

Following Jesus Into The Future

Revelation 1:1-3

Introduction

We begin our study in the book of Revelation. Revelation is God's final Word to a world that is coming to an end. It is a book of destiny, and book of final things.

Not too long ago I had Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye on my radio show. Their book the "Remnant" had just been released. The cover of TIME magazine featured this title, "The Bible & The Apocalypse; Why more Americans are reading and talking about The End Of The World" (July 1, 2002). The article began "What do you watch for, when you are watching the news? Signs that interest rates might be climbing, maybe its time to refinance. Signs of global warning, maybe forget that new SUV. Signs of terrorist activity, maybe think twice about that flight to Chicago. Or signs that the world may be coming to an end, and the last battle between good and evil is about to unfold?" We know the end is out there—somewhere. Even the popular culture has adopted many of the images, quotes and symbols contained in the Bible's last book—Revelation.

TIME/CNN polls indicate about 36% of Americans believe that the Bible is the word of God and is to be taken literally. 59% believe the prophecies in the Book of Revelation will come true (Time Magazine July 1, 2002). The article went on to relate that more Americans are watching the news and asking themselves questions about how it might relate to the end of the world. Some of the interest is fueled by faith, some by fear, some by imagination. The LaHaye/ Jenkins series has sold north of 32 million copies, 50 million if you count graphic novels and children's editions. What the poll didn't indicate was how many of the 59% of people who believe in the prophecies in the book of Revelation—know what they are—can explain them and apply them to their lives.

Our study of the book of Revelation must begin with an analysis of our own hearts and motives. What do we want to know about this book? What is your motivation in studying the book of Revelation? Are you curious about the future? Are you fearful about the future? 17% of Americans believe the end of the world will happen in their lifetime.

In 1945 we dropped an atomic bomb on Japan. In 1948 the nation of Israel was formed. 1956, 1967, 1973, 1991, 2003 major conflicts erupted in the Middle-East.

What is the purpose of the book of Revelation? According to the book itself, it is to reveal the full identity of Jesus Christ and to give warning and hope to believers. In the book of Revelation we follow Jesus back into the past, we follow Jesus into the present, and we continue to follow Jesus into the future. John had at least three reasons for writing revelation. One is an historical purpose, to allow Jesus Christ to proclaim to his followers in every generation, "Behold, I come quickly" (Rev.2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). Who know better than the Lord Himself that every generation needs comfort,

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encouragement, hope. But make no mistake—Jesus is also sending a word of warning, of counsel. There is an immediate purpose—to speak to seven real churches, in Asia, because they needed immediate encouragement, warning, counsel. Then there is the godly purpose, to give the church and the world the Revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. This uncovering, unveiling, is to reveal to a wondering world, the person of Jesus Christ, the central figure of all of human history, and the unveiling of the message of his heart to a lost world. What is the revelation of Jesus Christ? “things which must shortly come to pass” (v.1). It concerns the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who alone is worthy to open and oversee—the book of destiny, the book of the future of the world, the book of God’s redemptive purposes.

What does the future hold for the church of Jesus Christ?

Dr. Merrill C. Tenney writes;

“Would it rise, decline, and vanish like so many religious cults that flourished in that period, or would it be more lasting? Was it destined by God to be an expression of His ultimate purpose, creating a faith and a society of its own, or was it simply ephemeral? Confronted with the growing hostility of the great world empire, devoid of military and political defense, possessing few if any learned apologists, what prospects did it have?

The book of Revelation is the answer. It reveals a church that is far from infallible, plagued by invading heresies and sometimes blighted with apostasy, but still in the omnipotent hand of the eternal Lord. It asserts that behind the church is a supernatural purpose which must preserve that church until its mission is fulfilled. By whatever system the book be interpreted, it does predict plainly that the people of God shall be preserved until the Lord Jesus Christ returns to become sovereign of earth and establish His kingdom” (Interpreting Revelation; p.25; Eerdmans Publishing Company-reprint edition 1985).

The Great Revelation To God’s Servants

Revelation 1:1 (NKJV)

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,

The very first word of this last book of the Bible is *apocalpsis*. The Greek term means to uncover or unveil, we might even call this book—the uncovering—but it is an uncovering—not necessarily of the future—but rather the uncovering of Jesus Christ in the future. In the book of Revelation we follow Jesus into the future—a future established by God and given to Jesus Christ the Lord. Whatever the future holds, Jesus will be there. In our culture, most people use the word ‘apocalypse’ to mean some catastrophic circumstance,

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chaos, the end of the world. I recently got a bottle of “Apocalypse” habanero hot sauce. Its also called ‘religious experience’.

In the book of Revelation God decides to give us a glimpse into the future—by revelation. God declares the prophecy but we cannot divorce the prophecy from the person. There can be no fulfilled prophecy apart from Christ. John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pulls back the veil, lifts the curtain and allows us to see Jesus, exalted, glorified in heaven, fulfilling His eternal purposes for the future.

The book of Revelation is an open book, not a closed book. After Daniel received his vision and finished writing the prophecy, he was instructed to “shut up the words, and seal the book” (Dan.12:4); but John is given the opposite instructions: “And he said to me, “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand”. Why not seal the book? The time is at hand. What time? Jesus has died on Calvary’s cross, Jesus has risen from the dead. Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. The Holy Spirit has descended on the Church. God has ‘ushered in the ‘last days’.

What are the last days? The days preceding the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place.”

“How did the Lord convey the contents of this book to his servant? The Father gave the revelation to the Son, and the Son shared it with the apostle, using “His angel” as intermediary. Sometimes Christ himself conveyed information to John (Rev.7:13); and often it was an elder (Rev.7:13); and often it was an angel (Rev. 17:1; 19:9-10). Sometimes a voice from heaven” told John what to say and do (Rev. 10:4). The book came from God to John, no matter what the various means of communication were; and it was inspired by the Spirit” (Wiersbe pp.566-577).

“And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,”

The word ‘signified’ is very important. It is the Greek word *semaino*(in the aorist) which has as its root *sema* which means signs or a sign. The word means in this context to give a sign, or to signify or to indicate. It can also mean to report, to make known. The ancients sometimes used the word to mean symbol—or to point to the deeper meaning of something. Edward McDowell writes; “The author implies that the message he has received is being given to his readers under signs and symbols. Attention to this fact should save us from crass literalism in interpreting the message of the book” (p.24).

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Someone has suggested the word ‘sign-ified’. In the book of Revelation the noun form of this word is translated as *sign* (Rev.15:1), wonder (Rev.12:1.3) and miracle (Rev.19:20).

John uses the same word in the gospel of John in reference to the miracles of Jesus, the idea being that his miracles were meaningful, there was a deeper message in each miracle, rather than simply a display of power.

But we cannot make the symbols mean whatever we want. The symbols are rooted in the Old Testament. Why did God use symbolism in this important book? I suspect that it provides a kind of code that easy to understand if you are a believer, and baffling if you are not! If a Roman officer or magistrate tried to use the book of Revelation as evidence against Christians, they would be hard pressed to find consensus on its meanings! That is exactly what we find to today—in the court of public opinion, in the minds of movie moguls, in the rantings and ravings of false prophets as they apply the words of Revelation to their own corny, hokey, implausible, unbelievable doctrines. The book is a puzzle and an enigma for those who have no relationship with Christ or understanding of the Old Testament. Another reason is that symbolism—cannot be weakened with time. John draws on great images and symbols throughout the Bible—and that has encouraged and ministered and brought hope to millions of persecuted Christians in every generation.

One mistake Bible commentators, Bible teachers, and Bible students make is to assume that simply because an image is symbolic—that it is not real. They are real. You may spit on the American flag, but America is real. “There is another reason—that the Lord allowed John to use symbols, because symbols not only convey or impart information, they impart values and arouse emotions. John could have written, “A dictator will rule the world” but instead he describes a beast. I think the symbol has much more content than the simple designation of “dictator”. Instead of describing a world system, John introduces “Babylon the Great” and contrasts the ‘harlot’ with the ‘bride’. The very name “Babylon” would impart deep spiritual truth to anyone who knew the Old Testament picture of Babylon. We must not allow our imaginations to run wild—but rather to think about the symbols in their biblical context, Biblical symbols are consistent with the whole of Biblical revelation. Some symbols are explained right in the text (Rev. 1:20; 4:5; 5:8); others are understood from Old Testament symbolism (Rev.2:7, 17. 4:7); and some symbols are not explained at all (the white stone in Rev.2:17). Nearly 300 references to the Old Testament are found in Revelation! This means that we must anchor our interpretations to what God has already revealed, lest we misinterpret this important prophetic book” (Wiersbe p.567).

Revelation 1:3 (NKJV)

3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

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The book of Revelation begins with a blessing for those who read and listen to the prophecy. It ends with the promise of a special curse on those who add or take away from it (22:19).

The book was originally written to seven churches scattered in the Roman province of Asia. Yet we are told any believer can read it and receive benefit and blessing.

How are we to ‘hear’ the words of this prophecy and those things which are written in it?

The book of Revelation is like medicine to the soul. Two of the major themes of the book of Revelation include warning and hope. The Lord Jesus warns us about the present and the future. But Jesus is not trying to scare you, or confuse you. The book of Revelation is supposed to give hope in the midst of pain, and persecution and what looks like the disintegration of the fabric of civilization itself.

Many years ago Paul Harvey reported the following on his radio broadcast (Jan.15, 1982). The respected American Medical News confirms what our “For What It’s Worth Department is about to relay. A patient complained of an earache. His right ear. His doctor prescribed eardrops—an antibiotic. Are you with me to here? The doctor prescribed eardrops for an earache. When the patient got the eardrops prescription filled the pharmacist wrote on the bottle. . .Three drops in *r*-for right—ear. No space and no punctuation. For “right ear,” the instructions read: *r*-ear.

That spells *rear*.

The patient said later he knew it sounded like a strange remedy for an earache but he had dutifully applied the drops to his rear for three days before the error was discovered.

The book of Revelation is Christ’s prescription for the future. How you apply it and where you apply it will make all the difference in your life.

There are many interpretations to the last book of the Bible. Some believe it is pure fiction, fantasy literature, this is the view held by unbelievers and agnostics. Some believe it is allegorical, this is the position that the book must be read as allegory or metaphor, no part of the book should be taken literally. The book is a symbolic representation of the age-long struggle of good verses evil. This is the view of most liberals. Then there are those who believe the book is historical. This is often called the preterist position. The word preterist is a Latin word which simply means-the past. Dr. Charles Ryrie writes; “Thus, the preterist interpreters are those who see Revelation as having already been fulfilled in the early history of the church. Chapters 5-11 are said to record the church’s victory over Judaism; chapters 12-19 her victory over pagan Rome; and 20-22 her glory because of these victories. The persecutions described are those of

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Nero and Domitian, and the entire book was fulfilled by the time of Constantine (A.D. 312).” (Revelation p.8). There is another view—called partial preterism—which states that only part of the prophecy has been fulfilled. Again Ryrie states; “This interpretative viewpoint states that in Revelation there is a panorama of the history of the church from the days of John to the end of the age. It holds that the book has been in process of being fulfilled throughout the whole Christian era. Those who hold this view see in the symbols the rise of papacy, the corruption of the church and the various wars throughout church history. Most of the reformers interpreted the book in this manner” (Revelation pp.8-9). Another position is that the book is prophetic. This view sees those events from chapter 4 onward as yet to be fulfilled. This view alone does justice to the book. Revelation, like all other books in the Bible, is to be taken in the plain, normal, sense of the word. Dr. David L. Cooper once suggested: “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense” (Wilmington’s Guide to the Bible p.537).

Conclusion

The book of Revelation can be contrasted and compared with other books in the Bible. In the book of Daniel, because of the indestructible Jewish nation (Dan.3,6; cf. Rev.12). Concerning the ministry of the antichrist (Dan.3:1-7; 7:7; Rev.13). Concerning the length of the tribulation Dan.9:24-27; cf.Rev. 11:2; 12:6,14; 13:5). Daniel is a sealed book, Revelation is an open book.

Genesis; and the gathering of the waters called he seas” (1:10); In Revelation we are told; And there was no more sea” (21:1). In Genesis is described the first Adam and his wife Eve in the Garden of Eden, reigning over the earth (1:27,28). In Revelation is described the last Adam with his wife (the Bride, the Church in the City of God, reigning over the Universe (21:9).

In Genesis God created the Sun, the moon, the day and the night (1:5,16). In Revelation we are told, “There shall be no night there”(Rev.22:5). “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof”(Rev.21:23). In Genesis the tree of life is denied to sinful man (3:22). In Revelation the tree of life; “yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations”(22:2). In Genesis the old earth was punished through a flood (7:12). In Revelation the new earth will be purified by fire (2Peter 3:6-12; Rev. 21:1). In Genesis man’s early home was beside a river (2:10). In Revelation man’s eternal home will be beside a river; “And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb 22:1). In Genesis the Patriarch Abraham goes to weep for Sarah (23:1). In Revelation the children of Abraham will have God himself wipe away all tears from their eyes (21:4). In Genesis God destroys an earthly city, wicked Sodom, from the sands (Gen.19). In Revelation God presents a heavenly city, New Jerusalem from the skies (Rev.21:1). Genesis ends with a

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believer in Egypt, lying in a coffin (50:1-3). Revelation ends with all believers in eternity, reigning forever (21:4).

J. Vernon McGee;

“This book is like a great union station where the great trunk lines of prophecy come in from other portions of Scripture. Revelation does not originate, but consummates. It is imperative to a right understanding of the book to be able to trace each great subject of prophecy from the first reference to the terminal.”

What will we find when we come to the end? As we go forward in time we find Jesus waiting for us (Rev.1:13). We find the church (Rev.19:7-90). We find the resurrection of saints (Rev.6-18). We find the Great Tribulation (Rev.6-18). We find Satan—judged and punished (Rev.20:1-10). We learn about the man of sin (Rev.19:19-21). We know we will find false religion (Rev.17). We find the times of the Gentiles coming to an end (Rev.18). We find the second coming of Jesus Christ (Rev.19:11-16).