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The Mission

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Revelation

Introduction

So turn with me if you would to the Book of Revelation and to chapter one and we'll begin our study tonight through the only book in the Bible, by the way, which is referred to as an apocalyptic book.

And that word apocalypse means to reveal or to discovery or disclose the future. And this last book in the New Testament does just that. It reveals many of the things which will occur with respect to the future state of Christianity.

So look with me if you would to verse 1 of chapter one and we'll read and study together these first three verses. Tonight will be more or less an introduction to the Book of Revelation. And I know you're anxious to get into the meat of it, but in order to understand the things to come, we have to first understand the things which have happened in the past and things that are occurring in the present.

Revelation 1:1, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. 3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Let's pray together.

Now, when we come to the Book of Revelation there are at least three and as many as seven theories of interpretation. I'm going to give you four.

The first one is the preterist interpretation and those who hold to this view believe that all of Revelation has already been fulfilled at sometime in the past. And I'm not going into detail about it because if it were true, there wouldn't even be any need in this book having been included in the Bible.

The next one is the historical view, which says that the fulfillment of Revelation is going on continuously with in the history of the church. In other words it started in John's day and is ongoing in our present day.

The third one is a take off of the historical view and it's called the historical-spiritualist view and it states that the book of Revelation is largely fulfilled but still contains some spiritual lessons for the church today.

And then the last one is the futurist interpretation and the one which most evangelicals, and all premillennialists hold to, and the one which I'll be presenting to you.

Now, there are several things that set this book apart from all other books in the Bible.

1. It is the only prophetic book in the New Testament. There are 17 prophetic books in the Old Testament, but this the only one in the N.T.
2. The Apostle John, who is the writer of this book as well as the writer of John's gospel reaches farther back into eternity past and farther forward into eternity's future than any other writer in the Bible.
3. This is the only book in the Bible that carries with it a special blessing for those who read, hear and practice the things they glean from this book.

4. It is not a sealed book. Daniel was told to seal the book until the end of time, but John is told, in **Revelation 22:10**, **And he said to me, “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.**

5. It is a series of visions expressed with symbols that deal with reality. And the literal interpretation is always the preferred interpretation unless otherwise made clear by the Apostle John.

6. It’s like a great central station where the prophecies from elsewhere in the Bible all come together. Revelation does not originate or begin anything. Rather it consummates and concludes that which has begun elsewhere in Scripture. That’s why knowledge of the rest of the Bible is critical to understand this book. Brother McGhee says that there are over 500 references or allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation and that, of its 404 verses, 278 contain references to the Old Testament. In other words, over half this book depends on our understanding of the Old Testament.

Now, let me reiterate something I mentioned earlier. This book is not entirely symbolic and therefore beyond our understanding. Like any other book, it is written to be interpreted literally. And when a symbol is used , it will be so stated. Also it will be a symbol of reality, and the reality will be more real than the symbol, for the simple reason that John uses symbols to describe reality. And so we just need to let the book say what it wants to say and not try and force it to say something God didn’t mean. Amen?

Now, if you’d like, you can find some really elaborate and complicated charts and outlines of the Book of Revelation, but I want to give you one that’s very simple and broad so as not to confuse you.

Chart on screen.

We start out in chapter 1 on this side of the cross with the glorified Christ. Christ has already ascended and He's now with the Father in heaven.

And then in chapters 2-3, Christ is addressing the churches of Asia Minor, and of course there's plenty of application for us today as well in those admonitions.

And then in chapters 4-5, we see that the church is heaven. This of course after the Rapture of the church, which is when Jesus comes back to just above the earth and we go to Him and meet Him in the air and he takes us to heaven.

In chapters 6-18, we have the Great Tribulation period. And we know that lasts for seven long years.

And then in chapter 19 Christ returns along with the church to establish His kingdom.

And then chapter 20 gives us the millennium or the thousand year reign of Christ on this earth.

After that comes the Great White Throne Judgment, where all unbelievers will be judged once and for all, and then in chapters 21-22, eternity begins. And that's a simple outline of the Book of Revelation.

Chapter 1 is about the past. Chapters 2-3 deal with the present. And chapters 4-22 are prophecies concerning the future.

Chapter one is about the person of Jesus Christ. Chapters 2-3 are about the possession of Jesus Christ which is the church.

And chapters 4-22 are about the program of Jesus Christ as seen in heaven.

Now, as always we need to set the context for what we're about to study.

So the writer we know is the Apostle John and I'm not going to waste a lot of defending that. It actually tells us here in this first verse who this word from God was given to.

Now, the year in which John penned down these words would have been somewhere between 95-96 A.D. during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian.

Now, some hold to the theory that it was written years earlier during the reign of Nero, but that's highly unlikely, because even though both these leaders hated and despised and persecuted Christians, Nero hated them so bad that he would only torture and kill them. There's no record of him ever exiling Christians, he only killed them.

But the emperor Domitian did exile them. In fact, he made a deliberate effort to banish Christian believers from the empire. So from this standpoint, it is much more likely that John was exiled during Domitian's reign.

Another reason for the later date would be the state of the churches pictured in Revelation as compared to the churches pictured by Paul in the 60's and 70's. Revelation pictures the churches as having been in existence for decades. Ephesus had lost its first love, and Sardis was dead. And so there's a stark difference between the churches of Paul's day and the churches in the day of the Revelation. And this too points toward the later date.

And so more than likely the Book of Revelation was written during the nineties versus the sixties.

Now, the Island of Patmos where the Apostle John was exiled was a rocky island located in Aegean Sea. And we know that John wrote from there because he tells us in verse 9.

In chapter 1:9 I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

And so we know that it was from here that John wrote down what he saw.

Now, we also know that since John was born around the same time as Jesus that he would have been somewhere in his mid to late nineties at this time. And since Patmos was a destination for criminals and political prisoners who had been sentenced to hard labor, this was no doubt a great hardship on the Apostle John at his age.

Not only that but it would have been somewhat frightening to be there among all these violent criminals who were allowed to roam freely around the island, though I guess it would have been a fertile place to give out the Gospel!

I read also that they had to provide their own food and shelter and though they were guarded by the Roman soldiers against leaving; they were pretty much on their own; when they weren't toting buckets of rocks as punishment.

It made me think of Alcatraz, which many of you have heard of and probably saw the movie that was filmed there years ago. Alcatraz is a small island off the coast of California near San Francisco and it used to be a military prison, before it was converted to a federal prison. It housed some of the most notorious criminals of our time. Al Capone, better known as

“Scarface”, who was a famous mobster was held there. Also Robert Stroud, you may remember him. He was a famous murderer way back when, and eventually became known as the “Birdman of Alcatraz”, because even though he loved murdering people, he loved birds even more! Go figure.

Now, supposedly Alcatraz was inescapable. And those that tried were either caught, killed, or drowned in the ocean’s current trying to get to the mainland.

Some of you may remember the movie that Clint Eastwood starred in about Alcatraz supposedly depicting a true story. And in that movie, he and some others devised a plan to escape and they slipped out through the air vents and made it outside, then set off across the San Francisco Bay on these inflatable rafts they had fashioned from raincoats.

Well, they were never seen again, and some believe they made it. But at the end of the movie they found pieces of their makeshift life vest, along with a bundle of letters wrapped in rubber, and from that the prison authorities claimed they had drowned.

Well, we’ll probably never know the truth about that, just as we don’t really know what happened to the Apostle John or how his life finally ended. Just like those escapees there's are a lot of speculation from historians about what happened to John, but none have ever been verified.

And so the Island of Patmos, would have been similar in some ways to Alcatraz, but the conditions on Patmos would have been even more harsh and inhumane. I mean you can only imagine having to compete everyday with other hard core criminals for food and shelter, and having to always watch your back and having to perform hard labor at such an old age. No doubt, all that had to have taken a toll on poor John.

But of course, God had allowed it didn't He? And of course He had placed John here or at the very least allowed him to be placed here, for a very special purpose; which was to write down what he saw and heard.

And of course like always, God provided for him. History does tell us that John's friends and followers in Ephesus would send food and other supplies to him and so God protected him and made a way for him to receive what he needed, just like He always does.

Now, another thing about Patmos; that makes it significant, is its insignificance. It's just another example of the way God "chooses to use the foolish things of this world to shame the wise; and how God uses the weak things of the world to shame the strong. And how God chooses the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

And of course those are Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:27–29.

The Island of Patmos had nothing in itself that would draw the attention of the Lord, except that Jesus close friend and faithful servant John was there. It was but a dot in the ocean, compared to the rest of the world, but God! But God saw John there, and then chose to entrust him with these very important prophecies. And even though John was exiled by the world, he was never ever forsaken by God.

Now, be clear, this book is not the book of "Revelations" (plural). And it's not "the Revelation of the Apostle John. It's the revelation of Jesus Christ, as given to Christ by His Father, who then by way of an angel relayed that message to the Apostle John who in turn wrote down what he saw and heard. And so that's what we have in our hands.

Now, as we go through the Book of Revelation, we will see light and darkness. We will see righteousness and unrighteousness and we will see

good and evil op-posing each other. We will also see Jehovah God, the Lamb Christ Jesus, and Satan. We will see men-saved and unsaved. We will study angels-holy and unholy. We will witness the greatest blood bath and the greatest fire this earth has ever known.

And then as we journey through this book, we will see the scenes change—from the present time to eternity, and then from Heaven to earth and back again, and then from the earth to the lake of fire, and from the river of blood, which is 200 miles long, 6 feet deep and ten miles wide; to the appearing of millions of white horses with their riders in the sky!

And then when the final veil is rolled back; God will be victorious. The millennium and the eternal glories of Christ will shine forth. And all things both heaven and earth will be made new.

And then as we move toward the end of the book, we'll witness that new Heaven and that new earth, and we'll see the righteous and holy in heaven in their eternal dwelling places.

And then as we draw even closer to the end, we'll witness the horrors of hell and the lake of fire and those who will spend eternity in this terrible place of torment.

And so let's get started; look at verse 1.

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,

So these very first words in verse 1 clearly reveal to us that these twenty-two chapters we're about to study contain "the Revelation of Jesus Christ". Again, not Revelations plural, but revelation singular about Jesus Christ.

And then notice who gave this revelation! It was given by God Himself. It was given by the Father to the Son. It says God gave Him and that Him refers to Jesus. And so God gave Jesus the revelation of Jesus.

Now, keep in mind, this Jesus who is being revealed, this is the same Jesus from the Gospels but He's not being revealed in the way He was revealed in the Gospels. He's not seen here as that mild and meek Jesus that He was in His first visit to earth.

Here He's unveiled as the Conquering King they were looking for the first time. Here He's not the Savior of the world, He's the judge of the world. Here He's the undisputed King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

So it was given by God the Father to Jesus the Son to pass on down to His servants or bond-slaves He calls them in some translations. And the purpose we're told is so we'll know and understand the things that **"must shortly come to pass."**

And of course the means that Christ would use to convey these things which must shortly come to pass are communicated through an angel. It was an angel who appeared and spoke to the Apostle John and made known this Revelation to him. And though it's most certainly a revelation of the person of Christ, it's also an unveiling of the events which will take place just prior to His second coming to this earth.

And that's what He means by the **"things which must shortly come to pass."**

Just before His death, Jesus' disciples asked Him **"When shall these things be?"** That was in **Mark 13**, to which He replied, **"32 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."**

Now, that was before the ascension, but this after the ascension. And undoubtedly He has that answer now. He's no doubt received that answer now from His Heavenly Father.

And just before the close of the first century of the Church, while at least one of those disciples was still living, God sent an angel to make known to John, and to make known to the churches in Asia this information we have before us concerning that time.

Now, somebody's going to ask. Well, it's been nearly 2500 years since this was written and it says here that these things are going come to pass shortly. It's been longer than shortly has it not?

Well, according to our timeline it has, but not according to God's.

2 Peter 3:8 says, But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

And so just because it may seem like a long time to us, we've got to remember who we're dealing with. It's only been a few days on God's time clock since these words were uttered. So to those of us who are spiritually minded, and who compare spiritual things with spiritual, it's not been a very long time in God's terms.

And then verse 2 says,

2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

Now, this is referring to the Apostle John of course who was the writer of the Book of Revelation. Notice I said writer, not author. The Author of Revelation is the Lord Jesus, Himself. The Apostle John was merely a scribe. A legal secretary if you will to whom God through His angel spoke these words.

And evidently God wanted to make sure we understood who the author was and how John received the message because three times He tells us. In verse one He tells us that it was **His angel that gave these words to His servant John.**

And then in **Revelation 22:8**, we're told again. **Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things.**

And then in the very end we're told again. This time by Jesus Himself.

Revelation 22:16, "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches.

And by the way, the Book of Revelation is the only book in the New Testament that Jesus personally closes with His own signature:

And then in verse 3 we have a promise of blessing: John writes;

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

This blessing we're told is for those who not only read this book, but who also keep the things that are written therein.

And by the way, that blessing is repeated in **chapter 22:7 "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."**

But, now there's also a curse described as well in Revelation 22, for anyone who might be tempted to tamper with the message of this prophecy.

Revelation 22:18 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this

book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

And so we need to be diligent in our study of this book and not take lightly the blessings nor the curse that has been promised. Amen!