

Apokalypsis – An unveiling of things to come

Text: Revelation 1:1-8

Theme: The Book of Revelation, End times, prophecy, Apocalyptic Literature

- Apokalypsis – is the Greek word for Revelation. You find it there in 1:1 – **“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place...” (ἀποκάλυψις)**. (Singular not plural – so this is not the Book of Revelations). In English, the Greek word is transcribed *Apocalypse*.
- “Revelation” itself means: **“God’s deliberate disclosure to mankind of true knowledge of himself and his purposes and actions on behalf of mankind”**. God has revealed Himself. He wants to be known.
- I have chosen to begin this series on Epiphany Sunday which is the day we celebrate the **revelation of Jesus Christ** to the Gentiles – when God led Eastern Magi to seek out Jesus – born in Bethlehem. The coming of the Magi to the cradle of Christ is a significant aspect of the Birth Narratives of Jesus because it again shows how God desires all nations of the world to bow before His Son and Saviour of the world!
- Back to the Book of Revelation itself, God saw fit that he would communicate much of what is to come through a really fascinating type of literature – what we now call **“Apocalyptic” literature**. It is a fascinating and beautiful genre but it also makes interpreting Revelation not so easy. I love Fee and Stuart’s opening words in their chapter on Revelation in their book: *How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth*: **“When turning to the book of Revelation from the rest of the New Testament, one feels as if he or she were entering a foreign country. Instead of narratives and letters containing plain statements of fact and imperatives, one comes to a book full of angels, trumpets, earthquakes, beasts, dragons, and bottomless pits”**.
- Because of language of Revelation, many avoid the book entirely. Or give up trying to interpret it or interpret it really badly without any work really digging into it and studying it. And yet it is the only Book of the New Testament that offers a blessing to those to read it. Look at **1:3 - ³ Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near”**.

- As it has been read and studied over the centuries, different approaches to interpreting Revelation have risen. There are at least 5 different schools of interpretation and even variations within the 5 schools. For me, one of the most helpful keys to interpreting Revelation comes in understanding the kind of literature it is – this genre called “Apocalyptic literature”. The problem is it is a dead genre now. It was common from 200 BC to 200 AD. Because the genre is now dead (no one is writing this type), we need to study the genre from the past to help interpret it in the present. So important to know the KIND of literature we’re dealing with. **Here are 6 elements to Apocalyptic: (Source is D.A. Carson in a lecture I attended at Heritage College and Seminary)**
1. Apocalyptic literature is rooted in writings of the Old Testament prophets. Out of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 contain references to the Old Testament. **68% !!** Mostly from the Psalms, Daniel, Zechariah, Genesis, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Joel. The prophets declared the “Word of the Lord” especially around the coming judgment and salvation of God. Therefore....
 2. Apocalyptic literature takes a “God’s eye view of history and destiny in massive movements”. – D.A. Carson
 3. Apocalyptic literature is highly “absolutist” in its readings. Eg. Two definite ways, everyone is marked, righteous and wicked, the beast or the lamb. It is a book of ethical absolutes – you are either bad or good, saved or not. Apocalyptic literature is like this.
 4. Apocalyptic literature uses highly symbolic language. Apocalyptic loves to use mixed metaphors. Revelation is full of metaphors! For example in chapters 21-22 –The city is the bride married to the lamb. The lamb is a lion. Another example we will see are these incredible creatures around the Throne of God covered in “eyes” = The eye is a Jewish image for omniscience. God is all knowing. So as we’re reading revelation and we come across a metaphor – you have to dig in and find what the picture meant in the mind of John – a first century Jew! In language, we reach for a metaphor when basic words are not enough. If you’re having difficulty describing something we say, “Well it is like....” A metaphor allows us to do something beautiful in language. Sometimes we have no words – and only metaphors help us explain or describe something. They help us describe for example a glorious God who is beyond description. We will really see it next Sunday in John’s vision of the throne of God. **Illust. How would you describe**

electricity to a stone age tribe? The best we can do is use a metaphor. Here is another example from Revelation itself. In 12:4 – a dragon is described and “his tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth”. This is example of Hebrew nature poetry in which something in nature represents something else. “Stars falling” for the Jew is a metaphor for trouble, darkness, distress, things going badly. (ie. The sky is falling). Another example is: “Trees clapping” – that is a Hebrew nature metaphor for joy, prosperity, things going well. So lots of metaphors in Revelation and we will be spending some time with them. Again - most of them in fact come from the Old Testament.

5. Apocalyptic literature uses numbers symbolically and in a “super-fluid” way. (They show up again and again). ie. 144,000 = symbolizes the totality of God’s people; 666 – the number of the Beast symbolizes Satan – the imperfect number. The number of God is 7. 666 then represents Satan and all that is diametrically opposed to God! So numbers in Revelation are used symbolically and they are repeated throughout the book.
6. Apocalyptic literature uses angels as mediators between a “seer” and a vision. (In Revelation the seer is John).
 - So when you read and study the Book of Revelation – you must keep the type of literature it is in mind, it really helps with interpreting it.
 - In Revelation the “seer” is John. Who is writing this all down. Look again at **Revelation 1:1–2** - **“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.**
 - Look also at **1:4**. - **⁴ John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,**
 - The early Church held that this was John the apostle, the author also of the fourth gospel and 1–3 John.

- John composed the Apocalypse either on the island of Patmos, on which he had been imprisoned for his Christian faith (**Look at 1:9–11 - ⁹I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹ which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.” (Map)**)
- So he either wrote it on Patmos, or some say he could have wrote it at nearby Ephesus after his release. There are a lot of references to persecution in the book (Revelation 2:10, 13; 3:10; 6:9; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2) and so this has helped scholars date the Book. Many suggest a date of composition close to the Neronian persecution (**A.D. 64–67**) or that of Emperor Domitian (**A.D. 95**). Most scholars accept the tradition of the early Fathers that it was under Domitian that John was imprisoned. ¹ So either way, the Book dates to the late 1st Century.
- There are great themes in Revelation that you can track through the book. Themes like God’s sovereignty, the return of Jesus, God’s faithful people, judgment, and hope. Yet the overall theme of Revelation is **the lordship of Jesus Christ over His Church and over all of human history.**
- It was written **to encourage** the Christian churches that were both feeling and experiencing a growing hostility between the church and the Roman state. It was also written **as a warning** to “the careless and negligent Christians who were tempted to lapse into an easy conformity to the world. It was the last voice of a closing century” (**Merrill Tenny, *New Testament Survey*, pg. 384**). How timely this purpose is for us today in the days we are living in as we too see a growing hostility between the teachings of the Bible and the State/culture around us. The temptation the church has today, is to compromise its message, water it down for the sake of not offending.
- Key Verse for an outline of the Book is **Rev. 1:19 – “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now, and what will take place later” = Key Verse**

¹ Myers, A. C. (1987). In *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary* (pp. 883–886). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

- **“What you have seen” – Vision of Jesus – Chapter 1**
- **“What is now” – Letters to the 7 Church’s – Chapters 2-3 (Another series to come)**
- **“What will take place later” – Chapters 4-22**

- Let’s be encouraged from this first vision of Jesus that John has through the angel. To start the whole revelation John sees a vision of the Risen, glorious Jesus!

- Look how Jesus is described in this “what you have seen” vision:
 - He is the faithful witness
 - The firstborn from the dead
 - The ruler of the Kings of the Earth! (vs. 5) - exactly the prophecy told to Magi in Matt.2
 - He is the one who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,
 - He is the one who has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve God!
 - He is coming again in the clouds!

- This is our Lord. This is our King. This is our Shepherd. Our Head. Our leader. Let us have full confidence in Him as we begin a New Year together. He is the one who holds our past, our present and our future together.