

Revelation – an Overview of the Book

Introduction:

1. Revelation is the last book of the Bible, and according to the thinking of most people, it is the most difficult book of the Bible to understand. Yet it is a very important book.
 - a. The 39 books of the Old Testament and the first 26 books of the New Testament which precede Revelation are books which prepare us for its message.
 - b. Revelation unites the Old Testament and the New Testament in that the teachings of both find their fulfillment in it.
 - c. It is the last message of God to man, the climax of written revelation. It presents the fulfillment of the purposes of God.
 - d. Revelation presents paradise regained in the evening of time – which was lost in the morning of time.
2. Revelation contains a blessing to those who “read,” “hear,” and “keep the things which are written..” Rev. 1:3.
3. Yet a close study of Revelation is generally neglected. Partially because of:
 - a. Preconceived ideas which convince some that little can be learned from it.
 - b. It abounds in figures of speech whose significance can be difficult to properly identify.
4. Its central message, however, implies its importance: Rev. 1:1: “*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him...and he sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John.*”
5. Its nature – Things “*signified,*” Rev. 1:1. Taught by signs, symbols, figurative language.
6. The nature of the figurative language further explored:
 - a. “*The revelation (apokalupsis) of Jesus Christ,*” Rev. 1:1
 - (1) “*Apokalupsis: “an uncovering, prop. A laying bare, making naked...,”* Thayer.
 - (2) An uncovering or unveiling of Jesus Christ in His present glory, and a portrayal of His power to give victory to His faithful followers.
 - b. Apocalyptic language was common in later years of Hebrew history – reflected in such books as Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. Such language appeared in troubling times, times when God’s people were undergoing persecution, and needed encouragement.
 - c. However, the figurative language of apocalyptic language was not the typical figurative language like that of Luke 13:32; John 15:5, etc.; rather it is language used in which real things are used to denote that which is unreal in nature. Cf. four beasts, one like a lion which had eagle’s wings; one like a bear raised up on one side with three ribs in the mouth; one like a leopard with four wings and four heads, and a fourth beast described as “*dreadful and terrible,*” and which also had “*ten horns,*” Daniel 7:3-4,7. This also prefigured the beast “*out of the sea,*” introduced in Revelation 13:1.
7. The theme and the purpose of Revelation set forth in Rev. 17:14.
 - a. Christ is herein set forth as the great Victor and Conqueror. Rev. 1:18; 2:8; 11:15; 12:10-12, etc.
 - b. As Christ overcame, so can His followers, Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21, etc.
8. The date of the writing is difficult to pinpoint with certainty; yet it is an important matter.
 - a. Many believe it was written during the reign of Nero, before the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - b. Perhaps a greater number believe it was written during the persecution of Domitian, around 96 A.D.
9. Revelation was written to the seven churches of Asia, Revelation 1:10,11.
 - a. It dealt with things “*which are, and ...which shall be hereafter,*” Rev. 1:19.

Discussion:

I. Methods of Interpretation (four main methods).

- A. Historical View – holds that Revelation outlines in symbolic form the entire course of religious history, from Pentecost to the return of Christ.
 1. Including the rise of Roman Catholicism, Islam, the Protestant Reformation, etc.
 - a. But if this view is correct, it would have little, if any, value to the ones to whom it was written.
- B. Futurist View – dealing with events at the end of the world.
 1. Those who hold this view tell us the first three chapters applied to the first century, or else the seven churches represent seven stages of church history.
 2. And they tell us that chapters 4-19 relate to occurrences which will transpire in about seven years, which they call “the rapture,” or “the great tribulation.” But this view ignores Rev. 1:1.
- C. Spiritual View – no references to specific events or persons, but only the presentation of great principles which were intended to guide and encourage followers of Christ.

- D. The Preterist View – holds that the symbols of Revelation relate to events of the day in which written.
 - 1. Note: A combination of the Spiritual and Preterist views harmonize with the teachings of the Bible in general, and would make Revelation meaningful to Christian living both then, and now.

II. Brief Outline of Revelation.

- A. Christ among the Seven Golden Candlesticks, Revelation 1-3.
 - 1. The seven candlesticks were the seven churches of Asia, Rev. 1:20.
- B. The Throne Scene and the Loosing of the Seven Seals, Rev. 4-7.
 - 1. God depicted in glory on the throne in heaven with book sealed with seven seals, Rev. 4:1-5:1.
 - 2. Christ hath *“prevailed to open the book and to loose...the seals,”* Rev. 5:5.
 - 3. The opening of six Seals, chapter six.
 - 4. The interlude between the 7th seal and the 7 trumpets (chapter 7 – the saints (spiritual Israel) sealed for their protection, in anticipation of the destruction to come.
 - a. A seal denoted ownership and approval; the Lord knows them that are His, 2 Tim. 2:19!
- C. The Sounding of the Seven Trumpets, Rev. 8-11.
 - 1. The trumpets come under the 7th seal as subordinate points in an outline.
 - 2. The trumpets warned of partial judgments against enemies of God’s people.
- D. Chapter 12 – The Woman, the Dragon (Satan), and the Man Child (Christ).
- E. The Two Beasts (Rev. 13).
 - 1. The Beast out of the Sea – the Roman Empire (vs. 1-10; cf. Daniel 7).
 - a. The dragon gave him His power, Rev. 13:4.
 - 2. The Beast out of the Earth, Rev. 13:11-18.
 - a. Later called *“the false prophet,”* Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10.
- F. More Assurance for the Saints, Chapter 14 – 144,000 redeemed, singing a new song before the throne!
- G. The Seven Bowls of Wrath, chapters 15-16.
 - 1. A progression of thought. Seals reveal, trumpets warn, bowls of wrath punish!
- H. Chapter 17 – another enemy of God’s people, the Great harlot Upon the Beast!
- I. The Fall of the Great Enemies of God and His people, chapters 18-20.
 - 1. The fall of Babylon, the harlot, chapter 18.
 - 2. The judgment of the two beasts, chapter 19.
 - 3. The judgment of Satan, Rev. 20:1-10.
- J. The glorious Destiny of the Redeemed, Rev. 21,22!

III. Lessons from Revelation for Us.

- A. The Lord’s kingdom was in existence in John’s day, Rev. 1:9.
 - 1. Those who look for it to be established when Jesus comes are in error!
- B. Christ dwells among His people, Rev. 1:12-13,20. Cf. Matt. 28:20.
- C. The Lord knows our Works, Rev. 2:2,9,13,19; 3:1,8,15.
 - 1. Regardless of whether they are good or bad, our works cannot escape heaven’s attention!
- D. The prayers of the saints provide sweet odor for God! Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4.
- E. Those who die *“in the Lord”* are *“blessed”* or happy, Rev. 14:13.
 - 1. Consciousness thus survives the death of the body; death is not annihilation!
- F. Judgment day is coming! Rev. 20:12-15.
 - 1. All the dead will stand before God.
 - 2. Those whose names are not found in the book of life will be lost, Rev. 20:15!
- G. Man must not take liberties with the word of God! Rev. 22:18-19.
- H. What was lost in Genesis is regained in Revelation!
 - 1. In Genesis 3 we see Paradise lost, Gen. 3:23; in Rev. 21-22 we see Paradise regained!
 - 2. In Genesis 3:24 we read of man being cut off from the tree of life; in Rev. 22:2 access is again permitted to the tree of life.

Conclusion:

- 1. It is noteworthy that the last chapter pronounces a blessing upon those who *“keep His commandments,”* v. 14 and issues an invitation to *“come,”* v. 17.

--Bobby Witherington, Jan. 11, 2014