

Introduction

Revelation 1:1-3

The word *revelation* comes from the root word for *apocalypse* and literally means, *to unveil, uncover or make known*. So, the first thing to note is that the book of Revelation was given by God to let us know and understand the future.

Why is this important? Because there are some who say that this is either a sealed book or something that simply cannot be understood. Nothing could be further from the truth! The Lord gave the revelation specifically so we could understand it!

Satan knows that Christians will not only be blessed, but also will be a much more powerful force for the Kingdom of God! Therefore, he does his best to attack and discredit it like much of Scripture in general. As a matter of fact, those who try to discredit the book of Revelation are typically those who also deny many other portions of Scripture as well. Some go so far as to say that the Old Testament should no longer be read at all. If anyone says that Revelation is not understandable or not to be read, please ignore them.

God clearly states that it was given to be understood, and it has now been unveiled for all with eyes to see. God says that the entirety of His Word is profitable and needed to be complete and whole Christians. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, *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.* And ALL includes the book of Revelation.

“What about the interpretation method?” some might ask. “Is it possible to take this book literally with all the symbols and images that are used? Shouldn’t it be taken allegorically or symbolically?” Absolutely not, and here is why:

First of all, anything in the Bible read as allegory or pure symbolism leaves the meaning up to the interpreter. Many different people will interpret things many different ways. If Revelation is left to an allegorical or purely symbolic interpretation, it can mean whatever someone wants it to mean. Then the interpreter is the authority rather than God. And when it comes to the Word of God, only GOD is the true authority.

How then is it possible to interpret this book literally with all its symbols and images? It is important to understand that every symbol and image used in this book did not begin here, but are found elsewhere in the Old Testament with a complete and literal interpretation. Locate these symbols and images in the Old Testament and plug them in where they belong in this study. If you do that, the meanings become clear. That is exactly what the Jews and the early church did when it came to fully understanding this book.

The early church, and especially the Jews, had no trouble at all understanding the book of Revelation because they knew the Old Testament very well. They knew all of the symbols and images and realized that they each had a literal meaning. When applying the literal meanings of the symbols from the Old Testament, it not only becomes understandable, but the literal meaning is then discerned. The closer one stays to the simplicity of what the Scripture says, the closer one is to what the simplicity of what God is saying; because that is how God wrote it.

Apocalyptic writing, using symbols and images, was not unusual in that day, and there were different reasons for employing them. Many believe that since John was on a prison island in the Mediterranean when he wrote, it was a means to get his manuscript past the Roman guards without them realizing it was a coded message for the church. While the Jews and early Church would have known exactly what all the symbols represented, the Romans, not knowing the Old Testament, would have had no idea. Not wanting these officials to stop this letter from getting through (because it would be clearly seen as a threat to the Caesar and his authority), God chose to use an apocalyptic format.

Why was John on a prison island? By this time, Rome had begun its second wave of intense persecution on the church. The first major wave came in the days of Nero, when Paul and many others were put to death, and now the second wave had begun. John, being one of the church's main spokesmen, had been arrested for refusing to declare that Caesar was lord and god. Many of the Caesars actually claimed to be a god, and the one ruling at this time did as well. His name was Caesar Domitian, and he ruled from AD 81-96, taking the name *dominus et deus*, which means *lord and god*.

In order to honor their god, Rome made its citizens pinch incense and offer it on an altar to Caesar. John refused to do that since Jesus alone is Lord and God, and so he was arrested and sentenced to death. According to secular history, John was to be boiled in oil. However, when they attempted to do this, he didn't die because God supernaturally protected him. So, what could they do with a guy they couldn't kill? Send him to the island of Patmos, which was a prison camp, or penal colony, for criminals and political offenders. It was situated off the coast of modern-day Turkey, some 25 miles out in the Mediterranean, and it became a good place to get rid of troublemakers that you didn't or couldn't kill.

It was here that the Lord appeared to John and gave him this book. Just as Genesis is at the beginning of the Bible to show how everything started, Revelation is at the close of the Bible to show how everything is going to end. Remember, if you want answers, always look at the back of the book!

People throughout the ages have desired to know the future, and they still do today. It is amazing that they would so quickly be interested in Nostradamus or some other fortuneteller but not run to the Bible. Why? Nostradamus and others are only partially correct, at best, in their supernatural guesses, while God's Word has proven itself to be 100% accurate throughout the ages. The truth of the matter is, although many want to know the future, they don't want to know the God of the future.

Revelation is broken up into three different sections, and there is an outline in Chapter 1 verse 19: *Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.*

- First, the things which you have seen – the past – (Chapter 1)
- Second, the things which are – that is what was currently happening - (Chapters 2 and 3)
- Third, the things that will happen after this – the future - (Chapters 4-22)

Another thing to note is that the number seven is used in many different places, and it represents completeness in the Scriptures. This speaks of God's completion of His dealing with mankind before His Second Coming and the beginning of a new era with Jesus ruling and reigning on the earth for 1,000 years.

Some other reasons God gave us the book, besides simply showing us the future, were:

- To encourage a suffering church under persecution
- To remind the church of the sovereignty of God
- To rebuke the church in its sin
- To further clarify end times' chronology
- And to remind the church of Jesus' ultimate victory at the end of the age

This book, written in approximately 95 AD, is in many ways more applicable now than in the day John penned it. One thing is for sure, we are much closer to its fulfillment than 2,000 years ago! Clearly that is seen in the signs that surround us today.

In verse one, it says the *Revelation of Jesus Christ*. That would really be the best name for this book. Not only will Jesus reveal the prophetic future, but he will reveal Himself as well. Firstly, because this is the Word of God and John chapter one says that Jesus is the Word; secondly, because Scripture says that Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy. And that is what Revelation is all about: Prophecy. So, Jesus will be known much better after this study.

Notice next where this revelation came from: It was given by the Father to Jesus to reveal! That's exciting! He says that these things must shortly take place. The word is *tachos* and literally means *in a quick way*. John was not saying it was about to happen, but that when it did happen, it would happen quickly. Which means it could be any time. We are right on the cusp of seeing it all take place!

Lastly, he says it was revealed by His angel, who bore witness not only to God's Word but also to the testimony of Jesus, which he saw. So, it came from the Father to Jesus, from Jesus to an angel, and from an angel to John (although, Jesus Himself speaks directly to John during this as well).

John also refers to this book as the *testimony of Jesus Christ*. Kind of neat to think that Jesus has a testimony! As such, it is certainly trustworthy and adds even more credibility to its faithfulness.

Verse three promises a supernatural blessing. Notice he says blessed are those who *read, hear and keep* the things written in it. The word *blessed* is the word: *markarios* and means, *spiritually prosperous and blessed in the highest good*. That's some blessing!

However, there are three things needed to do in order to receive this blessing:

- **Read it** - it means out loud
- **Hear it** - not only means by the ear but with the heart
- **Keep it** - must be done individually

When all three are practiced, God promises a blessing! Let's take Him up on it!

Why does he say to take heed to this book? For the time is near or imminent, which means it may not be happening right now, but it most certainly will happen! This does not seem near at all, considering it has already been a few thousand years, but to God, Who is outside of time, it is upon us! And if it was near 2,000 years ago, how much closer are we today!

The indicators in Revelation show these things are nearly upon us! The prophecies, which were given to indicate how close we really are in *people* years, are now happening, and they were not when this was written. Scripture says it will only get worse before it gets better. Yet we, as followers of Jesus Christ, can rejoice because Jesus has told us what is going to happen, and not only is He in charge, but we are right on track. If He has been 100% accurate up to this point, He will be 100% accurate to the end. The Bible says He is coming again, and we will rule with Him here on the earth for 1,000 years! So you see, no matter how bad it looks right now, we have a great future just ahead! Be encouraged and rejoice in our God!

Things are really crazy on this earth today. The world economy is in shambles, evil nations are obtaining nuclear weapons and making threats against the rest of us, and man obviously doesn't have the answers. Are you encouraged today by what you see going on in the world? You may not be, unless you know the end of the book. But if you know the end of the book, you can rejoice because you know we win!

Group Study and Personal Application Questions:

1. What is the root of the word “revelation” and what is its literal meaning? What does it tell us about God’s purpose for the book?
2. What are some of the reasons people use NOT to read or study Revelation?
3. What literary approach should we take when trying to understand the passages or symbols used in the book?
4. If we read Revelation as being “allegory” or “pure symbolism” who then becomes the interpreter? What does that do to God’s authority?
5. What holds the key to understanding the symbols and imagery of Revelation?
6. When John was exiled on Patmos, what could be a reason he wrote Revelation in an apocalyptic fashion?
7. Even though people are intrigued by the future and want to find out its outcome, they still don’t go to God’s Word to find it. Why is that when we can be assured it is 100% accurate?
8. Revelation is divided into 3 sections. What are they?
9. Besides knowing the future, what are 5 reasons Pastor Mark listed for God giving us Revelation?
10. The early church believed in the imminent return of the Lord, but that was 2,000 years ago. What gives us more reason for His return to happen in our lifetime?
11. V1 – The prophetic future is *what* God reveals, but *who* is also revealed? How?
12. What is meant by the phrase “shortly take place” in Revelation 1:1?
13. V2 – What is significant about the meaning of “the testimony of Jesus Christ”? It also pertains to all of God’s Word.
14. V3 – To some, reading Revelation can be depressing, but that is not God’s intent. He wants us to be blessed. What 3 things can we do to insure that blessing?
15. Why should we take seriously the things that are written in Revelation?
16. Name some things taking place in our world today that give evidence of the soon return of the Lord?

Seeing the world crumbling around us can be fearful and leave one in a state of uncertainty.

- What encouragement can we have in the midst of the world’s chaos if we read, know and hold dear the Revelation of Jesus Christ?