

DATE: October 2, 2011

TEXT: Revelation 22: 1-9

TITLE: “Revelation I: an Introduction”



I decided to begin my study of the book of Revelation with the words from the last chapter. Why are we studying Revelation. Our text tells us: *Rev. 22:7 states...*

**7 “Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”**

We desire the blessing of the Lord. The promise is this... we will receive the blessing if we keep the words of the prophecy. We will especially be blessed upon the return of Jesus.

Hallelujah! That is our intention. That is why we study Revelation.

Let me say... like many Christians, I have somewhat avoided revelation over the years. This summer, I have read it a number of times... I have studied it, I have read a number of book about it... and I am excited about teaching it. It is wonderful... it is rich, and it is mysterious.

This is an introductory sermon..... by their very nature introductory sermons are boring. But they are important. They give a foundation on which to build. This introduction is especially important because how we approach Revelation... and there are a number of approaches...

determines our understanding of the text. I will ask and answer a number of questions to introduce the book of Revelation.

**Question # 1** Who wrote it? I believe it was written by John the Apostle. Let me say this....

nowhere does it state this... it was written by John not necessarily the Apostle. However

tradition is strong that it was the Apostle... probably using a different secretary from the letters and Gospels. The word usage is different in the Revelation.

We know this about John. He became the leader of the church at Ephesus. He was there for many years guiding and leading this church... and as the last surviving Apostle the entire church. In 81 AD Domitian became Emperor of Rome. He increased the practice of his father, TITUS and his grandfather NERO in heavily persecuting Christians. It is believed in 94 AD John was arrested. While many Christians were being put to death... John was too important.. So he was exiled to the island of Patmos. It is believed by most scholars that in 96 AD. John had his vision and wrote the book of Revelation.

**Question # 2** Who did he write the book to? This is an important question. We must never

forget that John was, like his Gospel and his letters, writing to a specific audience. He was writing to the 7 churches in Asia Minor. What is today mostly Turkey. However, this was a circular letter... and it was the Apostle John.... so it was also intended for the entire Christian church. Also, like all the writings of scripture.... it is the Word of God and it is timeless, therefore it is also written to you and to me. The same as the Gospels and the Letters.

**Question # 3** What kind of writing is the book of Revelation? It's not a Gospel. It's not a letter.

No, it's Apocryphal. As a matter of fact Revelation means Apocrypha in Greek. Other Apocrypha book in the bible are parts of Ezekiel, parts of Daniel and parts of Zechariah. As you might guess, Apocrypha book are highly, highly symbolic. For example, while the Gospel will say Satan, the Revelation will call him "the beast." While Paul may speak of Rome, John will speak of Babylon. While the gospels will speak of Jesus, Revelation will speak of the lamb that was slain. And of course, it goes on and on and on.

Why symbolic language? Because symbolic language adds incredible richness to description.

In many ways you get a much richer image of Jesus in revelation than in the Gospels .

Apocryphal writings are also very prophetic. Prophecy has three elements to it. First, it miraculously explains events that are currently happening in the life of the believer. Revelation was written to specific people facing terrible persecution. Second, prophecy give prediction of soon to happen events. Events that affect the people receiving the letter. Finally, prophecy looks to future events in the distant future. How distant is never known.

**Question # 4** How do you interpret the Book of Revelation? This is a very, very key question and will determine your entire understanding of Revelation. There are 4 main approaches to interpretation. Two I will quickly mention because they are not popular.

- “Preterists” believe all the prophecies were fulfilled in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The Fall of Jerusalem and the Fall of Rome.
- “Idealists” believe the book is pure poetry and has little to do with actual history. It is simply a poetic representation of the battle between good and evil.
- “historicists” believe Revelation is a chronological outline of history from the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Christ to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ.
- “Futurists” think fulfillment will take place immediately before the second coming of Christ.

What approach will I take? I follow the traditional understanding of Revelation.. Which is basically a futurist with elements of historicist. Let me explain this. Tim Lehay, in the Left

Behind series is a pure historicist. It has a name.. It's called Dispensational Premillennialism. In one sentence it advocates a step by step history of the future church....

Rapture to seven year tribulation (7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls) to 1000 year millennium, to Armageddon, to return of Christ, to judgement to new heaven and new earth. If you want this picture in details read the Left Behind series in our library. I think it reads like good science fiction (that's my bias). Or read the Scofield Bible. This Bible was written to teach this view.

I am a "Traditional Amillennialist. I believe the Revelation is primarily addressed to people in the church 2000 years ago... and to the church today. The blessings promised in Rev. 22 are true today.... not just in the future. 2000 years ago Christians faced persecution and today Christians face difficult times and persecutions. Today we experience the seals, the trumpets and the bowls. The time line for an amillennialist is very simple.... the age of the church to the rapture to the return of Christ to the judgement to the new heaven and the new earth. The rapture, the return of Christ, the judgement and the new earth are all one act.

Practically what does this mean. Two things. First, I do believe revelations speaks to us

today. It is not just future speculation. The beast exists today. The dragon exists today. The 144000 exist today. The lamb wins victory today. Second, I believe Christ can return today and bring judgement. As Jesus says he will come as a “thief in the night.” The separating of the wheat and the tares can occur today. I will preach based on the fact of Christ’s immanent return. Not in 1000 years. Not after a 7 year tribulation. Today. This is the view of the vast majority of men and women throughout history. Only in the past 60 years or so has premillennialism become popular.

By the way, you can disagree with me. That’s O.K. Many wonderful theologians disagree with me. My own kids may disagree with me.

**Question # 5** What is the structure of Revelation? Revelation is a series of visions. John based the entire book on the number 7. The book has a prologue that includes chapters 1 to 3, and an epilogue which is chapter 22. Chapter 4 to 21 is broken into 7 sections. Each section repeats itself... but also moves a little bit further into the picture of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. This is called Progressive Parallelism. The seals, the trumpets and the bowls are repeating a terrible

picture of persecution and judgement, each with a different emphases and a growing severity of the judgement of God. Each section ends with a statement of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ.

**Finally, Question # 6** What are the major themes of the book of Revelation? I will just mention them... you will hear them again and again and again in the sermons.

Theme # 1. We are in the midst of a battle. Yes, Christ has died on the cross, yes, Satan is bound.. He can not destroy the earth, but he is still present and he causes great pain and persecution. We are in the midst of a battle.

Theme # 2 In the midst of the battle there is always hope. We must never give up. We must not compromise the truth. We must hang onto the Lamb

Finally, Theme # 3 We are victorious. Christ will come back. We will be part of his victory parade. We will be forever in His presence. Victory is assured.

That's it. That the introduction. Next week we begin diving into the text. Next week we begin to receive the blessing that are promised to each and every one of us. AMEN