

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 91: The Book of Revelation, Part I

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

When Jesus came to earth in a manger in Bethlehem two thousand years ago he ruined the contemporary Jewish view of what a Messiah should be.

They pictured a powerful and conquering king who would come in might and great glory, leading hosts of heaven and earth to throw off the yoke of Roman tyranny and set up His Millennial Kingdom, ruling the world from His throne in Jerusalem forever, Hallelujah.

THEN, ". . . Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." --Phillipians 2:5-8

BUT, They were not entirely wrong . . .

At God's appointed time, the risen and ascended Lord will explode onto the world stage flanked by an army of saints and angels and announced by an earth shattering shout and trumpet fanfare.

And all the world will know that Jesus Christ is Lord of the Universe because,

". . . God highly exalted Him, and bestowed upon Him the name which is above every name, and at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." -- Phillipians 2:9-11

This is the message of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ . . . a vision revealed to John (22:8), a fellow servant and a prophet (22:9). The Greek word translated "revelation" literally means "an uncovering or unveiling" and always refers to something once hidden, now becoming revealed or visible.

What this book reveals is the truth about a highly exalted Jesus presented, for the first time in all of His glory which is only hinted at throughout the previous Scriptures.

Satan and his forces will gather with all the other enemies of Christ to come against Him, but as Handel quoted from Isaiah in his musical masterpiece, The Messiah, "Who shall stand against the Lord, and His anointed . . . and He shall reign forever and ever, Hallelujah!"

Author:

Four times the author identifies himself as John and early church tradition unanimously identifies him as the Apostle John. There is no compelling evidence to question their belief, in fact, many of the book's original readers would have still been alive when the earliest of the church fathers confirmed his authorship.

Revelation begins with John, an old man and the last surviving apostle, living in exile in the small, barren penal colony on the island of Patmos, located just southwest of Ephesus in the Aegean Sea.

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All other apostles have been martyred and John has been banished from the Empire by the Roman authorities for continuing to preach the gospel against imperial orders.

When he was arrested, John was ministering to the churches in Ephesus and the surrounding territories. John addresses The Revelation to them (1:4) as a means of encouraging them to stand under increasing persecution in which at least one man has been martyred (2:13). To the seven churches John provides a message of hope: God is in control of all events, and even though evil seems to be winning and wickedness prevailing, their end is near as Christ returns to judge and rule the world in justice and peace forever.

Date:

Revelation was clearly written during a time of great threat to Christians by Rome. This has led some to believe it was written during Nero's persecution after the burning of Rome in AD. 64. However, church documents seem to indicate that John's exile took place around AD. 95, that places it in the rule of Emperor Domitian (AD. 81-96). Rome was at its peak, the wide disparity between the rich and poor affected even the church, and increased persecution came as the Roman cults of emperor worship increased.

Purpose and Type:

According to John himself, the purpose of the book is to reveal the full identity of Christ and encourage believers to stand fast in the hope of His coming triumph and to exhort them to holy living in view of the coming judgment. Again, the purpose of prophesy is the change the life-style of the believer.

The book is:

- Prophetic--It reveals coming events.
- Encyclical--Meant to be shared and read aloud in many churches.
- Literary--Including vision, symbolism, prophesy, exhortation, narrative, prayer, dialog, praise, and worship.
- Apocalyptic--Using symbolic images, angelic activity, visions, earthly and cosmic catastrophe, creative and eternal events.

Interpretation:

There are four basic approaches to the interpretation of this book which depend on ones view of the time of its fulfillment:

The Preterist Approach: Prophecies that were fulfilled in early church history.

This view presents Revelation as a description of events in the Roman Empire taking place in the first century. This view seems to come from Alcazar, a Jesuit Priest, who used it to counter the claims of reformers who insisted that Revelation predicted the corruption and destruction of the Roman Catholic Church.

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This view takes the prophesy as largely symbolic and although it makes the book meaningful to its original readers, which follows one rule of accurate Scriptural interpretation, it utterly destroys its true prophetic nature. This contradicts the book's own claim of being prophetic.

It is virtually impossible to find all the events of revelation as already fulfilled.

For example, the second coming of Christ certainly didn't happen in the first century.

The Historical Approach: *A panorama of church history from Apostles to present.*

This view was held by most reformers and is accepted by many people today. By equating events in Revelation to historical events, they try to map out the scene so as to determine where they are in the panorama.

They see in the events of the book the barbarian invasions of Rome, fall of the Empire, rise of the Roman Catholic Church, various popes, emergence of Islam, the crusades, the French Revolution, etc. This produces many conflicting interpretations as men try to fit their own historical events into the picture.

This approach rejects the literal method of interpretation and also robs the book of any meaning for those to whom it was originally written.

The Idealist Approach: *An unfolding of a cosmic conflict to teach spiritual concepts.*

In this view there is neither historical reporting nor predictive prophecy. It is, rather, a timeless depiction of the struggle between the forces of good and evil. This view was developed by Augustine to counter a growing acceptance of a thousand year (millennium) in the early church.

This view ignores the prophetic claim of the book and its obvious prophetic nature.

The Futurist Approach: *A literal book of prophesy most of which is yet to pass.*

This is the view taken by most evangelical churches, especially those who are pre-Millennial. This view insists that those chapters literally and symbolically depict actual people, places, and events yet to appear on the world scene.

It, then, describes the literal events surrounding the second coming of Christ, the Millennium and final judgment, and the beginning of eternity for believers and non-believers alike.

Only this approach does justice to Revelations claims to be a book of prophesy, and interprets it by the same grammatical-historical method used for all of Scripture. Only this method accomplishes its purpose of giving hope to a persecuted church and presenting a reason for righteous living.

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Outline:

The outline is given to us in Chapter 1, Verse 19:

I. PAST: "*The things which you have seen*" (Chapter 1)

The vision of the risen Christ

II. PRESENT: "*The things which are*" (Chapters 2 and 3)

The letters to the seven churches of Asia minor

III. FUTURE: "*The things which will take place*" (Chapters 4-22)

The prophecy of the end of time as we know it.

Bible Survey Lesson 92: The Book of The Revelation, Part II

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

Introduction:

The Book of The Revelation is often treated as if it were outside of the rest of Scripture, in a world of its own. It does have strange and wonderful symbolic images, angelic guides into visionary experience, and great cosmic catastrophes. It is unique, strange, unusual, and surreal. But, none of this should mislead us into separating the book from other Scripture or the world of New Testament theology.

The Revelation speaks of the same God-given, crucified, risen and exalted Jesus who is portrayed in the entire Scriptures:

1. The Son of Man
2. The Lord of the church
3. The Lion of Judah
4. The Lamb of God
5. The Lord of judgment
6. The Child born, the Son given
7. The King of kings and Lord of lords

I. PAST: "*The things which you have seen*" (Chapter 1)

The vision of the risen Christ

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A. Victory (1-8)

The Revelation is written to "the seven churches" in the Roman province of Asia where John ministered in Ephesus and the surrounding churches during the closing years of his life. It is a "revelation," or unveiling, of things which "must shortly take place."

God committed this message to Jesus who gave it to John through an angel to pass on to His "bond-servants." John wrote the prophecy in the form of a letter to be read in the churches for their blessing.

He begins with a greeting of grace and peace from each member of the Trinity (vv. 4-5).

The subject of John's work is crystal clear: The Lord God Almighty has guaranteed the final victory of the crucified Jesus in full view of the entire world. Depending on their relationship to Jesus, people's reactions will be great rejoicing at deliverance or great mourning at judgment. *"Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. . ."*(v 7).

This verse combines the prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14 and Zechariah 12:10, the first of 31 quotations from Daniel 7 in this book.

B. Vision (9-20)

John received a vision while in exile on the island of Patmos. Behind him, he heard a loud trumpet-like voice telling him to write down what he would see and send it to the seven churches. When he turned to find the source of the voice he first saw, "seven golden lamp stands" (v. 12) which, we find out in verse 20, represent the seven churches in Asia minor.

These seven messages are found in chapters two and three. Each church must heed not only its own message but all the messages to the other churches and the entire teaching of Revelation as well.

John's book is an exhortation to the churches (then and now) to remain faithful to Jesus, to live a godly life, and to persevere in trouble knowing that Christ, the Lord of the church, will soon return to rescue and vindicate His people.

John then saw, in the middle of the lampstands, the Son of Man Himself which he attempts to describe:

--Clothed in a long flowing robe

--A golden girdle worn high for ceremony rather than work

--Hair like white wool, as white as snow (like in Daniel 7:9-10)

--Eyes penetrating and powerful, like a flame of fire to judge (v14)

--Feet like burnished brass (like in Daniel 10:6)

--Voice, not only like a trumpet, but like a mighty waterfall (like the voice of God in Ezekiel 43:2)

--Angels of seven churches like stars in His right hand (v. 20)

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--Sharp two-edged sword of judgment from His mouth (2:12)

John's response was to fall down like a dead man, but the "Living One," who possesses the absolute eternal life of God, lifted him up .

II. PRESENT: "The things which are" (Chapters 2 and 3)

The letters (messages) to the seven churches of Asia-minor

The letters to the seven churches follow a common format:

1. Church location
2. Christ's description
3. Commendation
4. Condemnation
5. Command
6. Comfort Promise

The study of these churches is valuable because these problems in churches have continued throughout the entire church age and still exist today.

A. Message to Ephesus (2:1-7)

This is a church which is characterized by orthodoxy and good works but lacking the love which came from that first response to their savior. They must repent and return or lose their witness.

B. Message to Smyrna (2:8-11)

This church receives no criticism at all, only encouragement to remain faithful during poverty and persecution, even unto death.

C. Message to Pergamum (2:12-17)

There is much to commend in their steadfastness under persecution but false teaching has entered the church which has corrupted them with immorality and idolatry. They must repent or be punished.

D. Message to Thyatira (2:18-19)

This little tiny city received the longest letter with much to honor it. However, it has failed because of its tolerance of an immorality which often accompanies doctrinal error.

E. Message to Sardis (3:1-6)

There is nothing good to commend this church. It was once a strong church whose pride has brought about a great fall into a catatonic stupor. They need to wake up and remember their savior.

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F. Message to Philadelphia (3:7-13)

They, like Smyrna are not condemned since, even though they have little power, they have kept true to the Word and patiently endured. They are promised that they will not go through the Great Tribulation (3:10).

G. Message to Laodicea (3:14-22)

There is not only nothing good to say, but there is more condemnation than for any other church. They are sickeningly "lukewarm" and in danger of losing their witness unless they wake up to their pathetic position of self-deception, repent and re-light the fire of their faith in Christ.

Some commentators refer to the seven churches as seven consecutive epochs, or periods, of church history. There is no indication that this is valid and it takes a large shoe-horn to make this concept work.

It is abundantly clear that these letters were written to real church congregations, engaged in real struggles of faith in the midst of real persecution and spiritual battles.

It is not surprising that we hear the voice of God as we read these messages and, in the same way we read the Epistles of Paul, and Peter, and John, we apply these messages to our lives and churches today.

III. FUTURE: "*The things which will take place*" (Chapters 4-22)

The prophecy of the end of time as we know it.

The last section of The Revelation can be broken up in many ways, but contains three major subjects: the tribulation, the millennium, and the eternal state.

There is a glaring absence in this section. The church has disappeared. This is because of "the catching up" of the church before the tribulation as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 52.

A. The Tribulation (4-19)

1. The Throne (4-5)

Chapter 4 presents the Creator God surrounded by worshipping creatures and men. He is God Almighty; holy, sovereign, just, righteous, and worthy of worship.

Chapter 5 presents Jesus, the Christ, the Lamb of God, the Lion of Judah, the Judge, able, because of His conquering obedience to the will of God, to take the book and break the seals.

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2. The Seals (6)

The breaking of the first four seals release four horsemen which represent the chaos predicted in Mark 13: war, violence, famine, and death. The fifth reveals a plea for justice from martyred saints, but the martyrdom is not complete.

The sixth seal brings great physical disturbances causing men to think the end of the world has come, but it has only just begun.

3. The Interlude (7)

John interrupts the sequence of judgments to remind us that we need not despair for there is hope even in The Tribulation. There are two visions which answer the question in chapter 6:17, "*who is able to stand.*" The scene is of a great multitude from every nation "*which no one can count.*" (7:9)

These include the 144,000 remnant of Israel along with their Jewish and Gentile converts to faith in Christ during the tribulation. God's mercy extends even into this time.

4. The Trumpets (8:1-11:19)

The seventh seal includes the trumpet judgments. They grow in intensity as the earth, sea, other waters, and heavens are effected. The last three are woes directed against mankind and still the unsaved do not repent of their wickedness.

In chapter 11, two witnesses measure the temple of God which indicates the temple must have been rebuilt.

The seventh trumpet again introduces earthquake, lightning, thunder as the end of history, as we know it, arrives. The heavenly chorus now treats the coming of the reign of God and Christ, as well as the day of judgment as past events (11:17-18).

The chorus sings, "*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever*"(v. 15).

5. The People (12-14)

We are introduced to the woman (Israel), the dragon (Satan), the man-child (Christ), Michael (representing the angels), Israel (the remnant of that nation), the beast out of the sea (political leader), and the beast out of the earth (religious leader).

This will be a time of war on earth and in heaven as good and evil battle until the final triumph of the Lord.

6. The Bowls (15-16)

Unlike the seals and trumpets, the outpouring of the bowls indicate a final, irrevocable judgment on mankind. They are much like the plagues of Egypt and herald the final hour of judgment of the Lamb of God on the earth.

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7. The Babylons (17-18)

Babylon, symbol of the great religious system that placed itself above the Most High God, and symbol of commercial and political greatness that scoffed at the King of kings, are destroyed.

These judgments prepare the reader for the return of Christ to restore God-ordained order to a depraved world.

B. The Second Coming (19)

All in heaven rejoice at the fall of Babylon and the great marriage feast takes place as Christ is joined with His people at the second coming.

Heaven opens and the one who has been promised returns to do battle with the forces of evil, human and supernatural alike. It is no contest. The account of Armageddon is indicative of the one-sidedness of the war.

C. The Millennium (20)

Jesus, the Messiah will reign on earth, in Jerusalem, from the throne of David for a thousand years of perfect law and order. All sin will be dealt with and peace will reign.

At the conclusion God will allow Satan to make one final attempt to lure men away from HIM, thus proving man's depravity is his own choice. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire forever.

At the Great White Throne Judgment Jesus will judge the unsaved just as they wish, by their own deeds. The permanent place of punishment for them is also the lake of fire.

D. The Eternal State (21-22)

This begins eternity and *"so shall we ever be with the Lord."* There will be a New Jerusalem, an unbelievable space-age city between heaven and earth as well as a new earth restored to its glory before the fall. And then the joy begins.

The purpose of The Revelation is clear, as John closes. It is a book of comfort and encouragement for us, and, like all prophecy, it should change our life-style.

Lesson:

We do not need a detailed forecast of future events.

We need a renewed vision of the risen and exalted Christ.