

Part 1 - The Revelation of Jesus Christ

I. INTRODUCTION

Joel Beeke, Revelation, The Lectio Continua Commentary, *“The Bible was not written to satisfy the hunger of the human mind for knowledge of future events. Many Christians use the book of Revelation as a kind of horoscope to predict the future. They might as well read the stars. The Bible is not a horoscope; it is a revelation of Jesus Christ. It is to be understood rationally, spiritually, and practically—not superstitiously or speculatively.”* pg. 5

- Revelation is a picture book not a puzzle book.
- Revelation is meant to be understood by believers.
- It is apocalyptic and prophetic writing but it is also a pastoral epistle.
- As such, it is applicable for us today as much as it was to its first century audience.
- It’s a letter to the Church!

- Today’s message will be to give us some foundational understanding and principles that will help guide our interpretation of this amazing, beautiful, and terrifying book of the Bible.
- Rightly interpreting Revelation will draw us in to worship of Jesus Christ, it will provoke us to faithful endurance, it will ground us in the events of history, and fill us with hope because we are on the winning side!

REVELATION 1:1-3; 19

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this

prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

II. THE REVEALER AND THE REVELATION

V1a The revelation of Jesus Christ,

- It is Jesus's revelation, not John's.
- John is merely the messenger. He is taking dictation and writing what he sees and hears.
- It is a revelation of Jesus Christ, his glory, his triumphant victory, his kingdom, his power.
- Revelation means a disclosure of something previously hidden.
- Notice that it is not a revelation of the end times, or the end of the world.
- The Revelation is about Jesus and it is from Jesus.
- He is both the Revealer and the revelation.
- He is the agent as well as the object of the revelation.
- Our first thought when studying Revelation should be what is Jesus revealing to us about himself for our edification, encouragement and comfort.

V1b which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.

- This tells us the intended audience of this revelation—it's God's people, Christians, followers of Jesus.
- What is the revelation intended to convey to Christ's servants?
- "*What must soon take place*"
- This comes straight from Daniel 2:28 as Daniel is given the vision of what was to come.
- **Daniel 2:28** but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.
- Daniel gives the interpretation of the image and the succession of the empires that will result in the inauguration of the kingdom of God.

- For Daniel, these things were in the future, the latter days.
 - The kingdom of God was coming.
 - But John, says these things must soon take place.
 - The kingdom of God is here and now.
 - These things are going to be happening sooner rather than later and it is important for his servants to know the things spelled out in the revelation.
 - Many times you will read John saying, “I saw...” There is the invitation to see the Living Word of God as he is presented to us in the various pictures.
 - Jesus instructs John to do that in v19 “*Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.*”
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- After the three-fold blessing for those who read aloud, hear and keep the words of the prophecy, we get another indication of the urgency.
 - “The time is near.”
 - This is code for the ‘last days’.
 - **2 Tim. 3:1** You must understand that in the last days there will come times of much trouble.
 - This is how we have come to understand the time before Christ’s return as the last days—it is the last days.
 - But it shouldn’t surprise you if you read your Bible that we have been in the last days and the last day has not yet arrived.
 - The O.T. has numerous references of the latter days or the last days and these were looking forward to the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah, the anointed son of David, the one who would establish the unconquerable and eternal kingdom that he would rule over — we saw that already in Daniel 2.
 - Christ’s advent was the fulfillment, the consummation of that promise and as such, he was the fulfillment of the OT latter day promises.
 - We can see then from that perspective, the last days was the closing of the old covenant.
 - Now we are in the new covenant, with last days promises as well.

- These promises God made are being fulfilled in the last days until they are fully and finally fulfilled on the last day, at the return of Christ and final judgment.
- The NT writers recognized the period they were in as the last days.
- Christ's resurrection and ascension inaugurates the last days.
- **1 Peter 1:20** He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you...
- **Hebrews 1:2a** but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,
- Acts 2 we see the fulfillment of what marked the last days, the outpouring of the Spirit on the church.
- **Acts 2:17** 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,...
- We are in the last days, we have been in the last days, and we will be in the last days until the LAST DAY!
- Every generation of Christians has believed they are living in the last days... and they were right.
- The Revelation of Jesus Christ is for his servants during this period of the last days who live in anticipation of the Last Day!

III. UNDERSTANDING REVELATION

1. Five Main Interpretive Views of Revelation

a. Preterist View

- Preterist means 'that which is past' in Latin.
- This view sees revelation having a much earlier date and the prophecies of Jesus and of the book of Revelation being fulfilled with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70AD.
- Take opening words, 'that must soon take place' to refer to things happening in John's time or shortly thereafter.
- The only future events left to fulfill will happen closer to the return of Christ. Ch. 21 and 22.
- If this view is true, Revelation doesn't really have much to offer us today.

b. Historicist View

- The visions of the seals, trumpets, and bowls are successive ages of the church.
- Some see the Letters to the seven churches as referring to seven ages in the history of the church.
- Each of the symbols represent a specific event in history such as the fall of the Roman Empire, the corruption of the papacy, and the reformation.
- This was the majority view during the Reformation. A few commentators have noted that this view seems to emphasize the history of the Western or the European church to the exclusion of other parts of the world.

c. Futurist View

- Everything in the book, with the exception of the letters, prophesies the events that will take place around the time of the return of Christ and will usher in the Millennial reign of Christ.
- This has been the dominant and most popular view of evangelicals at the beginning of the 20th century.
- The main form of this view is Premillennial Dispensationalism.
- Visions are taken literally and will happen chronologically.
- The challenge with this view is that it disconnects the visions of the book with the challenges and struggles of the original audience John first sent this book to.
- It doesn't offer them much consolation nor to us and it doesn't offer the suffering and persecuted church at any other time in history any consolation because everything is focused on that narrow point in time before Christ's return.

d. Idealist View

- Revelation is to be interpreted largely as a symbolic presentation of the cosmic battle between good and evil.
- The events described in Revelation are events that are repeated over and over again in human history throughout the church age.
- It is the repeated experience of the church in every age and the book exhorts believers to remain faithful in the face of suffering.
- The events prophesied speak to all generations of believers making it relevant for every Christian.

- The images in the visions have multiple fulfillments. They are part of a general pattern.
- It has relevance for Christians and the church in all times and in all places.
- The idealist doesn't approach the visions as sequential or chronological, hence no need for the complex charts. The symbolism has a looser interpretation which gives comfort and encouragement to persecuted Christians.

e. Eclectic Idealist View

- The eclectic idealist view, while leaning more to the Idealist end, recognizes that there are valid elements and merits in all of the approaches and draws from the strengths of each of the views.
- This is perhaps the safest and best approach.
- This is the approach we will take during our series and I trust you will see the merits of it.

2. Symbolic or Literal?

- Revelation is packed with symbols, numbers, colors, and references to creatures.
- Numbers, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 24, 144, 666, 1,000, 12,000, 144,000 / 42 months or 1260 days, 5 months
- Colors, White, red, scarlet, green, purple, black, pale
- Gems/Precious Stones: jasper, emerald, sapphire, Topaz to name a few.
- Symbols, lamp stands, scrolls, trumpets, seals, bowls, books, four horsemen, scales, winepress, crows, pillars, thrones, altar, incense.
- Climate, earthly heavenly features: clouds, water, seas, rivers, thunder, lightning, trees, mountains, sun, stars, rainbow, lake of fire, floods, earthquakes.
- Creatures: four living creatures, lamb that looks like he was slain with seven eyes, beast from the sea, dragon, serpent, horses, sheep, bear, scorpion, lion, eagle
- Any there are many others. Places, plants, foods, medicines, spices, precious metals, and people.

- In light of this, how should we interpret Revelation, symbolically or literally?
- GK Beale in his commentary suggests that the old dictum of interpreting Revelation literally unless forced to interpret symbolically, should be reversed.
- He argues we should interpret symbolically unless we are forced to interpret literally.
- We are to expect that the main means of divine revelation in the book are symbolic.
- John alludes to Daniel 2 in the opening lines of Revelation as we have seen. Did Daniel instruct the king to take these things literally?
- So we will read the book symbolically unless we need to take it literally.
- That will change you the way you interpret Revelation.
- This is why we need to read and understand the OT!
- To understand what all of these symbols and numbers and other things mean we need to go back to the OT.
- Scholars believe there are about 278 references to OT passages in 404 verses.
- And there are some 500 allusions to the OT in the entire book.
- Without knowing the OT and referring back to the OT we will be completely lost in understanding the meaning of these things in Revelation.
- Warren Austin Gage, a bible scholar who has done tremendous research in Revelation, refers to these callbacks to the OT as reversals of time as we go forward in the book.
- Rev. 1 / 7 lampstands, reminds us of temple of Solomon (1Kings7-8).
- Rev. 4-5 Lion of Judah, takes us back to David (2 Sam 5).
- Rev. 9-11 trumpets sound and great city Babylon falls, reminds us of Jericho's fall (Joshua 6).
- Rev. 15 people of God sing the Song of Moses as they escape the beast of the sea, reminds us of Exodus 15 and the Red Sea.

- Rev. 20 judgment poured out on all the wicked, takes us back to Gen. 7 and the flood.
- Rev. 21-22 with the tree of life, calls us back to the garden in Gen. 2 with the tree of life.
- We need the OT to help us make sense of the visions and interpret Revelation faithfully to draw encouragement and application.
- Before looking forward in Revelation, we must look back to the OT.

3. Understanding the Meaning of the Visions

- The two main views of the five today are the Futurist and the Idealist.
- The Futurist understand that the overall meaning of the visions is that they are to be seen as chronological and successive events. That is how the visions unfold.
- With the exception of the letters which are seen as events that have already taken place...
- The seals prepare the way for the trumpets and bowl judgments.
- One comes after the other in the order that the prophecy is written.
- The Idealist or Eclectic Idealist sees the various series of judgments as parallel or cyclical descriptions of the same events.
- This is known as recapitulation.
- The pattern repeats within each series.
- So the book is a series of parallel visions in which God expresses the same truths in different ways.
- Daniel has four visions surrounding the four great world empires, but the visions are different because they are from different points of view. The visions in Revelation are like that.
- I believe that the recapitulation or parallel view is the best way to understand and explain the visions rather than trying to read them chronologically.
- It offers us views of events that have happened throughout the entire history of the church, and continue to happen, but seen from different vantage points.
- The idealist sees that John wrote the visions down in the order he saw them but that doesn't necessarily equate to a historical chronological order of how these events will happen.

- Parallel visions are being disclosed conveying the same truths from different vantage points.
- The visions intensify with each new view presented until they reach the climax of the final battle where Jesus wins and vanquishes his enemy.
- This book is meant to be an encouragement to believers in every church age to be faithful to Christ even as they are experiencing suffering and persecution and to heed the warnings against turning from Christ.
- The book contains promises given to the conquerors and unfolds a powerful vision of the glory to come and the final victory they will experience, if they remain faithful.
- The way this is conveyed is important as it is done in seven parallel cycles, based on the symbolic use of the number 7, which is everywhere in Revelation.
- As we make our way through the book and the visions, this will start to make sense to you.

Seven Parallel Cycles of Symbolic Visions

1. Vision of Christ and the Seven Churches (1:9 - 3:22)

Ends with a call to be faithful to the end (Judgment Day)

2. The Lamb and the Scroll with its Seven Seals (4:1 - 8:1)

Cycle ends at Judgment Day

3. Seven Angels with Seven Trumpets (8:2 - 11:19)

Cycle ends at Judgment Day

4. War with the Persecuting Dragon (12:1 - 14:20)

Cycle ends at Judgment Day

5. Seven Bowls of God's Wrath (15:1 - 16:21)

Cycle ends at Judgment Day

6. The Fall of Babylon and Church's Vindication (17:1 - 19:21)

Cycle ends at Judgment Day

7. The Last Judgment and the Reign of the Saints (20:1 - 22:5)

- The Visions are there to encourage us to be press on, to fight the good fight, to wage spiritual warfare, to endure in the face of

persecution and personal struggles, knowing that Jesus wins and the Church wins!

CONCLUSION

V3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

- We cannot afford to avoid studying this precious book just because it's more difficult to understand.
- We need to read it and study it with a desire to know what Jesus has revealed to us.
- We need to read with a desire to believe what Jesus has revealed to us.
- We need to read and study it with every intention of obeying the revealed will of God for us that is contained in it.
- The blessing is pronounced only upon those *“keep what is written in it.”*
- The blessing is for those who look forward with expectant hope to the day when this world will pass away, when Christ will come in the fullness of his glory, and we will reign forever with the King of kings and Lord of lords.
- May you find a blessing as you read, hear and keep the words of the revelation of Jesus Christ.