

REVELATION

Lesson 1

Revelation 1

This study, perhaps the most exciting book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, has a specific message for us “the church” - and it’s sent direct to us from Christ (See Rev 1:1 and Rev 22:16). It also has a powerful message of judgment for the lost Gentile world and a message of hope and redemption for the God’s chosen and beloved people the Jews.

There are two primary reasons we should study this book - first, because it is an important end time book sent to us by Jesus himself, and second because it is the only Bible book promising a blessing if it’s read and heard - Rev 1:3. For these reasons we need to study it to see what Jesus is telling us individually, and as a Church....it will provide each of us with great insight into Jesus our Savior, what our walk with Him ought to be like, and what the business of the “Church” really is..... I really believe it will “reveal” things to you about you, your walk, your Church, and your Savior that you never knew before.

As you will quickly see in reading Revelation it is a prophetic book, meaning it tells us about events yet to come at some future point in time. As we consider this from a literary sense this means it will be full of symbols and symbolic meaning and therefore difficult to interpret. Why is it that prophecy, especially this book, is full of so many symbols?

Consider for a moment that you spend a long vacation on a beautiful beach in some far way area of the Caribbean. Golden sand, turquoise blue water, and at night the moon glistens off the ocean spreading shining diamonds across the surface of the sea. Now return home and find your friend who’s been blind from birth and describe that scene to them - how will tell him about the color turquoise blue, or the diamond studded ocean or the golden beach when they’ve never seen any light or color?

Or, consider you could go back in time two thousand years and could meet the Apostles as they prepared for a Passover meal. Now, tell them about a microwave oven...and oh while you’re at it tell them that some day people will be talking to one another at the same time while they’re in different continents using a cell phone or listening to their iPod. Better yet, go back another two thousand years and see if Abraham understands that you call yourself a “Christian”? A new name that no man had ever heard until Christ died on the Cross... hmmm I think there’s something about people getting “a new name” in the book of Revelation, I wonder what that means...

You begin to see that the only way these things can be communicated is by relating to the reality of the person you’re trying to communicate with and through symbols of things they can relate to. Further complicating things are attempts at describing geo-political shifts, political parties rising and fallen, alliances, treaties, agendas, the collapse of institutional organizations and the creation of new ones all thousands of year out in the future. Try, for instance to describe the rise and power of the Soviet Union to the Roman Soldiers of Christ’s day.

Symbols are the primary means of communication in prophecy as you can see. Now the real challenge is correctly interpreting the meaning of symbols, particularly when the symbol is something well known to the original hearers or readers of the prophecy but not to us today. There are two basic approaches to the interpretation of symbols and prophetic literature. They are, allegorical and literal. Let’s look for a moment at what each means and how they’re used.

Allegorical means that a story or message is read believing that it actually represents something else. For example, the allegorical approach to studying the new city of Jerusalem that will come down from heaven. In this story we are told that the city has square dimensions, approximately 1,500 miles in all directions, as though it were a cube or square. The allegorical approach says this is Christ describing God’s complete justice, balanced on all sides and perfect in every sense, for example but not describing a real city. Or consider the reign of Christ in Revelation described in terms of Christ setting up his throne and reigning over the whole earth for a thousand years, this is referred to as the “Millennial Reign” of Christ. Allegorically then we could say this is not

a physical reign but represents Christ's current kingdom since the day of His ascension into heaven he now rules over the earth, and that the 1,000 years is only symbolic of his long reign.

If we take the "literal" approach to interpreting prophecy this means we are going to take a look of the type of literature that it is, the context in which it was written, the grammatical structure of the text we're interpreting, and the history of the time in which it was written. Further, to be consistent so that everyone interprets the same passages the same way we will use the Bible as our primary source and will seek out the meanings of the symbols from within scripture, rather than assigning our own assumptions, biases or suppositions. For example then, we would interpret the new city of Jerusalem as a literal city that physically comes down from heaven. We'll interpret the fact it's 1,500 miles in each direction as merely that, dimensions, which provide us an idea of the size and glory of it. For instance, consider today that when the Space Shuttle is in space it travels between 800 and 1,000 miles above earth. The new city of Jerusalem will be 1,500 miles high! What a glorious city that will be. We'll also consider that Christ will return and set up a literal kingdom for 1,000 years, at the end of which Satan and all of his followers will be completely defeated and cast forever into the lake of fire.

With this as a backdrop you may want to begin a notebook which will list each symbol we'll find and what they're meaning is, and list the scripture reference we use to define it. For a little challenge this week, here's one to start your list – The Olive Tree – it represents the nation of Israel...can you find that meaning in the New Testament, how do I know that's what it means, and can you figure out why it's important we know this symbol? I'll be interested in seeing your answer.

For this week, let's begin our study of Revelation by looking at Chapter 1.

Read chapter one then answer the following:

1. What is the exact title of this book of the Bible?
2. Who is being revealed? (See verse 1.) How many revelations does the first verse say are contained in this book?
3. Who is providing this revelation or "unveiling" to John, and where did the revelation come from? (verse 1)
4. What do verses 1:3 and 22:16 tell us about the readers and hearers of this book? Based on these two verses is this a book we should be studying, or is this book to be left sealed until Christ returns?
5. Can you find the three parts of the Trinity in Verses 1:4-5?

6. Read Rev 1:1-20. List each of things these verses tells us Christ "is" (for example, "The Alpha and Omega").

7. What does Christ mean when he says he's "the firstborn of the dead"? (verse 5)

8. What are the three things John was told to write and are therefore contained in this book? (verse 19)

9. Think for a moment - if this is the "revelation" or revealing of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah - who is he being revealed to? It can't be the Church and the saved that have put their faith, trust, and hope in him, as they already accept him as the Messiah...so who is Christ being "revealed" to in this book?

I encourage you to read this book carefully and prayerfully and to reflect on it. While a difficult book to simply read through it is a very powerful book which reveals a lot to us. You will find it a study that greatly strengthens your faith and will provide you a peace that passes all understanding as Christ reveals to us His Second Coming.

Yours in Christ

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