

Revelation Introduction pt 1
1:1-8

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION?

What comes to mind when “The Book of Revelation” is mentioned?

Here are some words and phrases that are often heard in association with it: the end . . . the rapture . . .

Revelation brought to you by the numbers 7 . 666. And the four horsemen.

OTHER key words or ideas: the antichrist, judgment . . . vengeance . . . the second coming . and the NEW heaven and the New earth.

Interestingly, two of the words in this list most associated with Revelation—rapture and antichrist—do not even appear in Revelation. Some of the most important words in Revelation, such as witness, throne, and lamb, do not come to mind as quickly, yet they are central to Revelation (Michael Gorman Reading Revelation responsibly p. 16)

As we begin, you need to know that I’ll follow what I’ve heard as The Burger King principal, which is attributed to Dr. Richard Pratt – Third Mill Ministries:

- If you try to say everything about a topic every time you say anything, you end up saying nothing at all.

I have no idea why it is called the BK principal, but I like it.

Some of you will be frustrated because I don’t talk about certain things. Some will be frustrated because I talk too much about certain things. I WON’T TRY TO SAY EVERYTHING that could be said about anything.

I want to Acknowledge some key sources now because I’m sure I’ll fail to cite specific authors at different times. – Dennis J. Third Mill, Dr. Robert Rayburn, WM Hendrickson, J. Nelson Kraybill (Apoc and Allegiance et al, Michael Gorman (RRR), Horatius Bonar, Graeme Goldsworthy (The Gospel in Revelation. Richard Bauckham.

As an introduction, let’s start with ch 1:1-8

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from **Him who is and who was and who is to come**, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 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. So it is to be. Amen. 8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

No matter what your degree of familiarity with Revelation, you know we’re in for a long series and an interesting ride. This book is tricky to read and understand. It sparks many debates on various topics.

I HOPE YOU WILL READ ALONG, and I hope that some introductory material will be useful in getting the big picture.

I’ll be the first to admit that Deut 29:29 comes into play...

29 “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

There are some questions to which one must say, “I don’t know the answer.”

Catholic and Protestant churches that use a lectionary for scripture reading during the calendar year often avoid Revelation altogether.

Bruce Metzger rightly says that “no other part of the Bible has provided such a happy hunting ground for all sorts of bizarre and dangerous interpretations.”

The book of Revelation has also inspired such great hymns as “Holy, Holy, Holy, ; Crown Him with Many Crowns, and the Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s Messiah. Visual artists through the centuries have depicted scenes from the book.

Religious, cult, and political leaders have been identified as, or have identified others as, the anti-Christ. EX Ronald Wilson Reagan (666)

As Eugene Peterson observes in commenting on Revelation as a political work, “The gospel of Jesus Christ is more political than anyone imagines, but in a way that no one guesses.”² Reverse Thunder

Revelation is (primarily) good news about Christ, the Lamb of God—who shares God’s throne and who is the key to the past, present, and future—and therefore also about uncompromising faithfulness leading to undying hope, even in the midst of unrelenting evil and oppressive empire. – Gorman RRR 26

With that in mind I want to give you a **CENTRAL KEY TO THE BOOK:**

In Chap 12, after the great dragon is thrown down, there is a loud voice saying...

“Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God, day and night. 11 And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

Revelation is about an eternal hope that fuels undying faithfulness among God’s people, even in the midst of unrelenting evil and oppression.

If you take nothing else away from this series, let your hearts be gripped by the eternal hope that is ours because the sovereign power and grace of God and of Christ, the Lamb who was slain. We’re going to see several interludes before the throne of God as we go through this book. I hope that you will read along, or read ahead, and use those interludes in your private worship.

The test of whether or not we “get” Revelation is NOT knowing the content, but rather it is twofold: Are you worshipping Christ more?

Are you standing firm with an outward WITNESS to a lost world, even in the face of persecution or death?

Now, let’s consider a few thoughts on the type or genre of literature in this book:

1. It is apocalyptic ... What does that mean??

APOCALYPTIC WRITING: SEE Daniel – Dr.Ralph Davis

Scholars have their own problems deciding what makes apocalyptic ‘apocalyptic’, i.e., what special marks a chunk of biblical literature has to have to be dubbed apocalyptic. Roughly, I would say that biblical apocalyptic is a sort of prophecy that seeks to enlighten and encourage a people despised and cast off by the world with a vision of the God who will come to impose HIS kingdom on the wreckage and rebellion of human history – and it communicates this message through the use of wild, scary, imaginative, bizarre and head-scratching imagery.¹

As you read, it will seem bizarre because of the style of literature –

(RRR – Gorman) While Revelation uses symbols, it does NOT mean that the ideas pointed to in the symbols are not real.

The symbols of Revelation are significant because they come from God and reveal Christ. Believe it or not, the book is designed to reveal, not conceal.

2. Revelation is Prophecy

RRR on Revelation as Prophecy – p. 35 It is to be heeded by all who hear.

Since Revelation is a word of prophecy in the biblical tradition, we must take care to understand that its primary purpose is to give words of comfort and challenge to God's people then and now, not to predict the future, and much less to do so with precise detail. Visions of the future, that is, are not an end in themselves but rather a means—both to warn and to comfort. (Gorman)

Richard Bauckham – Prophecy serves 3 functions (Theology of Revelation p. 148-149)

First, there is discernment of the contemporary situation by prophetic insight into God's nature and purpose. Revelation has a concern for exposing the truth of things - both in the churches and in the world - and for revealing how things look from the perspective of God's heavenly rule.

Secondly, there is prediction. In John's vision he sees not only 'what is', but also 'what must take place after this' (1:19; cf. 4:1; 1:1). Essentially, the prediction consists in seeing how God's ultimate purpose for the coming of his universal kingdom relates to the contemporary situation as it is perceived by the prophet. Prophecy as prediction reveals how the contemporary situation must change if God's kingdom is to come. **What it does predict is a period of conflict between the church and the beast, in which the church will bear its prophetic witness to the nations by persevering in its loyalty to the true God even to the point of death.**

12:11 We're not used to this, to this degree. Yet.

Thirdly, prophecy demands of its hearers an appropriate response to its perception of the truth of the contemporary world and its prediction of what the working out of God's purpose must mean for the contemporary world.

3. Revelation is a CIRCULAR PASTORAL LITURGICAL LETTER – RRR p. 39

Revelation is written to those oppressed but also to those who are tempted to compromise and accommodate the culture around them. Revelation is 'resistance literature' in that it teaches the need to resist the false religious and civil religion demands of the age. As such, Revelation is always relevant. Resistance to the spirit of the age comes by a wholehearted worship of the One True God. First commandment faithfulness is the anti-dote to the lure of secular and civil religions of the age. This false religion is anything that seeks to hide or subvert Biblical truth and replace it with a status quo version of the truth. The timeline of human history is filled with individuals and systems of power that have pushed, and are pushing, a man centered view of truth. The statist collectivist impulse is one manifestation of this problem.

From the days of the Roman emperors up to today, those who worship the true king, Jesus, are often viewed as enemies of the spirit of the age. Proclaiming Christ as Lord is seen as a crime against the State.

Acts 17 in Thessalonica – hunting for Paul and Silas...v.6 When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; 7 and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

While just about all scholars identify Babylon with Rome, Rome is not mentioned. This means that there is more in view than just the Roman empire. John targets ALL empires that seek to replace god and His truth with a man-centered view of life. If the “Babylonian shoe fits, then wear it.” Thus Revelation is also a critique of all idolatries and injustices similar to those of Rome, throughout history and into the present. -(Gorman RRR. 46)

John knew that following Christ would be costly for his audience, and he wanted to encourage and comfort them in faithful obedience. His overall message is Christ has won, Christ is winning, and Christ will win, so hang in there.

WHY STUDY Revelation?

Core Christianity – p. 10-12

1. It UNVEILS Christ – the word “apocalypse” means to reveal or unveil. Sadly, most often we think of it in terms of a future disaster to come upon the world. John was given the vision to reveal Christ v5 the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. John wants us to be encouraged and blessed.

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bondservants, Jesus is THE REVEALER, and He is the One who is REVEALED – His true nature is displayed his divinity and humanity, his humiliating suffering, and sovereign command of everyone and everything. Dennis Johnson, Revelation bible study- Core Christianity p. 11

The title suggests that if we don’t read this book, then we’ve missed something about Jesus. He is ‘revealed’ in this book in ways he is not revealed in the Gospels. If your understanding of Jesus doesn’t square with how He is revealed in Revelation, then you need to refresh your view.

NAMES AND TITLES OF JESUS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

1. Jesus (1:1-2, 5, 9; 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10; 20:4; 22:16, 20-21)
2. Christ (Messiah) (1:1-2, 5; 11:15; 12:10; 20:4)
3. The faithful witness (1:5; 3:14)
4. Firstborn of the dead (1:5; see 22:16)
5. Ruler of the kings of the earth (1:5)
6. Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood (1:5)
7. One like a son of man (1:13)
8. The first and the last, and the living one (1:17-18; 2:8)
9. The Son of God (2:18)
10. The Amen, the faithful and true witness (3:14)
11. The Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5)
12. The Root of David (5:5)
13. The Lamb who had been slain (5:6, 9, 12-13; 6:1, 16; 7:9-10, 14, 17; 8:1; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22-23, 27; 22:1, 3)
14. The woman’s male child (12:4-5, 13)
15. Faithful and True (19:11; see 1:5; 3:14)
16. The Word of God (19:13)
17. Lord of lords and King of kings (17:14; 19:16)
18. The Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (22:13; see 1:17-18; 2:8)
19. The root and descendant of David (22:16)
20. The bright morning star (22:16; see 2:28)

Guess who this book is about??? NOT THE BEAST, the dragon, Satan, or the anti-Christ. This book is ABOUT Jesus.

More than any other book, the Jesus of Revelation will push us out of our comfort zone.

Yes, he is the Jesus who walks among the churches, but he is also the Jesus who will vomit you out of His mouth if you are lukewarm. He is coming back to oversee the great wine press of the wrath of God.

EX: Aslan - "Is he safe?" "He's not safe, but He's good."- (Lewis)

He IS SAFE if your name is written in the Book of Life. That is the message that Jesus gives to John to give to the churches.

Revelation was not written TO US but was written FOR US. (Tommy Allen)

The overall message revealed is "Jesus has won, He is winning, He will win."

The **SECOND REASON TO STUDY Revelation is because we are promised a blessing in the reading and hearing of this book AND in heeding the things that are written in it.**

3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

WHO DOESN'T WANT TO BE BLESSED??

The original audience was basically limited to hearing the words because individual copies were rare. What a great opportunity for US TODAY since we have access to read and hear this book ANYTIME. God has given us this book to bless us, NOT CONFUSE US. Please read along and read ahead as this series unfolds.

SEVEN BLESSINGS IN REVELATION

1. 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. (1:3)
2. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" (14:13)
3. Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed! (16:15)
4. Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. (19:9)
5. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! (20:6)
6. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. (22:7)
7. Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. (22:14)

This apocalyptic, prophetic, pastoral letter is for us today so that we might experience blessing now and understand the future blessing for those who know Christ.

One blessing not mentioned in this letter is that of the foretaste of the marriage supper of the Lamb - the Lord's Table. This is a physical representation of ch 1:5-6

To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever.
Amen

As we partake, we remember and celebrate the one who gave Himself for us.