

- ***READ Revelation 1:9-20** While the Bible was inspired by God to be written in such a way that all people can read it and come to have faith in Him (**Romans 10:17**), we must admit that there are certainly some sections of this Holy Book that are more difficult to grasp than others. Considering the New Testament specifically, we would likely admit that Romans and Hebrews are particularly challenging writings because of the content contained within them that is unfamiliar to our 2019 ear. But we would also likely admit that neither of these writings even come close to causing as much anxiety, confusion, and even intimidation as that of the Revelation.
- This final book of the New Testament and Bible as a whole often leaves the reader befuddled and full of questions concerning what is meant by the vivid imagery that is found within its pages. Now, we often feel ok as we're reading through the first three chapters that include the introduction and purpose of this writing along with the writings to the churches of Asia, but even within these chapters we are sometimes left scratching our heads. What is all of this about golden lampstands and the Son of Man being dressed in a robe, with a golden sash, and hair that is white as wool and snow? Why are His eyes fiery like a flame and His feet like bronze and His voice like the sound of great waters? Why does He have seven stars in His hands and how in the world is a sword coming out of His mouth??
- While all of this might cause of great confusion, we haven't even gotten to the sections yet that mention the throne scene with the One sitting on the throne who has the appearance of jasper and carnelian stone or the emerald like rainbow that surrounds the throne. Not to mention the 24 thrones, 24 elders, and the four creatures that continually praised the One on the throne. Oh yeah...and we definitely can't forget about the slaughtered lamb with seven horns and seven eyes who steps forward to open the seven seals which is followed up by the seven trumpets being sounded. This of course is all intertwined with the great beast, the pregnant woman clothed with the sun, the fiery red dragon who has seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns, the sea beast, and the earth beast. On top of that we have the three angel proclamations, the seven bowls of wrath, the woman sitting on the Scarlett beast, the fall of Babylon the great, and the sealing of the great dragon for 1,000 years. All of that doesn't even include the beautiful scenes that are painted for us in the final two chapters concerning the new heaven and the new earth.
- I would be willing to say that even just me saying everything that I just said that is contained within Revelation makes some of us a bit nervous! We might even feel a bit stressed thinking about what all of that could mean! I will grant you that the simple reading of Revelation with 2019 eyes can most certainly leave us grasping for straws, but I do hope that our considerations this morning will have us feeling at least a bit more sure about what we are doing as we read through this great Bible book to close out this year. If you're hoping that I will answer all of the questions that you have about Revelation then please don't hold your breath because that is not the intent of these considerations for this morning. Instead of giving straight up answers to some of the most looming questions, I want to simply strive to equip each of us to have the ability to find those answers for ourselves. I believe there are at least 4 keys that can help us to properly handle what is found within the book of the Revelation of Jesus to John, and that is what I would like to consider with you over the next few minutes.
- I will give just one spoiler alert and is concerning the overall theme of the book. I would suggest to you that though Revelation contains many seemingly complicated situations and happenings...the point of the book centers around the fact that Jesus is God's great conquerer, and in the end He will stand victorious while all of His enemies are laid to waste. How can we approach Revelation in such a way that we see this simple and yet powerful conclusion? Consider that the first key is recognizing the impact that our approach to the book will have on the way that we interpret and understand what is written.

4 Keys to Properly Handling The Revelation

I. Remember that our approach to the Revelation will affect the way that we interpret it.

- A. In his class introducing the book of Revelation, Nathan Ward suggest that there are at least four different approaches that one can take when reading and interpreting the Revelation.
1. **The Futurist Approach** — This approach takes what is found within Revelation, especially in chapters 4 and on, as being very literal and looks forward to the time when the exact things described in Revelation begin to take place. This approach looks at Revelation as a map of sorts that lays out exactly what will take place during the last days. Many, but not all, of our premillennial friends would buy into this type of approach.
 2. **The Historicist Approach** — This approach looks at Revelation predicting the future up to this point in history. Revelation is about history unfolding until now in our day. This would mean that depending on when we have lived in history determines the meaning of Revelation. For example, the evil beasts found within the book would represent different people or groups throughout time. For some they would represent the Catholic church. Some would say that the great beast was the conquerer Napoleon. Some others would see the Nazis as having been the fiery dragon. What would people today interpret these things to be? Maybe the Russians? This approach greatly varies depending on when you are living and reading it.
 3. **The Idealist Approach** — This approach holds that there is nothing within Revelation that holds to anything specific within history. Therefore, there is no need to try apply anything with Revelation to any specific time in history. The Idealist simply sees Revelation as a timeless book of principles concerning God, how He sees the world, and how He works within it.
 4. **The Preterist Approach** — The Preterist (Latin *praeter* meaning “past”) approach looks at Revelation first and foremost from the perspective of those to whom it was originally written. This means that Preterist see many of the visions of this book as having been fully realized in an original context in the past. This allows for the visions that are found within Revelation to find their primary fulfillment and meaning in the lives of those who were suffering persecution at the hands of the Romans in the first century, but it also allows for us to find value in the principles that are found within it. This is probably the approach that most of us are most familiar with in regards to how we have approached Revelation in the past. I believe this to be the most appropriate way to approach this final book of the Bible.
- B. I believe this to be the best way because it is always good for us to allow Biblical writings to mean what they were originally meant to mean in their original context. The writings of this book were written to a specific people in a specific context in their original forms. Our best understanding of these books then is to figure out how they were understood by those to whom they were originally sent and who first received them. This means that the writings of this book were meant to be written to disciples who were suffering at the hands of people who did not approve of their following of Jesus. The letters to the seven churches of Asia seem to make this abundantly clear. They were suffering, and Jesus through John is writing to them to encourage them to stand strong in that original context of persecution. We’ll talk about this more in a moment.
- C. However, this approach does not come without its own differing varieties. What I mean is that there are some who are known as full-Preterists. This means that they believe that every prophecy or foretelling in the Bible has already come to past. Everything in Revelation and before it. The AD-70 doctrine is a part of this approach. I would say that the majority of brethren in our fellowship would be described as partial-Preterists because we see much of Revelation as having come to past, but we also probably see some as having happened before the time of the writing of Revelation in recounting different points in history and then we see the final two chapters as still being within the future. Then even within those who are partial-Preterists are the differing opinions on when this book

was written and whether it is concerning Jesus conquering in judgement against unfaithful Jerusalem or evil Rome. Regardless, I hope we understand that our approach to this book will have a great impact on the way that we interpret and understand what is found within it, and that there is a best way to go about it which is to allow for it to mean something to the original audience and then take principles away for ourselves. Again, we will talk a bit more about that in our final point this morning.

II. Remember that the Revelation was written in Apocalyptic and Prophetic literary styles.

- A. Further, we need to remember that the Revelation is written in a literary style that is very different from every other writing of the New Testament. While the other 26 books include narrative accounts and personal letters that are similar to other literary works that are found in our day, the Revelation was written in Apocalyptic and Prophetic literary styles. Now, I recognize that the simple mentioning of something being Apocalyptic might cause confusion or a bit of raised blood pressure, but let me share with you a book I have read that really helped to sort the Apocalyptic literary style out a bit more in my mind.
- B. First of all, let me highly recommend the short book, "Understanding Apocalyptic Literature" by brother Mark Roberts as a go-to resource when trying to wrap our minds around what is found within Revelation. This book does an excellent job of making simple that which might intimidate us because of our great unfamiliarity with such a literary style. Within this book, brother Mark shares a great definition of what it means for something to be Apocalyptic. This definition was produced by the Society for Biblical Literature. (Understanding Apocalyptic Literature, pg. 22)

"A genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological [end-times] salvation and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world...[it is] intended to interpret present earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority."

- C. This of course is a lot to take in at one time, and it is quite academic sounding, so please consider these five key characteristics of this type of literature that are seen within this definition.
1. **Revelatory Literature:** This simply denotes that the truest form of Apocalyptic literature has divine origins. This is to say that it claims to be from the mind of God. This means that Apocalyptic writings contain the divinely given perspective on what is happening or seen in this world. This is clearly seen to be true concerning the Revelation by what is written in **Revelation 1:1,2**, *"The revelation (literally apocalypse) of Jesus Christ that God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, whatever he saw."*
 2. **Narrative Framework:** This means that this type of literature tells a story. Not all Biblical writings do this. While the Gospel accounts and the Acts of the Apostles are written in a narrative form, the New Testament letters cannot claim such a thing. There is no plot in those letters because they are exhortation. The Revelation is different because it has a plot...a crazy plot at that! A plot that contains beasts, dragons, great warriors on white horses, etc. If nothing else can be said, it must at least be said how captivating the story is.
 3. **Other-Worldly Beings:** One of the reasons it is so captivating is because of the presence of these other-worldly beings. As we noticed from the first couple of verses, there are angels involved! Chapter 4 involves great living beasts made up of different animals. This isn't a writing that is happening only on our level of human existence, but it involves so much more.

4. **Discloses A Reality On 2 Levels — Temporal & Spatial:** That involving of so much more stems from the fact that the Revelation *"lets us look 'behind the curtain' to see the real origins of what happens around us."* Brother Roberts has a very straight forward and easy explanation of this that I want to share. (Understanding Apocalyptic Literature, pg. 24)

"Apocalyptic literature radically shifts our view of world events because it proposes that what we see here on this earth is just the playing out of a much larger reality: what is happening in heaven. An Apocalypse says, 'See that persecution going on over there? That is happening because Satan and his forces attacked God!' It says, 'The fall of that world empire came about because God willed it, not because the empire was weak militarily.'"

5. **Eschatological Salvation & Influencing Behavior:** Finally, the whole point of this type of literary style is for the Lord's people to recognize that the end is near and they can obtain that greatly desired salvation even in the face of great suffering and persecution. The recipients of Apocalyptic literature are in the middle of crisis, and they are to use these writings to be encouraged to keep serving God until the end for He is with them and will greatly reward them. Immediately, **Revelation 2:10** comes to mind, *"Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."* If ever a part of the Revelation fit this characteristic...it would be this text. The message is clear..."Just hold on! I've got this, and it will all work out!"

- D. Again, I recognize this is much to take in, but maybe a much shorter and more simple description of such literature is to put it as brother Roberts does. Of Apocalyptic literature he describes it as, *"A story, written in a time of crisis and distress, that is given by otherworldly beings explaining how God will reverse everything so that the righteous will triumph."* (UAL pg.25)

III. Keep the text of the Revelation in the proper context of who it was originally written to.

- A. Allowing Revelation to remain in its original and proper context will do a number of things. Firstly, it will keep us from sensationalizing what is found in Revelation into a giant end times mapping of what will take place. It will keep us from turning the Revelation into some kind of big sci-fi adventure movie, book, or whatever else currently exists in our current time.
- B. Secondly, it will allow us to recognize that though we often struggle to grasp what is being recorded by John...the original audience did not. It is well noted by scholars that literary works written similar to the Revelation were widely circulated throughout the first century. One expert on second temple/post exile Judaism claims that Apocalyptic type writings were flourishing in the second half of the first century. This would not only include extra-Biblical writings such as I Enoch or the Jubilees, but it would also include sections of Biblical works such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. As an aside, a better know of those works of the Prophets will greatly help us in our understanding of the Revelation, and others back this up. Moses Stuart gives a great summation of the presence of Apocalyptic literature during the first century when this book would have been written and circulated.

"To sum up all in a few words: John wrote in order to be read and understood; and therefore intelligent persons of his day might understand him. If they did, it was by virtue of familiarity with language and imagery such as he employed. Now whatever helps us to place ourselves in a situation like to that of John's original readers, helps us to read his book intelligently. It follows of course, that the Apocryphal books, written at or near his time, which exhibit to us either the language or the style and imagery of that period, must afford us important aid in reading and understanding the Apocalypse." (UAL, pg.38)

- C. I am fully convinced that those of Jesus's day could fully comprehend what was being written by John because it had all of the markings of that day's Apocryphal writings. They knew what the

symbols and pictures were telling them, and they allowed them to speak for themselves. Instead of us getting bogged down in figuring out every single detail that is found within the book, we might do well to keep things as simple as possible by trying to see things from their perspective instead of trying to sensationalize everything by making it apply to happenings of our day, especially considering what is said in **Revelation 1:3**. One quick example to note since we cannot get into anything in great detail would be that of **Revelation 12:7-12** which Roberts suggest is a section which describes a heavenly battle that is taking place and yet it is an allusion to what took place at Calvary. This would've been easily recognized by the original readers, and we would do well to keep this book firstly in their context and allow their understanding to interpret the book's content.

IV. Recognize the principles found within the Revelation continue to remain true for us today.

- A. Finally, even though the Revelation's content was not written originally to us in order for us to see specific happenings of our day in its writings, I would suggest that the principles that are found within this book are most certainly applicable to us, and we would be doing ourselves a great disservice by failing to recognize the benefit they offer to us.
- B. For example and really the most low hanging of fruit in this regard is what was written to the seven churches of Asia. I can't imagine there being a church anywhere in the world that can read what was written to those churches and not come away from something that either admonishes or encourages us to greater faithfulness and service to God. Those writings are truly timeless admonishments and encouragements to churches and Christians for ages to come.
- C. Additionally, we can look at the overall message of the book and recognize that Christ truly has and will continue to conquer over those who stand against Him and the desires that He has for His peoples' faithfulness. Those who remain committed to Jesus as we noted from **Revelation 2:10** will receive a crown of righteousness even if they are killed for their faith in this life. Conversely, those who stand against Christ and rebel will be judged. This is precisely the message that is given by the words that are found in **Revelation 20:11-15**. Those who side with Satan will meet the exact same end that he will meet which will be utter defeat and destruction.
- D. Finally, the conclusion of the Revelation paints a beautiful picture of God's ultimate desire for the faithful. (**Revelation 21:3-7**) The words of the ending of the Revelation should do nothing by give us great joy and encouragement knowing what God desires for us in the end. John records of a place of glory, a new heaven and a new earth in which,

"God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away. Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new." He also said, "Write, because these words are faithful and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will freely give to the thirsty from the spring of the water of life. The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he will be my son."

If you're like me then you have spent much of your life confused and even intimidated by the book of Revelation. But I'm done looking at this book in that manner. I'm done with intimidation because God didn't work throughout history to preserve this writing for me to simply ignore it out of intimidation or confusion. No, my God desires for me to read this book and know this book so that I can know the power of Him and His Son and His Spirit. He wants me to know that He is Conquerer, and that He will stand victorious and triumphant in the end. He wants for me to know this so that I will desire to be there with Him in glory in the end. May each of us lean upon the Lord's strength and provisions by recognizing His past victories and His ultimate impending victory in the Revelation to John and making sure that we embrace His grace and find ourselves on the winning side when this life does finally come to an end.