The Historicist sees Revelation as a rolling history of the church in symbolic terms.

Comment: The difficulty with this position is that you can't prove it. If you think that the second bowl is Charlemagne going down the tubes, how would you know for sure if you have the correct interpretation? You are left with subjective guesses and not objective absolutes. You have to impose an idea on Scripture from the outside that you have no way to verify from the Word of God.

2. Preterist Approach

The preterist interpretation understands the Apocalypse from the standpoint of its first century historical setting. The church, threatened by the growing demands of emperor worship, is entering into a period in which its faith is to be severely tested. By not relegating the book to some future period, the encouragements to the church as well as the warnings to "those who dwell upon the earth" are taken with immediate seriousness.

This approach understands the book of Revelation as describing the events that were soon to take place. Specifically it sees the book as a prophecy of the two key events, the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70) and the fall of Rome (AD 476). Thus, in the preterist view all the events are already in the past. The only relevance to us is spiritual lessons.

Comment: One of the positive things about this point of view is that the book of Revelation when given had to mean something to the original hearers.

The downside of this view is that it only sees the issues as dealing with that generation. It does not take into account that perhaps the actual historical events foreshadow or pre-figure upcoming events. It may be that Revelation prepares first generation Christians for first generation assaults, but in categories and terms that prepares later generation Christians for other assaults and ultimately for the final assault.

Also, Revelation would had to have been written before 70 AD for this view to be true.

3. Futurist Approach

This method interprets Revelation largely as a prophecy of future events depicted in symbolic terms which lead up to and accompany the end of the world.

This approach understands the book of Revelation as primarily describing future events which will usher in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Comment: This view usually says that from Revelation chapter 4 until the end refers to the second coming or events right close to the second coming. Thus, it relegates most of Revelation to the future - not just to John, but to us. This view did not come onto the scene until around 1830. One of the biggest problems with this view is that it does not give any direct application for the readers of John's day.

4. Idealist or Spiritual Approach

This method avoids the problem of trying to find any historical fulfillment of the symbols of Revelation and sees only a symbolic portrayal of the spiritual cosmic conflict between the Kingdom of God and the powers of satanic evil.

This approach understands the book of Revelation as basically teaching spiritual lessons and principles through visions that are primarily symbolic. This view would say that Revelation is not referring to a particular beast or whore, but it is talking in symbolic terms to deal with the ongoing issues facing the church of all ages.

Comment: I think we'll find there is a lot of merit in this, but the question comes, "Is it all symbolic? Can we tie it down historically at all?"

Conclusion

Those are the main views. I think as we go through the book, seeking to draw our meaning from Scripture, we may well end up with a bit of a combination of Preterist, Futurist, and Idealist. Ultimately, however, we want to examine the evidence and seek to handle the Word of God in context. I think we will find as we work our way through Revelation, it actually will become a remarkable study in how to interpret the Bible.

Different Views of the Millennium

There are 4 main views of the 1000 year period mentioned in Revelation 20:

1. Postmillennialism

Postmillennialists believe that the kingdom of God is now extended through the teaching, preaching, evangelization, and missionary activities. The world is to be Christianized, and the result will be a long period of peace and prosperity called the Millennium.

i.e. The gospel will have such a great impact, there will be a great revival and a "golden age" will begin. This golden age is what they call the millenium.

2. Historic Premillennialism

Premillennialists hold that the return of Christ will be preceded by certain signs, then followed by a period of peace and righteousness in which Christ will reign on the earth in person. Historic premillennialists understand the return of Christ and the Rapture as one and the same event.

i.e. Jesus will come back before this 1000 year period (thus "pre") and set up an earthly millenium in Jerusalem. Historic refers to the fact that this view is much older than the more recent dispensational view.

3. Dispensational Premillennialism

Adherents of this school are represented by those who generally hold to the concept of two-stages in the coming of Christ. He will come for his church (Rapture) and then with his church (revelation). The two events are separated by a seven-year Tribulation. There is a consistent distinction between Israel and the church throughout history.

i.e. This is the view that many are most familiar with (i.e. the view of Hal Lindsey and Tim Lahaye). This view believes God has two distinct plans - one for Israel and one for the church - that He works with one at a time. Now He is dealing with the church and when He deals with Israel again, He's got to remove the church. In this view the millenium is primarily Jewish.

4. Amillennialism

The Bible predicts a continuous parallel growth of good and evil in the world between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ. The kingdom of God is now present in the world through his Word, his Spirit, and his church. This position is also "realized eschatology."

i.e. "A" meaning "no". This is not saying there is no millenium, but that there is no physical millenium; it is symbolic. The idea is that the imagery of Revelation cannot be nailed down to exact literal matches.

Basic Outline of the Book of Revelation
(Hendriksen)

- *Revelation 1* **THE SON OF MAN**
- *Revelation 2-3* **THE SEVEN LAMPSTANDS**
- *Revelation 4-7* **THE SEVEN SEALS**
- *Revelation 8-11* **THE SEVEN TRUMPETS**
- *Revelation 12-14* **THE CHRIST VERSUS THE DRAGON AND HIS ALLIES**
- *Revelation 15-16* **THE SEVEN BOWLS**
- *Revelation 17-19* **THE FALL OF THE DRAGON'S ALLIES**
- *Revelation 20-22* **VICTORY THROUGH CHRIST**

Introduction
Revelation 1:1-8

- **Warning** - As one reads, a person can get so caught up in the details that he/she forgets that this is a revealing of Jesus Christ as He really is - the King of kings and Lord of lords. The book of Revelation is a book of comfort. It brings perspective to life. [i.e. Here's what's really going on - whether or not it seems like it or whether or not you see it.] God is in control. You are taken care of. All is well! This is why thankfulness and joy are a normal part of the Christian life.

The Prologue (*Rev. 1:1-3*)

- "*of Jesus Christ*" - Does that mean content (i.e. is it about Jesus) or is it the revelation Jesus gives? Since it is what God has given Him, it seems it would be the latter. (Though the first idea is also true). The Father gives to the Son and Son gives to us. He is the one Mediator between God and men. Jesus discloses things to His people through His servant John, by means of angels, to help believers understand what is true and to help us live in terrible times. The goal is edification and strengthening - not satisfying your curiosity about the future. Jesus is on the throne and everything that happens is determined by His hand. We are on a rigidly controlled timetable to the very end.
- When is "*shortly*" or "soon"? This is why the preterist takes the view that the fulfillment is 70 AD and the fall of Jerusalem.
- We have been living in the **last days** since Pentecost (i.e. the whole New Covenant era). The time period from Pentecost until the 2nd Coming of Christ is called the last days. From this biblical point of view, believers on this side of Pentecost are always living **near** the time of the 2nd Coming. *Hebrews 1:1-2; Acts 2:17*

Sometimes the fulfillment in Scripture surprises us. For example, Jesus tells us John the Baptist is the Elijah to come. We would never have guessed that had not Jesus said it. It is fulfilled, but not in an obvious way. The same could be said of the "last days". For many of us reading that phrase, we never would have thought of the whole time period of the New Covenant, but the Scripture defines it as such. Therefore when we come to the term "shortly", we do not want to jump to a hasty conclusion. When it says "shortly", does it mean that the next vision will be soon or does he mean the whole thing? Also, what is meant by the term "shortly"? I don't think we can nail it down yet in our study. We must temporarily shelf it, and see if the ongoing study provides us with more information that can help us determine our answers. We must always make our case from the Scripture itself. We need to avoid speculation. What an excellent opportunity to exercise self-control!

- Verse 3 tells us there is a blessing to be had in reading and taking to heart these words. This is a book that brings perspective. Therefore let us not be afraid of reading Revelation for it is extremely comforting and encouraging.
 - This blessing is for every believer no matter when he lives in the New Covenant era.
 - This blessing is not dependent on figuring out all of the symbols in the book.

Greeting and Doxology (*Rev. 1:4-8*)

- The seven churches described in the book of Revelation were real life churches in the Roman province of Asia (modern Turkey).
 - Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea.

- "*Grace to you and peace*" is not just filler. It describes the cause and effect of our salvation. Grace is the undeserved favor of God. Grace is the whole basis upon which we are accepted. It is the whole basis upon which God can talk to us and not send us to hell. Everything we are and have has been given to us. Peace is the result of being justified with God. As believers, we have peace with God. He is no longer our enemy (Rom. 5:1). Also, that "you" is a limited people. Only a limited people have the grace that brings peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come.

- The seven spirits?

There are two possible interpretations from which to choose. The first says that this refers to angels, while the second says that this refers to the Holy Spirit. The imagery comes from the Old Testament Scriptures (Zech. 4:1-10), where the literal lamp appears to be a picture of the Holy Spirit. If the seven spirits refers to the Holy Spirit, then you have the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (i.e. Grace to you and peace from Him... and from the seven spirits ... and from Jesus Christ...) This seems to be most consistent with the Scriptures. To view them as angels would seem to be placing these created beings alongside the Father and Son as a source of grace and peace.

- "*Jesus Christ*"
 - *the faithful witness* (martyr). Jesus is the chief witness to what God is like, and ultimately He most fully discloses who God is in His sacrificial death.
 - *the firstborn from the dead*. He is the preeminent born one who was first to be glorified in body.
 - *the ruler*. He is already the ruler (Matt. 28:18). Right now there is opposition, but one day all opposition will be put down. He must reign (1 Cor. 15:25)!

In this verse we move from the witness of light in the incarnation, to His death and resurrection as Lord of all!

When facing opposition, it is important to remember that above all thrones and powers is one throne. The One who sits on that throne is Jesus. This One - ruler over all - is He "*who loves us.*" (present tense)

"Washed" or "Freed" - one letter different in the Greek - both are true.

The love of Christ is most supremely manifest in the atoning sacrificial death of Christ! There our Maker bore our sins in His own body on the tree. There the Just became sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. There He was wounded for our transgressions. There He was bruised for our iniquities and the chastisement for our peace was upon Him. *"To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."*

- *"us"*

- This identification is used three times in verses 5 and 6. He loves *us*. He washed and/or freed *us*. He made *us* a kingdom of priests. (See Rom. 9:11-13 - there are the elect of God, beloved for the sake of Jesus, and there are reprobates who will be sent to hell where they will not experience one ounce of love or grace). Believers alone can claim to be a part of the "us".

- *"a kingdom - priests"*

- The fulfillment of Ex. 19:6 (see also 1 Peter 2:9). Promises made to Israel are fulfilled in the church. In the church true Israel lives on!
- When you become a believer you enter into His kingdom. Thus, you acknowledge His "kingship"; the fact that He is Lord. The people with whom we have the most in common are not fellow Canadians; they are fellow Kingdom citizens. Our nationalistic spirit should be for the holy nation of our blood-bought citizenship!
- Every citizen in Christ's kingdom is a priest. Thus every believer has purpose and place and function in the kingdom, and as such is to be about our Lord's business. We are His representatives to the world. We are not a group that has priests; we are priests.

- Christ's return (v. 7)

- *"Behold"* reminds us that we must live our lives in light of the end! Are our values shaped by this truth? What comfort and joy for the believer; what infinite terror for all His enemies. (Dan. 7:13; Mark 14:62; Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 14:14; Zeph. 1:15; Ps. 97:2-3) The Bible knows nothing of an invisible or secret coming. Every eye will see Him. The mourning of verse 7 is not repentance, but rather, the bitter mourning of hopelessness and despair (Zech. 12:10-11).

- *"the Alpha and Omega"*

- The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet describe our God and Savior. He is sovereign over all of history from beginning to end (Eph. 1:11; Rev. 22:13).

- Eternal and almighty

- The description *"who is and who was and who is to come"* is used in verse 4 of the Father and in verse 8 of Christ.

- This Lord who was slain for us is the Almighty God!