

# Revelation – Part 1 Introduction | 4/23/17

- Introduction
  - Today will be an introductory to the Book of Revelation.
    - This Book more so than all the others of the Bible needs an extremely long introduction before we begin to study it.
    - The purpose of this introduction will be to prepare us to study it, to gain some basic understand of its structure and the different perspectives on how to approach it in study.
  - There WILL be differences of opinion, must respect others points of view.
  - Will present different perspectives and points of view.
    - Revelation is a book where you can consult 5 different very respected scholars and yet they will disagree as to the meaning and approach in several places.
  - In several cases I cannot be dogmatic and can only speculate on the true meaning
    - We can be dogmatic about the necessity of faith for salvation.
    - We cannot be dogmatic about the meaning of several of the symbols or with some things related to timing of the rapture and the tribulation.
- **What is the first thing that comes to mind with you think of the Book of Revelation?**
- **Why is Revelation so appealing to Christians?**
- **What do you hope to learn from this study on the Book of Revelation?**
- The overall theme of Revelation can be portrayed as the return of Jesus Christ to defeat evil and establish His reign. **It is a book of victory.**
  - Throughout the Bible God's people are trampled, beaten and bruised.
  - Jesus is crucified.
  - But God has revealed to us that in the end, all is made right and that justice prevails.
- Revelation is a key book that brings a close to the Scriptures.
  - This Book ties all the Scriptures beginning in Genesis and brings it all to a close.
  - Without it there would be a lot of unanswered questions (of course its answers at times also spawn "more questions").
- The name of the Book of Revelation
  - The name of the book is "Revelation" not "Revelation's"
  - **Look at the title of "Revelation" in your Bible, what does it say?**
  - Depending on your translation the name varies if it is the Revelation of John, to John or the Revelation of Jesus Christ.
    - **However, verse 1 tells us precisely that this is "the revelation of Jesus Christ"**
      - Revelation 1:1
  - The Words that are written here were given by Jesus to be written down.
- To reveal or uncover Jesus Christ is the primary purpose of the book of Revelation.
  - The Greek word for Revelation is "Apokalypsis", which means to uncover or reveal.
    - The Greek word "Apokalypsis" is where we get our English word apocalypse.
      - Today if you hear that word we instantly think of chaos and destruction or the end of mankind.
    - However, the true meaning is "an uncovering" or "an unveiling".
      - It is to reveal something or someone that was once hidden.
  - **So, in the case of the Book of Revelation it means to reveal to us Jesus Christ and the truths about Him and what will take place in the future.**

- At times, we think of Revelation primarily as a book of prophecy and future events, which it does do.
  - However, its primary purpose to reveal to us in full Jesus Christ.
  - **In Revelation Jesus is revealed in as an exalted king as opposed to the one of humility in the New Testament.**
    - One thing we see that is different is that the New Testament shows us Jesus in the ultimate form of humility and lowliness.
    - He never exalted Himself above anyone.
    - **In Revelation, we see Jesus for who He truly is, we see Him sitting on throne, who rules all and overcame all.**
  - We see the glorified Christ in heaven and the fulfillment of His sovereign purpose.
  - Revelation depicts Jesus as:
    - The faithful witness and ruler of kings – 1:5
    - The Alpha and the Omega – 1:8
    - The Almighty – 1:8
    - Son of man -1:13
    - He was dead, but was resurrected and lives – 1:18
    - Son of God – 2:18
    - The Messiah who will live forever – 11:15
    - Word of God – 19:13
- Theologically its primary focus is eschatology (future events)
  - Eschatology means it focuses on future events that have not yet taken place, but are prophesied in Scripture.
    - The power and demise of the antichrist.
    - Christ's 1000-year earthly kingdom.
    - The 2<sup>nd</sup>-coming of Jesus
    - The tribulation
    - Resurrection of the dead
    - Final judgment
  - These are events that God has chosen to tell us about, although cryptically in many cases.
  - **These future events are also referred to as apocalyptic literature.**
    - This term simply means it is Scripture whose purpose was to uncover or reveal future events that met certain criteria.
      - The recorder received God's truths in a vision.
      - Makes use of symbols or signs.
      - Usually concerns the future of God's people.
      - Was written in an ordinary form, in that it wasn't poetic or some other structure.
    - **Most of Revelation and portions of Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah are also considered apocalyptic literature.**
- Relationship with the Book of Daniel
  - The Book of Revelation is not the only book of prophecy in Scripture.
  - Daniel also spoke of the end times and several things are paralleled between the two.
  - I will bring those into light as we go through this study.
- What significant events are covered?
  - **What are the significant events that are covered in Revelation?**
  - There are too many events to list but here are a few:
    - Return of Christ (2<sup>nd</sup> coming), antichrist, tribulation, final judgment etc.,
- Revelation gives us a glimpse into throne room of God and heaven.

- God's throne room
  - Revelation 4:1-11
- Heaven
  - Revelation 21:2-4, 10-27
- Author and Date
  - The author of this Book is provided to us in the very first verse.
    - Obviously, the true author is God, but the human author is John.
    - This is the same John who gave us the Gospel of John and the 3 epistles that bear his name.
    - What about the differences in the writing style?
      - One of the main arguments or concerns that scholars have with John is the differences in the style of the writings.
        - However, this argument is quite insignificant and several things point to it being John.
      - John being the human author has far ranging support which includes all the early church fathers and theologians like Irenaeus, Justin Martyr and Tertullian.
      - Only the Gospel of John and Revelation refer to Jesus as the logos (Greek) or "the word".
        - John 1:1 and Revelation 19:13
      - Only the Gospel of John and Revelation refer to Jesus as the Lamb
        - Revelations 5:6, 8 and John 1:29
  - The date of the writing of Revelation was around A.D. 95.
    - The vast majority of scholars and historians all put the date at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century during the reign of Emperor Domitian. However, there are some who believe it was some 30 years earlier during the reign of Nero in the 60's.
    - This date is backed up again by the church and other important early figures in church history like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Jerome and Eusebius (3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century) who was the earliest major church historian.
- Circumstances around the writing of Revelation
  - John wrote this Book on the island of Patmos in the year A.D. 95.
    - This island is in the Aegean Sea southwest of Ephesus.
  - **Why do you think John was on this island in the first place?**
  - He didn't come there because he went on vacation, instead he was exiled there because of his Faith.
    - Revelation 1:9
      - "I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.
  - Tradition has it that the Roman emperor Domitian himself exiled John to the island as he had made it a priority to persecute Christians.
    - He proclaimed himself divine and forced his subjects to call him "Lord God"
    - He even had members of his own family killed because of their faith.
    - So, John would have been a prime target to have removed.
  - **This exile, however evil in its intent, was used for a divine purpose.**
    - **John received instruction from God that would reveal Jesus Christ and the future of the world.**
    - **It's interesting that due to exile both John and Paul had major writings of Scripture.**
- How was the Book of Revelation given to John?

- There were several ways in which God spoke and gave the message to John.
  - Through an angel
    - According to the first couple of verses the message came from God, was given to the Son who then shared it with John through “his angel”. – Revelation 1:1-2
    - Revelation 17:1, 19:9-10
  - Christ conveyed it Himself – Revelation 1:10
  - There was an elder – Revelation 7:13
  - A voice from heaven – Revelations 10:4
- Regardless of the messenger the Word was given to John just as God desired and written down for us so that even us being almost 2000 years removed can still read God’s message.
- John the last apostle, wrote the last Book of the last written Word of God.
  - The word “last” or “final” describes the Book of Revelation and the apostle John in many ways.
  - John was the last of the apostles, his death signified their end.
  - The Book of Revelation is the last written Word that God gave to man.
    - Jesus having ascended into Heaven some 60 years prior has given His last written Word to the Apostle John to record in Scripture.
    - These are His last words to be given to us as written Scripture, they are very important indeed.
  - The Book of Revelation is the last book of the Bible
    - This wasn’t by chance that it was put in the end, but it complements and puts a divine finish to the work of the Bible that began in Genesis.
- Difficulties in studying Revelation
  - Revelation is certainly not the easiest or most straightforward book in the Bible. However, what is recorded in this Book is of a divine purpose and it has been written exactly as God intended.
  - Interpretive challenges
    - There are 4 approaches that are taken to study Revelation.
    - Preterist
      - According to this approach all the events in Revelations have already occurred, they deny the prophetic word of the Scripture.
      - That Revelations describe 1<sup>st</sup> century conflict, not things that will happen in the future.
        - The book and prophecies were fulfilled in A.D. 70 with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.
      - That all the end times events (Christs second coming, tribulation etc.) has already happened.
    - Historicist
      - The historicist will view Revelation as a continuous historical interpretation.
      - **That all the events and symbols in Revelation can be tied so specific events in history.**
        - **I would note that its common for people to hold to a partial position in this without being a full historicist.**
      - This view also hold that most of the events in Revelations have already taken place.
      - Examples of history applied to Revelation for the historicist:
        - The seven churches are a representation of the 7 ages of the church throughout history with the 7<sup>th</sup> church (Laodicia) representing the modern day luke-warm church.

- The seals in chapters 4-7 represent the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.
- The little scroll in chapter 10 is a picture of the protestant reformation.
- The beasts of chapters 12 and 13 represent Catholicism and the papacy.
  - This was actually very popular with the reformers during the protestant reformation. They viewed the pope as the anti-Christ.
- This view has produced thousands of varying interpretations that are different with each generation.
  - This is also where you get a lot of the “predictions” as to the coming of Christ.
- **Christians should be cautious when we attempt to map Revelation with current events.**
  - **Not that it isn’t possible or wrong of course, but that if we are not careful we can get to overwhelmed trying to fit in all of Revelation to our current lifetime.**
  - This has been done time and time again over the centuries just with different “current events”.
- Idealist
  - The idealist interprets Revelation as a timeless struggle between good and evil.
  - There are no historical illusions or future prophecy.
  - Its purpose is to simply teach spiritual truth.
- Futurist
  - **The futurist interprets the majority of Revelation, as prophecy regarding future events.**
  - That everything from chapter 4 (or 6) to 22 are future events that will take place here on the earthly stage.
    - **Of course, there are those who are a mix of futurist and historicists who believe that some of these have begun but not all.**
    - **This is based off Revelation 1:19**
      - **“Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.**
    - The things that you have seen Revelation 1:1-20
    - The things which are Revelation 2:1-3:22
    - The things which will take place after these things – Revelation 4:1-22:21
  - This includes the primary events like the tribulation, second coming of Christ etc.,)
  - The futurist also holds to a more literal interpretation of Revelation, but also acknowledging the symbols.
    - So, when time frames are given like years they are quite literal.
      - Revelation 11:3
        - “And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.
    - But the futurist also understands the appropriate use of symbols as in this passage Jesus doesn’t have a literal “sword” or “rod of iron” coming out of His mouth.
      - Revelation 11:15

- “From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.”
    - **Seeing these various ways to approach Revelation, do you see how there are so many differences in opinion and why there isn’t a universal agreement on its meaning?**
  - When is the rapture? Is it before the tribulation (pretribulationism)? Or is it after (posttribulationism)? Or is it midtribulationism or perhaps partial rapture?
    - There are varying beliefs on this and I will simply line out the differences between them.
    - First, we need to define what the rapture and tribulation are.
    - Rapture
      - The rapture is an event in which the Christians will be caught up into the heavens with Jesus and removed from this world, being spared the experience of physical death.
      - This is portrayed most clearly in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
        - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
      - All Christians agree this will take place, they just disagree on which side of the tribulation it will occur.
    - Tribulation
      - Tribulation is the 7-year time in which the wrath of God will pour upon the world.
      - This is the 7 years that precedes the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ.
      - His divine wrath and judgment is portrayed as seals, trumpets, and bowls in chapters 6-19.
      - The “Great Tribulation” refers to the latter half (Matthew 24:21)
        - Matthew 24:21
          - “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.”
      - This is the same period described in Daniel
        - Daniel 9:24
          - “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.
      - **The question all do not agree on is if the Christian will be there during this time.**
      - **What do you think the tribulation will be like?**
    - Pretribulationism –
      - The church (Christians) will be taken up in the rapture before the tribulation.
      - The tribulation will last for 7 years and at the conclusion Christ will return (2<sup>nd</sup> coming).
      - Many passages of Scripture are used to support this view. The basis is that God said He would not allow His children to endure this period.
        - Revelation 3:10
          - “Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.”
        - 1 Thessalonians 5:9

- “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,”
  - Posttribulationism
    - The church (Christians) will be present on earth during the 7 years of tribulation.
    - The rapture and the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ are a single event.
      - One of the reasons people support this view is because it seems that most of the verses related to His rapture and return seem to be interchangeable. So its assumed they are likely the same event or happen at the same time.
    - Revelation 3:10 applies after the tribulation.
  - Midtribulationism
    - This view cuts the 7 years of tribulation in half and puts the rapture in the middle, prior to the great tribulation.
    - This view accepts a portion of both views in that Christians will endure some of the tribulation but be raptures prior to the great tribulation.
  - Partial rapturism
    - Only Christians who possess sufficient spirituality and are watching for the coming of Christ will be raptured at the beginning of the tribulation.
  - **What do you think of these different views and the reasons for them or against them?**
- Revelation uses a great deal of symbolism
  - **Why do you think there is so much symbolism used in this book?**
  - While we don’t know exactly why God chose to use so much symbolism, only that it has its purpose.
    - Examples of symbols:
      - The seven stars, bowls and lampstands.
      - The beast, harlot, dragon and the lamb.
    - In some cases, we are given their meaning
      - Revelations 1:20
        - “As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.
    - In others, there is no meaning – “White Stone”
      - Revelations 2:17
        - “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.”
  - The symbolism greatly interlaces with the Old Testament,
    - There are almost 300 references throughout the Book of Revelation.
      - Tree of life, Babylon, Israel and Manna as examples.
      - So yes, the Old Testament is important
  - The symbols withstand time.
    - The symbols don’t become any less effective or lose their meaning with time.
    - Centuries can pass and yet they still retain their significance.
  - **They convey a truth without being specific.**
    - **The beast, the harlot, Babylon and the “mark of the beast” are all used to convey a truth, but they do not tell us specifically who they are.**

- This is of course where we run into the speculation on who or what they might be.
- While we would like to have the specifics, God chose to use symbols.
- **The use of symbols to guard the specifics.**
  - One theory that is often stated is that it was written with symbols so that when Rome (who was persecuting the church) saw the letters that they wouldn't understand them or think them to be dangerous.
    - This is certainly plausible and if that was the intent, it was God who decided this and not a human decision.
    - It would also make it more likely that only Christians who knew the Old Testament could begin to understand Revelation since many of the terms require that knowledge as a perquisite.
  - **It could also be to guard the specifics from the believers.**
    - **Perhaps God wanted us to be aware of how the end would come, but He did not desire for us to know the specifics.**
    - This would fall in line with past promises in Scripture, like when God promised Abraham he would be a father of many nations, He didn't give Abraham the details only that it would happen.
    - Jesus was clear that we are not supposed to know the day or time in which He will return.
      - Matthew 24:36
        - “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”
- We must use caution with the symbols and to not let our minds get carried away.
  - It is common for people to read into current events and make inferences with current events. That's OK, but we must be careful not to take that too far.
- Revelation is God's final word of Scripture for the Christian. While it is difficult to study, and comprehend, we should not be scared or shy away from reading and studying these truths. God gave them to us for a divine purpose and we must open our hearts and minds to it.