

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Introduction to Revelation

Revelation 1:1-3

Keywords: Revelation, prophecy, End Times, Jesus Christ,

PowerPoint Presentation included: “Introduction to Revelation”

Sermon Audio Blurb: The book of Revelation is both a book that encourages and frustrates many Christians. Yet it is a book that promises blessing to those who read it and obey it. It is a book designed to encourage and give hope to believers, especially in difficult days. And it is a book that reveals much about our Triune God, sin, Satan, and the true, invisible war. In this opening sermon on the book Pastor Henry seeks to give a sense of why and how to approach such a unique book and some of the challenges related to it.

I. Introduction.

- A. Today we begin a journey through the final book of the Bible and I hope that it will be a journey that both sobers and encourages each of us.
- B. Currents trends in Evangelicalism regarding Genesis and Revelation.
 - 1. Distrust and dismissal.
 - 2. A need for pulpits to consider how they approach and teach the Bible.
- C. Today will be broad and more like a teaching lecture but I hope it will also awaken in each of you a desire to know this book and to be strengthened in the goodness and power of God.
 - 1. I want to talk about challenges to teaching and learning about this book.
 - 2. I will take us through the main ways people will approach this book.
 - 3. I will give some background on the book and writer.
 - 4. Finally, I will take us through the first three verses, which form the introduction to the book.

II. Challenges teaching through Revelation.

- A. Presume it is too difficult to understand.
- B. Closed minds.

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- C. Competing views by many teachers who you may listen to and respect. (Dever, Wilson, Schreiner, Piper, MacArthur, or Sproul)
- D. Turned off by those who sensationalize the book and prophecy.

III. Various key approaches in understanding this book.

- A. The Preterist View.
 - 1. It means “standing previous.” It speaks of being concerned with the past rather than the future.
 - 2. Therefore this view usually holds that most of Revelation has already been fulfilled in the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A. D.
 - a. Generally speaking this view sees almost all of Revelation as having occurred in the past, with the exception of the last couple of chapters.
 - b. This requires an early dating to the writing of the book, which is counter to the more common view of it being written around 95 A. D.
 - c. It seems to fit nicely into statements in other passages such as Matthew 10:23 and 24:34.
 - 3. Examples:
 - a. They would take quite literally Rev. 1:1 and 22:10.
 - b. There is the belief that at the fall of Jerusalem, Jesus Christ did come again. But it was not “the” second coming, rather, it was a final judgment upon the nation of Israel.
 - 4. There is a sub-group in this movement that is heretical in nature, seeing the second coming of Jesus Christ as already taking place. The result of this group rising up recently is that the preterist group tends to like to be known as “partial-preterists.”
- B. The Historicist View.
 - 1. A Historicist approach to interpretation of the Revelation sees the book prophesying events that transpire over the course of the entire church age. The book of Revelation, they would say, is a foretelling of all history from the time of the first coming of Christ unto the end of the age.
 - 2. Therefore when reading the book of Revelation you should be trying to identify where each section fits into the history of the Church.

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3. You will note from the slides how Euro-centric and Roman-Centric this view is. That is due to the fact that it became rather popular in the time leading up and during the Reformation in Europe.
 - a. Leaders like Wycliffe, Luther, and Calvin proposed this view.
 - b. You will still find modern day teachers who teach this.
4. The weaknesses to this view are:
 - a. There is no certainty that any of the world events are those that are spoken of in the book for it requires a lot of reading into the passages.
 - b. When you read those who taught this you find that they are not in agreement as to what world event is being described.
 - c. There is little relevance to the 1st century readers since the vast majority of the events are yet future.
 - d. The greatest issue is how it utterly ignores the vast majority of the Church in places such as Asia and Africa.
5. Examples:
 - a. Revelation 6 & 7 speak of the seven seals that are broken and read. They describe great events of judgment which take place on the earth.
 - (1) It was a common interpretation of the historical approach to view these chapters as predicting the sacking of the Roman Empire by invading barbarians.
 - (2) The fifth seal was viewed as signaling the rise of Islam and the sixth seal signaled the invasion of Rome by the Turks.
 - b. The most significant interpretation that was promoted was that of Revelation 13. There the Beast is declared the Roman papacy. The pope was universally held to be the antichrist by the Reformers who used the Historicist approach of interpreting the book of Revelation.
 - c. Other events that have been seen in the book through this view are the Protestant Reformation and the destruction caused by both Napoleon and Hitler.

C. The Idealist View.

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1. Another term for this by some is the allegorist view.
2. This view sees Revelation as a description of the ongoing struggle in this age between God and Satan, good and evil culminating in the second coming of Jesus Christ.
3. One aspect of this position is that there is a general refusal to identify with any sense of certainty the imagery that is portrayed in Revelation. (i.e. the mark of the beast, the events surrounding the seals, etc.).
4. This view is found to be very attractive to many because it is not concerned about specifics. Instead the book is seen to contain spiritual lessons and principles that apply throughout history. These allow a Christian in any point of history or situation to find instruction and encouragement.
5. Examples:
 - a. The beast rising out of the sea (Rev. 13:1) signifies satanically-inspired political opposition to the church at any time in history, whether it is Rome toward the churches of Asia Minor, or the Soviet Union toward Christians during its power.
 - b. The beast from the land (Rev. 13:1) signifies the opposition of pagan or corrupt religion to true Christianity.
 - c. The harlot (Rev. 17:1) is representative of all apostate or heretical Christianity.

D. The Futurist View.

1. There are two aspects to this view that are commonly seen today: Both understand the visions from ch. 4 up through 22 :5 as referring exclusively to a future time immediately preceding the end of current history . This position tends to see the book as primarily prophetic rather than apocalyptic (highly stylized and depicting a grand battle between good and evil with very symbolic language) in its writing and purpose.
2. This position looks at Rev. 1:19 as a key passage. Usually chapter 1 is what was seen, chapters 2-3 are what are seen and chapters 4 and following are what is to be seen in the future.
3. The most common position is *classic dispensational futurism*. This view makes the events of Rev. 4-5 to belong to the distant future.

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4. *The second view is progressive dispensation futurism.* This view perceives the overlapping of the two ages to be operative in John's vision of the exaltation of Christ to the throne of God. On the one hand, the age to come has dawned in heaven. This is nothing less than the beginning of the fulfillment of the reign of the Davidic Messiah...On the other hand, Christ's David-like kingdom has not yet fully descended to the earth.
 5. The third view is *modified futurism*. It does not interpret all of Revelation as literally as the other two positions. This allows for a spiritual view of Israel and the Church and there is a rejection of the view of a pre-trib rapture.
- E. The position you take on these views will then usually lead you to a conclusion about the millennium in Revelation 20.
1. Post-Millennium.
 2. A-Millennium.
 3. Pre-Millennium.
 4. The key point to this is that when you hear these terms realize they are related to the return of Jesus Christ in relation to Revelation 20.
- F. Let me tie this section up with something I learned that helped me regarding the doctrine of end times.
1. There are many views and conclusions people make regarding this part of theology. Too often it becomes a point of great division and tension but this ought not be.
 2. There are four essentials for a true Christian to hold on to regarding biblical eschatology. These four are not negotiable in orthodox Christian doctrine.
 - a. Jesus is going to bodily return.
 - b. We will all be bodily resurrected
 - c. There will be a final judgment of all humanity.
 - d. There is a literal heaven and hell.
 3. Everything else that we deal with in eschatology touches on these four. But everything else is debatable.

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4. This doesn't mean that you don't need to take a position. But it does mean as you think through this book that you should not feel the need to attack or be overly defensive about your position.

G. Dating.

1. Early date (AD 68)—needed for the Preterist view.
2. Late date (AD 96)—majority view, this is best view, especially in light of the conditions of the seven churches.

IV. The Revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1-3).

A. “Revelation” *avpoka,luyij (apokalupsis)*

1. Basic meaning is the disclose, reveal, make known.
2. Within the biblical text the idea is a disclosure of divine truth, or a manifestation from God.
3. There is a question about the nature of the phrase “revelation of Jesus Christ.”
 - a. Could be from Jesus Christ (source).
 - b. Could be about Jesus Christ (subject).
 - c. Could be belonging to Jesus Christ (possession).
 - d. By the context the best fit is possessive due to the following phrase, “which God gave Him . . . the things which must shortly take place. . . .”
 - e. Why is this important? This is a key passage that helps define the whole of the book as to its purpose. Therefore it becomes a hermeneutical key.
 - (1) It is not primarily a revelation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, our job is not to “see” Jesus everywhere in the book.
 - (2) Rather, it is the revelation given to Jesus. So we are to seek to understand what the Father gave to His Son for us to know.
4. Notice next what is the flow of the revelation.
 - a. God, Jesus, angel, John, us.

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- b. Again, you can see why this is not the revelation about Jesus. The Father doesn't need to give to Jesus a revelation about Jesus.
- B. "Witness" and "Testimony" (2).
 - 1. Same word, just a verb and a noun. Legal terms of giving formal testimony of facts.
 - 2. John is giving testimony of the testimony given to him by Jesus Christ through the angel.
 - 3. Notice that this testimony is referred to as the very "Word of God." This is important as too many dismiss this book and it is incredibly wrong to do so.
- C. "Blessed" (3).
 - 1. Means to be happy.
 - 2. But it is more than that. It is a happiness because of fortunate circumstances. You are in an enviable position as viewed by others.
 - 3. So the happiness is not the emotion of happiness as much as being in a happy situation.
 - 4. What makes this person blessed? Two reasons:
 - 5. They have read aloud, or they have heard the prophecy AND obeys what they hear.
 - a. The reading out loud of the book was very common because people just didn't own books then. Very expensive.
 - b. Very common that only one scroll would exist in a congregation and the leaders would read and then explain what was read. All others listened.
 - c. The idea of personal, private bible study is actually a very recent reality for us.
- D. "Prophecy" (3).
 - 1. Means to tell forth something, here it speaks of the proclaiming of God's will.
 - 2. But it also includes a predicting of what God's will shall bring about.

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V. Conclusion.

A. “The time is near.”

1. This is the final word of revelation from God to His people.
2. It is a good word, thought at times a frightening and sobering book.
3. The assumption by John is that you will take this book seriously and you will learn to order your life in light of what it tells us.
4. From the point in time where Christ ascended into heaven until now the Church has been anticipating His return. It is something we should yearn for and it is something we should learn about.
 - a. Titus 2:11-14
 - b. 1 Corinthians 1:2-8.
 - c. Philippians 3:20.

B. Lord willing next week we will begin to delve into the meat of this book as we see a wonderful display of the glory of our Lord and Savior in vss 4-8.

VI. Benediction.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Small Group Questions

- What has been your sense of the value of Revelation in your Christian life? What influenced you to make whatever your conclusions were?
- What stood out for you in this sermon and what challenges did it possibly raise?
- Is there any questions you hope this sermon series will help answer? (CGL please write them down and send them to the pastor)