

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/14/09 Wednesday Evening

Series: *A Walk through the Book of Revelation*

Revelation 1:1-3 "The Big Picture"

Tonight we're going to take a walk together. Actually, we're going to begin a journey, a trek that will take us through one of the most amazing books in the Bible. By the help of our Great Savior and with His Spirit's guiding presence, we're going to begin a new series, an inductive study of the final book of the Bible. It's the book we call *Revelation* (NIV) or *The Revelation* (KJV). In the Greek text it's identified as "The Apocalypse of John."

Upon hearing our new Bible study topic, your first thought might be, "Why study Revelation? Aren't there lots of opinions about how to interpret this book?" Opinions do abound. My goal isn't to add to the speculation. It is to help us grow through the careful teaching of the *whole counsel* of God's Word, and specifically to grow to know the person who is the central theme of this book.

Some things about the book are quite clear. The writer is John (he identifies himself four times; 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). The recipients of the book were seven churches (1:4) with whom John had pastoral ministry in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Also clear is that the book addresses the subject of the future.

But what about the future? That's where the speculation begins.

Allow me to state the obvious. The future hasn't happened yet! Which is why the subject of eschatology is controversial. We don't debate history. The facts of the past are clear and (for the most part) objective. But what about the future?

With the spiraling of world events, there's increasing interest in the subject of the end times. A decade ago the series of novels known as the "Left Behind" series added to such interest. Closer to home, in the sign ups for this month's Growth Groups, more than twice as many people in our church enrolled to read and discuss John MacArthur's "*The Second Coming*" group as the other groups. I take that to mean that people want to know, "So what does the Bible say about the subject of end times?"

Two Preliminary Cautions:

1. *We will seek to do exegesis, not eisogesis as we study the book.*

Say what?! Let me explain. Too often, when people come to the book of Revelation, they have a preconceived system of end time events. "This is what God is going to do in the future," they affirm. They may have colorful charts which diagram in great detail their systematic theology.

When they come to Revelation, they use it as a proof-text to support their preconceived position. Instead of allowing the text of God's Word to speak for itself (exegesis), they impose their interpretation on the text (eisogesis). In essence, their ultimate authority is their *chart*, not the Bible. They merely use the Bible to support their chart.

Lets be honest. We all have preconceived notions when we come to the Bible. That's okay. And we may have a "systematic theology" which helps us organize our thoughts as we come to a text. That's fine and can be helpful.

As long as we do this. When we study God's Word, we must do so with a big "T" and a little "s." By that I mean we need a big view of the *Text* of the Bible, and we hold to our *system* only so far as the text supports it.

2. *This will not be "the final word" on the subject.*

In fact, we actually did a similar "walk through Revelation" ten years ago. Now it's time for another walk, for there's more to see and more to learn. Any time we discuss future events, we need to exercise caution. You may recall that most of the first century Jews *didn't*, and because Jesus didn't fit into their theological "box," they rejected Him. They clung to their system, and missed the Savior at His first coming.

Suggestions for the Study:

1. Read the book of Revelation each week. Consider *listening* to it also (by using the Bible on CD or MP3).
2. Give attention to what the text actually says.
3. If you choose to use commentaries, do so only *after* you have worked through the text.
4. Pray. Let's ask the Lord for wisdom to grasp what He wants us to learn from this book He has given to us.

An Overview of the Series:

Session	Text	Topic
#1	1:1-3	The Big Picture
#2	1:4-20	The Portrait of the Risen Christ
#3	ch 2	A Message from Jesus to Seven Churches--part 1
#4	ch 3	A Message from Jesus to Seven Churches--part 2
#5	ch 4	A Vision of Heaven
#6	ch 5	A Vision of the Lamb
#7	chs 6-8	The Judgment Begins--the Seals
#8	chs 8-11	The Judgment Continues--the Trumpets
#9	chs 12-13	The Enemy Responds--the Dragon & the Beasts
#10	ch 14	The Lamb

#11	chs 15-18	The Judgment Climaxes--Seven Plagues, Seven Bowls, & the Fall of Babylon
#12	ch 19	The Applause of Heaven
#13	ch 20	The Thousand Year Rule & Final Judgment
#14	chs 21-22	The New Heaven & Earth
#15	22:7-21	The Final Promise of the King

The Big Picture: Revelation 1:1-3

In the first three verses of the book, we're given the "big picture." Five important questions are answered.

I. Question #1: Who? (1a)

Who is this book about? Notice how the book begins: "The revelation of Jesus Christ."

Q: What does that indicate?

A. This book reveals a person, Jesus Christ.

There are two ways to take the phrase "of Jesus Christ." Perhaps both are true.

1. It's *about* Him.
2. It's *from* Him.

Discuss: How should this truth affect the way we study this book?

In my estimation this is key. If we come to the book of Revelation to get a future time-line, we've missed the point. Our aim should be to get to know a person, namely, Jesus Christ.

B. This book reveals what Jesus is going to do.

There are specific things Jesus is going to do in the future. This book reveals them, as we'll see.

Discuss: What are some of the things we see Jesus doing in this book?

II. Question #2: For whom? (1b)

For whom was this revelation intended? Notice the text...

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A. God gave it to His Son.

The text says, "which God gave Him." What does that mean?

For whose benefit did God give this revelation to His Son?

B. God gave it for the benefit of His servants.

Q: Who are "his servants?" Believers. This is for our benefit.

Discuss: Why is it important to remember that we are *servants*?

III. Question #3: What? (1c)

What is this book all about? "To show His servants *what must soon take place*."

Key: The content of the revelation shows what must soon take place.

IV. Question #4: How? (1d-2)

How did we get this revelation? The process is explained in verses 1-2.

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A. God sent an angel to John.

Q: What John is this? Where was he? See verse 9

B. John recorded what he saw.

Q: What two phrases did John use to summarize what he saw?

1. He saw the *logos* of God.

2. He saw the testimony.

Q: How do you "see" a word and a testimony?

Q: Where else do we find the term *logos* in the NT? John 1:1

John didn't make this up. It's not science fiction. It's what he saw.

Important Observation: John didn't have categories to describe what he saw. He wrote in a literary form known as *apocalyptic* literature.

Here's where a big part of the confusion enters for us. We're not familiar with apocalyptic literature. According to D. A. Carson, apocalyptic literature was popular in Jewish circles from the second century B.C. to the first century A.D. After that, it basically died out.

Apocalyptic literature uses highly symbolic language. Its images are often rooted in Old Testament themes and ideas.

The visions in Revelation may seem bizarre to Western readers like us (see *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1922). John uses images like stars, lampstands, rainbows, and fire to depict things he saw. Sometimes he helps us by telling us what the images represent.

For Example: In 1:20, we're told that "stars" represent angels. And "lampstands" represent churches. In 17:5, 18, "the great prostitute" represents Babylon.

Key Verse of the Book: Revelation 1:19

Q: The Lord told John to write three things. What are they?

Q: These three things provide the outline of the book. How so?

"what you have seen" = the vision in ch 1

"what is now" = the letters in chs 2-3

"what will take place later" = everything from chapter 4 on

V. Question #5: What is it for? (3)

There's a blessing associated with this book. What are we supposed to do with it?

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A. It's to be read.

B. It's to be heard.

Note: In John's day, most people didn't have Bibles. You went to church to hear the reading of the Scriptures.

C. It's to be taken to heart.

The KJV says "keep those things."

Q: Why does John say we need to read and heed this book? "The time is near."

Application: If our intent is to debate the chronology of end times events, we've missed the point of Revelation. Are there judgment calls to make in interpreting the book? Certainly. But the main point of the book is clear.

Discuss: So what is the main point? See 1:7; 22:7, 12, 20

