

CONCERNING THE WAY

May 26, 2009

LESSON 59: THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST



The book of Revelation - Introduction

Welcome to our first study on the book of Revelation. With this book, we reach the pinnacle of Bible Prophecy. This book builds on what has been revealed before and gives us insight on the completion of God's plan for human history. What most people don't understand is that much of Revelation is drawn from the other books of the Bible. They read Revelation and struggle to figure out what is meant by all these strange things that are written there. Most give it up as a book that is just too enigmatic, and just can't be understood with any degree of confidence.

However, if you have been with me from the beginning of our studies, Revelation will not be a mystery to you. We have studied Genesis, Exodus, Samuel, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Matthew 24, and the doctrine of the Rapture, and we are now prepared to understand the final book in the Bible.

The book of Revelation was written by the apostle John while living on the island of Patmos, exiled by the Roman emperor Domitian. There God gave him this vision of the end times. He also wrote the Gospel of John at about the same time, about 95 AD. There are liberal scholars and preterists who try to theorize that Revelation was written in the 60's so that they can say that these prophecies were all fulfilled in the year 70. However, the internal and external evidence shows that it was written in the mid-90s, and also, you cannot fit most of these prophecies anywhere in the past without severely torturing and allegorizing the text.

John also wrote the books of 1, 2nd, and 3rd John. He is generally regarded as a genius in the way that he wrote. He could put a thirty minute teaching into one single verse. Every single verse in the Gospel of John is powerful. Much of Revelation is the same way. The book of Revelation and the Gospel of John were written late in John's life, and there are grammatical indications of this in these writings.

Revelation has hundreds of direct or indirect quotes from the rest of the Bible. It's as if the Holy Spirit wanted to take all the revelations of the end times that He had already given, put them in a book, and give further details. John incorporates all these quotes from the rest of the Bible into a cohesive whole, and it is perfect.

Revelation 1:19 gives the simple outline for the book.

- A. **The things which you have seen** - (the past) - Chapter 1 - The introduction and description of the resurrected Christ. John sees Jesus in His glory.
- B. **The things which are** - (the present) - Chapter 2-3 - letters to the churches in John's day
- C. **The things which will take place after these things** (the future) - Chapter 4 to the end of the book

Comments about studying the book

- Revelation is foundational to a complete understanding of the Bible. It is a bookend along with the *Book*

of *Genesis*. Much of what falls apart in *Genesis* is restored in *Revelation*.

- The most serious attacks on *Revelation* come from within. We expect those who do not believe the Bible to attack the *Book of Revelation*. But the most serious attacks come from distortions of its message from within the Christian community.
- Many are uncomfortable with various teachings found in the book and want to avoid these realities:
 - 1) a restoration and future for the Jewish nation;
 - 2) a literal kingdom on earth with Jesus reigning from Jerusalem;
 - 3) a time of unparalleled upheaval and destruction on the earth.
- Many people think the *Book of Revelation* is obscure and hard to understand. Is it meant to be that way?
- The Bible is written to reveal to those with an ear to hear, but also to hide or obscure truth from those with hard hearts. Matthew 11:25-26; Matthew 13:11-15
- One Text, Many Interpretations - The difficulty is not so much with the text itself, but with the variety of interpretations which are put upon the text.
- Two extremes to avoid: 1) everything written applies exclusively to *our day*; 2) everything written applies exclusively to *John's day*.
- Focus is Christ - The book is "The revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1). The emphasis and motivation of all revelation is ultimately to reveal Jesus. (John 5:39; Revelation 19:10). If we are looking for something else, our study will be unfruitful and not what God intends!
- Beware of Distractions - The *Book of Revelation* is packed with interesting symbols and events. These aspects can draw our focus away from Jesus and toward a fascination with the horrific events. We are never told to watch for the Antichrist, but always told to watch for "our Lord!"

Purpose of the book

1. To Reveal Christ as God - Christ is immediately and clearly revealed in His deity.
2. To Address the Needs of the Seven Churches - Chapters 2 and 3 address the specific needs of historic churches and by extension, churches of all times and places.
3. To Confirm the Prophecies of the Old Testament - Chapters 4 through 22 confirm that God's program as set forth in the Old Testament will certainly come to pass. It was not abandoned or replaced by the Church Age.
4. To Reveal the Future - this results in:
 - 1) motivating believers to godly living and to watch for Christ;
 - 2) motivating unbelievers to consider their ultimate destiny and that of the earth;
 - 3) revealing the restoration of God's original created order.

Themes of the book:

- **The Sovereignty of God** - God's direct intervention and control of the events of history is a powerful testimony of His sovereignty over creation. His purposes are immutable.
- **The Glorification and Worship of God** - The book is chock-full of scenes of the worship of God in heaven. (4:8-11; 5:8-13; 7:9-12; 11:15; 15:2-4; 16:18; 19:1-8).
- **The Arrival of God's Kingdom on Earth** - This expectation from the Old Testament is confirmed again as real, future event as Christ reigns from Jerusalem upon the throne of David.

- **A Worldwide Revival** - This time of unparalleled persecution and upheaval will bring perhaps the greatest revival of history as many people reject the worship of the Beast and turn to God.

Interpretation of the book of Revelation

The "Golden Rule" of interpretation says that the text is to be "studied in the light of related passages." Interpretation must recognize the interwoven nature of this miraculous book -- evidence of its supernatural design by the Holy Spirit. We must let scripture interpret scripture.

- **Don't forget the fundamentals**

- 1) The Scriptures are inspired (God-breathed, *theopneustos*, (2Timothy 3:16)). Revelation is a supernatural process apart from which the things of God cannot be known. The natural mind cannot produce divine revelation apart from God (2 Peter 1:21).
- 2) The original texts of Scripture are inerrant. In the same way that Jesus is fully God and fully human, but without sin, so the Scriptures were given through human vessels, yet without error.
- 3) The Scriptures are taken at face value as an accurate representation of historical facts.

- Some commentators deny one or more of these evangelical fundamentals in their approach to *The Book of Revelation* or the rest of Scripture.
- Wolves in Sheep's Clothing - those who deny these principles generally won't admit it up front since it is the foundation of historic, orthodox Christianity. Instead of admitting their non-evangelical beliefs openly, it often is only implied in their teachings.

Examples of attitudes which deny the Supernatural nature of Revelation

- Author not Named John - In discussions of authorship, some suggest that the author uses the name John, but is not really named John. This asks us to believe that God set forth divine truth packaged as a lie!
- Genesis as Legend - Some commentators deny the historic reality of Genesis. Since Genesis and Revelation are intimately related, this undermines the historic relevance of Revelation. (This view is known as limited inerrancy).
- Book of Daniel Written After-the-Fact - Some commentators hold that the Book of Daniel was written in the time of the Maccabees (B.C. 168-165) as a devotional work and its prophecy is written after the events happened. (Daniel is foundational to understanding Revelation.)
- John Incorporates Pagan Legends and Apocryphal Themes - John did not simply record the things which he saw in the vision, but carefully crafted a document using his own initiative and incorporated pagan legends and apocryphal themes from extra-biblical sources.

Interpreting Symbols

- Unique Use of Symbols - The *Book of Revelation* is unique in the New Testament because of its heavy use of symbols. How one interprets these symbols has tremendous influence over the meaning one gets from the text.
- Two Extremes of criticism – Enemies of Christianity say the existence of these symbols shows that the book cannot be understood as anything other than a description of the general conflict between

good and evil. Liberal Christians say that it is wild speculation and sensationalism when symbols are interpreted in terms of current events.

- A Denial of Logic - Some say that the symbols indicate the book is not subject to the normal rules of logic and language.
- Motivation for Apocalyptic Genre – Liberal scholars will categorize Revelation as apocalyptic or apocryphal in genre, so they can interpret it based on hidden, mysterious, or unspecified "secondary meanings" under the text itself.

Allegorical Interpretation

- Allegorical Interpretation - Searching for a hidden or secret underlying meaning and unrelated to the more obvious meaning of the text. The literal reading is a sort of code which needs to be deciphered.
- Superior Revelation? - Allegorical interpreters believe they are interpreting on a higher, more "spiritual" plane. Any literal aspect is considered inferior.
- Motivation for Allegorical Interpretation - Arose from a desire to reconcile Old Testament Scriptures with Greek philosophy.
- A Convenient Tool - Provides a convenient way to reinterpret or deny unpopular teachings found within God's Word. If you don't like what the text says, then change its meaning!

Old Testament is the Foundation

- Allusions to Old Testament from Revelation - Swete identifies 278 references to the Old Testament (out of 404 verses). Fruchtenbaum identifies over 500. " [Unlike apocalyptic writings] St. John's... symbols are not obscure ravings hatched from a fevered imagination; they are rooted firmly in the Old Testament (and the reason for their seeming obscurity is that very fact: We have trouble understanding them only because we don't know our Bibles). " – Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*.
- The Sufficiency of Scripture - " But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them* , and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. " (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Meaning of Numbers

- Primary Literal Meaning - Like elsewhere in Scripture, numbers in the *Book of Revelation* have a primary literal meaning. If the text says 1,000 years, it means 1,000 years.
- Secondary Symbolic Meaning - Revelation is unique in the frequency with which it uses numbers that have additional symbolic meaning. You get the symbolic meaning of a number from a study of the use of the number throughout Scripture. The study of these symbolic meanings is known as Biblical Numerology.

Symbolic Meaning of Numbers

- Two: Witness - Example: the two witnesses of Revelation (Revelation 11:3, 10).
- Three: Life, Resurrection, Completeness, the Trinity - Example: the phrase "holy, holy, holy" (Revelation 4:8, Isaiah 6:3), the "unholy trinity" (the beast from the sea Revelation 13:1, the beast from the earth, Revelation 13:11, and the dragon Revelation 13:4).
- Four: the Entire World, the Earth - Example: the four horsemen (Revelation 6:1-8), the four angels standing on the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds of the earth (Revelation 7:1).
- Six: Incompleteness, Man - Example: the number of the beast (Revelation 13:18).
- Seven: Perfection, Completeness - Too many examples to list!
- Twelve: Jewish Tribes, Completeness - Example: the twelve tribes (Revelation 7:5-8; 14:1), the woman's garland of twelve stars (Revelation 12:1).

Interpretive Systems Compared – different ways Revelation is interpreted

Name	Time Period	Revelation Chapters 4-19
Preterism	Past	Describes the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 or the fall of Rome in A.D. 476.
Historicism	Present	Describes major events of Christian history spanning from John's time to the Second Coming of Christ.
Futurism	Future	Describes a future period prior to the Second Coming of Christ.
Idealism	Timeless	Describes spiritual truths. Good will eventually prevail over evil. Readers are encouraged in their current trials.
Ecclectic	Mixed	Typically favors idealism while borrowing some elements from other systems.

All of these systems except futurism must allegorize much of the Bible to make it fit their preconceived ideas.

I believe that futurism is the only system of interpretation that is truly derived from the text. Futurism is the result of understanding the text through the consistent application of the "Golden Rule" of interpretation.

Futurist Interpretation

- Consistent Literal Hermeneutics - Futurism comes from the consistent application of the "Golden Rule" of literal interpretation. " The more literal an interpretation one adopts, the more strongly will he be construed to be a futurist. " -- Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*.
- Revelation Chapters 4-22 Future - All the events described beyond Chapter 3 have yet to occur. No valid fulfillments can be found in history.
- Events are Historic and Global - The events described in Revelation are literal events in real history yet to come. They are not primarily devotional, nor restricted to the region of Rome or the Mediterranean Sea.
- Connection to Prophecy Elsewhere in Scripture - The *Book of Revelation* is not a "head without a body." It is intimately connected with prophetic revelation found elsewhere in Scripture (Daniel's

seventy weeks, Jacob's Trouble, the Great Tribulation).

- Relevancy to All Saints - The book has relevance to the churches at the time of John, but *also for all believers of all ages* because of what it records concerning the ultimate victory of Christ, the consummation of history, and the eventual destiny of both believers and unbelievers.
- View of Early Church - "Variations of this view were held by the earliest expositors, such as Justin Martyr (d. 165), Irenaeus (d. 195), Hippolytus (d. 236), and Victorinus (d. 303)." – Johnson, *Revelation: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

Interpretation Summary

- The Importance of Interpretation - The meaning we get from the text is dependent upon how we interpret the text.
- Departure from 'Normal' Interpretation - Leads always to a wide range of subjective opinion. Confusion and obscurity result. "The Book of Revelation" becomes "The Book of Obscurity."
- Watch for Interpretive Inconsistency - Learn to recognize inconsistency in interpretive approach, both in the teaching of others and in your own studies. Understand the difference between non-literal interpretation and the proper handling of figurative language within the literal framework.
- Golden Rule = Futurism - Consistent application of the Golden Rule of interpretation will produce a futurist understanding.
- Futurism has less Variation - All interpreters differ in their understanding of some details. But futurism has the smallest variation within any one interpretive system.
- God's Word Has a Single Meaning - All systems of interpretation cannot be correct. An eclectic view produces inconsistent logic and interpretation, so it must be incorrect. So we must make a decision! How are we going to read and interpret the text? Let the Golden Rule be your guiding principle!

Acceptance of the Gospel – different views

- How Does God's Kingdom Arrive *on Earth*? – There are conflicting views within Christianity: some expect the message of Christianity to succeed in changing the world; others believe that although many *individuals* will respond, the mass of humanity will reject the message.
- Ushering in a Golden Age? - Will the gospel message preached by the Church eventually convert the world's peoples, social systems, and political processes to Christ? Will this usher in an age of righteousness on the earth to which Christ will return?
- Ultimate Rejection? - Or will the gospel message, after having drawn countless people to saving knowledge of Christ, ultimately be rejected by the mass of humanity causing the direct and dramatic intervention of God in history?

Trouble Ahead

- Jewish Rabbinical Thought - We don't study the rabbis to know the truth, but to know what they understood the Old Testament (*Tanak*) to reveal. They understood that the advent of Messiah (Christ) would be preceded by cataclysmic events. This is not something Christians have just come up with.

- The Pattern of the Past - In each period of time, or *dispensation*, where man has been tested, he has miserably failed. The point of these periods of testing is to prove that man cannot live without God.
 - 1) Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden: the Fall and expulsion.
 - 2) Man outside the garden: the Flood.
 - 3) Noah's family all knew God: the tower of Babel and dispersion.
 - 4) Abraham, Isaac, Jacob called: Israel rejects her Messiah.
 - 5) The church commissioned, the gospel preached: will this period of testing also end in failure?
- What Does the Bible Say? - Many Scripture passages make plain that the arrival of God's kingdom on earth is characterized by conflict and judgment. One example out of many is Psalm 2.

A Kingdom Coming On Earth!

- Denied or Ignored by Many Christians - Much of Christianity either denies (reinterprets) or ignores the Scriptural teaching of the future earthly kingdom of God. Allegorical interpretation along with the reality of a present spiritual kingdom causes earthly passages to be misinterpreted.
- The Lord's Prayer - " Our Father Who Art in Heaven, hallowed by Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. " But how does His will come to be done on earth?

A Dramatic Intervention

- The Kingdom Arrives Dramatically
 - 1) Earth's rulers will reject God and His Christ (Psalm 2).
 - 2) God's kingdom will finally smash all other kingdoms (Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45)
 - 3) Saints will be persecuted until God intervenes (Daniel 7:21-27).
 - 4) Jesus destroys His enemies and stains His garments with blood at His Second Coming (Isaiah 63:1-6; Revelation 19:11-18).
- A Time Like No Other - The arrival of God's Kingdom on earth will be a time of trouble like no other, especially for the Jews (Daniel 12:1-4; Jeremiah 30:3-7; Matthew 24:15-22).
- Scriptural Terms - The most used terms given for this period by Scripture include: "The 70th Week of Daniel" (Daniel 9:27); "The Time of Jacob's Trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7); "The Day of the Lord" (Joel 2:1); "The Great Tribulation" (Matthew 24:21).

Genesis and Revelation - Probationary vs. Eternal World

Genesis (probationary world)	Revelation (eternal world)
Division of light and darkness (Gen. 1:4)	No night there (Rev. 21:25)
Division of land and sea (Gen. 1:10)	No more sea (Rev. 21:1)
Rule of sun and moon (Gen. 1:16)	No need of sun or moon (Rev. 21:23)
First heavens and earth finished (Gen 2:1-3)	New heaven and earth forever (Rev. 21:2)
Man in a prepared garden (Gen. 2:8-9)	Man in a prepared city (Rev. 21:2)
River flowing out of Eden (Gen. 2:10)	River flowing from God's throne (Rev. 22:1)
Tree of life in the midst of the garden (Gen. 2:9)	Tree of life throughout the city (Rev. 22:2)
Gold in the land (Gen. 2:12)	Gold in the city (Rev. 21:21)
Bdellium and the onyx stone (Gen. 2:12)	All kinds of precious stones (Rev. 21:19)
God walking in the garden (Gen. 3:8)	God dwelling with His people (Rev. 21:3)

Bride created for her husband (Gen. 2:21-23)	Bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2)
Man in God's image (Gen. 1:27)	Man in God's presence (Rev. 21:3)
Man on probation (Gen. 2:17)	Man inherits the riches of God (Rev. 21:7)

Summary

- Revelation is Intimately Tied to Previous Biblical Revelation - Understanding related passages and themes is absolutely necessary to understanding Revelation. This is why we've gone through the Old Testament first!
- God's Kingdom *on Earth!* - Although there is currently a "mystery" form of the kingdom where God dwells in the hearts of the saved, the literal earthly kingdom is yet future.
- Trouble Ahead - The kingdom of God will not arrive peacefully or gradually. God will unexpectedly, suddenly, and dramatically intervene in history.
- A Dark Day followed by Light - The "Day of the Lord" is a day of deep darkness and God's wrath (Joel 2:1-2; Amos 5:18-20). But it ushers in the return of Christ and the blessing of His millennial reign on the earth.
- Restoration of Creation - The eternal state includes a new heavens and a new earth in which God's original design of perfect holiness and full fellowship between God and man will be restored.

Next time, Revelation Chapter 1