

NOON BIBLE STUDY: REVELATION 1 & INTRO

OUR GOAL AND APPROACH IN READING REVELATION WILL NOT BE TO SORT OUT EVERY SINGLE DETAIL WITH PRECISION AND FINALITY. THERE ARE GOING TO BE A LOT OF THINGS THAT WE WILL READ AND FIND OURSELVES CONCLUDING NOTHING MORE PROFOUND THAN "I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THAT MEANS." HOWEVER, YOU WILL BE SURPRISED HOW MUCH WE WILL READ THAT WILL MAKE SENSE, THAT WILL BE CLEAR AND WILL CONNECT WITH THINGS THE BIBLE HAS ALREADY COMMUNICATED ELSEWHERE.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION IS NOT *JUST* ABOUT THE END TIMES. IT IS ABOUT SPIRITUAL BATTLE, THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISES, GOD'S PEOPLE, HUMAN HISTORY AND ABOUT HOPE.

THE WORD "REVELATION" COMES FROM THE GREEK WORD "ἀποκάλυψις (APOKALUPSIS)" WHICH IS WHERE WE GET OUR ENGLISH WORD "APOCALYPSE". "THE APOCALYPSE" HAS BECOME SHORTHAND FOR THE TERRIBLE EVENT(S) AT THE END OF TIME. FROM A LITERARY PERSPECTIVE "APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE" IS THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE - DANIEL, EZEKIEL AND OTHER SECTIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT ARE PROPHETIC BOOKS WHICH SPEAK OF THE THINGS TO COME. BUT WHEN WE READ "APOCALYPTIC", IT DOESN'T JUST MEAN "END TIMES" - FIRSTLY IT MEANS "UNCOVERING" - IT'S LITERALLY A REVEALING OF THINGS THAT ARE UNKNOWN, HIDDEN OR COVERED UP. REVELATION IS A MESSAGE FROM JESUS CHRIST TO THE CHURCH THAT REVEALS THINGS.

IN FACT, WHEN YOU GET A "REVELATION" OF SOMETHING, IT'S OFTEN A GOOD THING. SOMETHING THAT WAS FORMERLY UNCLEAR OR CONFUSING BECOMES CLEAR. BECAUSE OF THE EVENTS AND SYMBOLS DESCRIBED IN REVELATION, THE WORD "APOCALYPSE" HAS INCLUDED THE IDEA OF THE END TIMES AND EVEN CATAclysmic EVENTS. BUT IT'S IMPORTANT FOR US TO KNOW THAT'S NOT THE ONLY THING IT MEANS.

THAT BEING SAID, LOOK AT HOW WEBSTERS DEFINES THE WORD "APOCALYPSE"

(1) ONE OF THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN WRITINGS OF 200 B.C. TO A.D. 150 MARKED BY PSEUDONYMITY, SYMBOLIC IMAGERY, AND THE EXPECTATION OF AN IMMINENT COSMIC CATAclysm IN WHICH GOD DESTROYS THE RULING POWERS OF EVIL AND RAISES THE RIGHTEOUS TO LIFE IN A MESSIANIC KINGDOM

(2) SOMETHING VIEWED AS A PROPHETIC REVELATION (MERRIAM WEBSTER VIA M-W.COM)

THAT'S A PRETTY GOOD DEFINITION! SO REVELATION WILL BE A REVEALING OF TRUTHS AND REALITIES FOR US TO GRASP. THERE WILL BE THINGS THAT WILL BE SIMPLE AND EASY TO UNDERSTAND AND SOME THINGS THAT WILL BE HARD TO UNDERSTAND. THERE WILL BE THINGS THAT WILL PROVIDE COMFORT AND THINGS THAT WILL UNSETTLE YOU. BOTH ARE GOOD, BOTH ARE NEEDED. PAUL REMINDS US THAT

"ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED BY GOD AND PROFITABLE FOR TEACHING, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS; SO THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE ADEQUATE, EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK." (2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17)

AND SO WE BEGIN REVELATION WITH A REMINDER THAT IT IS, LIKE ALL OTHER OF THE 66 BOOKS OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS, ARE FROM GOD, FOR US.

REVELATION 1:1-3 - INTRODUCTION

WE LEARN SOME HELPFUL THINGS ABOUT THE BOOK OF REVELATION IN THE OPENING LINES.

THIS IS A BOOK/LETTER WHICH CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING:

REVELATION ABOUT THINGS THAT "WHICH MUST SOON TAKE PLACE"

THIS INFORMATION IS FROM JESUS CHRIST AND WAS GIVEN TO HIM BY GOD.

JESUS GAVE THE INFORMATION TO AN ANGEL WHO THEN GAVE THE INFORMATION TO JOHN

THE END GOAL OF THIS WRITING IS THAT THOSE WHO READ AND HEAR AND HEED THE WORDS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION WILL BE "BLESSED". THAT IS AN INTERESTING WAY TO START A BOOK THAT TRADITIONALLY SCARES, FRIGHTENS AND TROUBLES PEOPLE. THIS IS A GOOD WORD TO START WITH. THERE MAY BE THINGS IN THIS BOOK THAT ARE CONFUSING, TROUBLING AND EVEN FRIGHTENING - BUT THE HOPE OF JESUS FOR THOSE WHO COME TO REVELATION WILL BE THAT THEY WILL BE BLESSED BY WHAT THEY READ AND HEAR, IF THEY ALSO OBEY WHAT IT SAYS.

REVELATION 1:1 IDENTIFIES THE PERSON WHO RECEIVED THIS REVELATION FROM GOD, THROUGH JESUS AND THROUGH AN ANGEL AS "HIS BONDSERVANT JOHN." THIS JOHN IS THE SAME JOHN THAT FOLLOWED JESUS AS A ONE OF THE TWELVE DISCIPLES. LET'S REMEMBER A LITTLE ABOUT JOHN

MATTHEW 4:18-22 - NOW AS JESUS WAS WALKING BY THE SEA OF GALILEE, HE SAW TWO BROTHERS, SIMON WHO WAS CALLED PETER, AND ANDREW HIS BROTHER, CASTING A NET INTO THE SEA; FOR THEY WERE FISHERMEN. 19 AND HE SAID TO THEM, "FOLLOW ME, AND I WILL MAKE YOU FISHERS OF MEN." 20 IMMEDIATELY THEY LEFT THEIR NETS AND FOLLOWED HIM. 21 GOING ON FROM THERE HE SAW TWO OTHER BROTHERS, JAMES THE SON OF ZEBEDEE, AND JOHN HIS BROTHER, IN THE BOAT WITH ZEBEDEE THEIR FATHER, MENDING THEIR NETS; AND HE CALLED THEM. 22 IMMEDIATELY THEY LEFT THE BOAT AND THEIR FATHER, AND FOLLOWED HIM.

JOHN ALONG WITH HIS BROTHER JAMES ARE IDENTIFIED AS SONS OF ZEBEDEE, A FISHERMAN IN GALILEE. THEY ARE CALLED BY JESUS AS SOME OF HIS FIRST DISCIPLES/FOLLOWERS.

MATTHEW 10:1-8 - THE 12 DISCIPLES SENT

AS JESUS COMMISSIONS THESE TWELVE MEN TO FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE OF GOSPEL PREACHING AND POWERFUL HEALING, HE ALSO TELLS THEM THAT ALONG THEIR WAY, THEY WILL HAVE TROUBLE - BUT THAT EVEN DURING TRIALS THEY SHOULD STAY BRAVE AND BOLD BECAUSE GOD LOVES THEM AND WILL BE WITH THEM.

MATTHEW 10:16-22, 26-31

AS JESUS' MINISTRY GROWS AND ADVANCES TOWARDS ITS CLIMACTIC MOMENT IN JERUSALEM, WE READ OF PETER, JAMES AND JOHN BEING BROUGHT INTO A CLOSER INNER FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS THAN EVEN THE OTHER 9. JOHN IS ONE OF ONLY 3 INVITED TO JOIN JESUS ON A MOUNTAIN AND THERE SEES A GLORIOUS VISION OF JESUS, MOSES AND ELIJAH (MATTHEW 17). JOHN IS ONE OF THE TRIO INVITED INTO THE HOUSE OF JAIRUS AND WITNESSES JESUS RAISING THE LITTLE GIRL FROM THE DEAD (MARK 5:37-37-43). HE'S SPECIFICALLY ASKED BY JESUS TO PREPARE THE PASSOVER WHICH WILL BE KNOWN AS THE "LAST SUPPER" (LUKE 22:8) AND AT THE SUPPER IS MOST LIKELY SEATED CLOSEST TO JESUS, EVEN ABLE TO LEAN AND REST ON JESUS (JOHN 13:23). YET THROUGHOUT THE JOURNEY WITH JESUS, JOHN WILL AT TIMES BE PREOCCUPIED ABOUT HIS POSITION IN THE FUTURE KINGDOM OF GOD OR ANGERED ABOUT HOW SOME CITIES RESPONDED TO THE GOSPEL AND NEED REBUKING BY JESUS (MARK 10:35-45, LUKE 9:54-56). IN OTHER WORDS JOHN IS A LOVED DISCIPLE OF JESUS YET STILL IN NEED OF GROWTH AND INSTRUCTION ALONG THE WAY.

JOHN WILL BE CLOSEST TO JESUS AS HE PRAYS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE (MARK 14:33). JOHN WILL FLEE AS THE SOLDIERS COME BUT WILL RETURN TO JESUS AND BE THE LONE DISCIPLE AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS. JESUS WILL SPEAK TO HIM FROM THE CROSS AND ENTRUST HIS MOTHER MARY INTO JOHN'S CARE (JOHN 19:25-27). JOHN WILL BE ONE OF THE FIRST TO SEE THE RESURRECTED JESUS. JOHN WILL BE NAMED IN THE BOOK OF ACTS AS AN APOSTOLIC LEADER, PREACHER, MIRACLE WORKER AND PERSECUTED FOLLOWER OF CHRIST.

MOST SCHOLARS BELIEVE THAT JOHN WAS ONE OF THE YOUNGEST OF JESUS' 12 DISCIPLES. HE WILL WRITE HIS OWN EYEWITNESS BIOGRAPHY OF JESUS CALLED "THE GOSPEL OF JOHN." HE WILL WRITE AT LEAST THREE LETTERS TO THE CHURCH ALSO NAMED AFTER HIM (1, 2 & 3 JOHN). HE APPEARS TO BE EDUCATED AND A DEEP THINKER AS HIS INSPIRED WRITINGS ARE FILLED WITH POETIC AND IMAGINATIVE LANGUAGE UNIQUE TO THE OTHER GOSPEL WRITERS.

FAR FROM THE SEASIDE VILLAGES OF GALILEE, AS REVELATION OPENS, WE ARE NEARING THE YEAR 90 AD. THE MESSAGE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS AND HIS FOLLOWERS HAS REACHED AND TOUCHED THE KNOWN WORLD. NO LONGER A SMALL AND UNHEARD SECT OF JEWISH BELIEVERS, THE CHURCH HAS BEEN PLANTED AROUND THE ROMAN EMPIRE (AND BEYOND) AND ALONG WITH ITS EXPANSION HAS FACED PERSECUTION FROM JEWISH OPPONENTS AND POLITICAL ADVERSARIES.

IN FACT, MANY OF THE ORIGINAL DISCIPLES HAVE DIED, AND FEW FROM OLD AGE. AT THIS POINT, MOST OF THE ORIGINAL 12 HAVE BEEN MARTYRED. IN FACT, AFTER STEPHEN'S DEATH, JOHN'S BROTHER JAMES WAS ONE OF THE FIRST:

ACTS 12:1-2 - NOW ABOUT THAT TIME HEROD THE KING LAID HANDS ON SOME WHO BELONGED TO THE CHURCH IN ORDER TO MISTREAT THEM. 2 AND HE HAD JAMES THE BROTHER OF JOHN PUT TO DEATH WITH A SWORD.

AND YET JOHN, NOW AN OLD MAN, LIVES ON AS A FINAL MEMBER OF THE FIRST GENERATION OF CHRISTIANS. WE'LL TALK MORE ABOUT WHERE AND WHY JOHN IS WHERE HE IS IN THE WEEKS TO COME. BUT NOW WE WILL TURN TO THE PEOPLE RECEIVING THIS FROM JOHN.

REVELATION 1:4 - TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

JOHN IS ADDRESSING THIS MESSAGE (PERHAPS IN THE FORM OF A LETTER) TO THE "SEVEN CHURCHES THAT ARE IN ASIA." CHAPTERS 2 & 3 IDENTIFY THESE SEVEN CHURCHES: EPHESUS (2:1), SMYRNA (2:8), PERGAMUM (2:12), THYATIRA (2:18), SARDIS (3:1), PHILADELPHIA (3:7), AND LAODICEA (3:14). THESE ARE CHURCHES THAT WERE ESTABLISHED IN THE FIRST CENTURY AND ARE NOW AT THE END OF THE FIRST CENTURY NAVIGATING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A FOLLOWER OF JESUS IN THOSE DAYS. AND SO FIRST, REVELATION IS A LETTER TO THE CHURCHES IN THE FASHION OF THE OTHER LETTERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT FOR US TO REMEMBER AS WE BEGIN THIS STUDY. GOD IS SENDING HIS MESSAGE THROUGH JOHN TO THE CHURCHES OF ASIA.



REVELATION 1:4-7 - OPENING GREETINGS

REVELATION WAS WRITTEN TO REAL PEOPLE IN A REAL TOUGH SITUATION. THE 7 CHURCHES RECEIVING THIS LETTER ARE LIVING IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE, LIKELY DURING THE REIGN OF DOMITIAN (81-96 AD).

"THE ROMAN EMPIRE, POWERFUL IN MANY SENSES, EXERCISED ONE PARTICULAR POWER WHICH BECAME A CAUSE OF GREAT TRIALS TO THE EARLY CHRISTIANS. THE GROWING PRACTICE OF 'EMPEROR WORSHIP' MEANT THAT AN INCREASING NUMBER OF THEM WERE REQUIRED PUBLICLY, TO MAKE THE FATEFUL CHOICE BETWEEN CAESAR AND CHRIST. EVERY AGE HAS ITS EQUIVALENT TEST OF A CHRISTIAN'S TRUE ALLEGIANCE: FOR THEM IT MEANT ACTUAL PERSECUTION AND THE THREAT OF MARTYRDOM." (MICHAEL WILCOCK, "THE MESSAGE OF REVELATION", PAGE 22)

ONE OF OUR APPROACHES AS WE READ THROUGH REVELATION WILL BE TO ASK NOT JUST "WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US AND THE DAYS TO COME" BUT "WHAT DID THIS MEAN FOR THEM AS THEY FIRST READ THIS IN THEIR WORLD?" THE MODERN CHURCH'S APPROACH TO REVELATION HAS SADLY BEEN TO SUPERIMPOSE CURRENT EVENTS ON THE BOOK AS A SORT OF KEY CODE TO UNLOCK BIBLICAL PROPHECY. A DRAGON MUST MEAN RUSSIA. A HORNET MUST BE A HELICOPTER. THE FAMOUSLY MYSTERIOUS "MARK OF THE BEAST" MUST BE BARCODES, NO WAIT, CREDIT CARDS, NO WAIT, A COMPUTER CHIP, NO WAIT, A VACCINE!

BUT THAT IMPLIES THAT THE BOOK OF REVELATION IS FOR US, AND NOT FOR THEM - AND THAT'S NOT ONLY SELF-FOCUSED, IT'S ARROGANT. WE HAVE TO APPROACH REVELATION ASKING WHAT DID THIS MEAN FOR THEM, AND WHAT CAN WE TAKE AWAY FOR US IN LIGHT OF THAT. SURE, THERE ARE COUNTLESS PROPHECIES AND PROMISES THAT WILL BE SPOKEN OF IN REVELATION, YET TO BE FULFILLED FOR US TODAY - BUT REVELATION ALSO MEANT SOMETHING FOR THE FIRST READERS WHICH WAS GIVEN TO THEM BY GOD TO HELP THEM.

IF THE BOOK OF REVELATION IS ONLY ABOUT THE CURRENT EVENTS UNFOLDING IN THE 21ST CENTURY, THEN IT PROVIDED NO HOPE FOR THE CHRISTIANS OF THE FIRST CENTURY. AND THEY *NEEDED* HOPE.

"AS THE EARLY CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT GREW, AND DEVELOPED MOMENTUM, FURTHER QUESTIONS EMERGED. WHAT WAS GOD DOING NOW? WHAT WERE HIS PLANS FOR THE LITTLE CHURCHES DOTTED AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD? WHERE WAS IT ALL GOING? IN PARTICULAR, WHY WAS GOD ALLOWING FOLLOWERS OF JESUS TO SUFFER PERSECUTION? WHAT LINE SHOULD THEY TAKE WHEN FACED WITH THE FASTEST GROWING "RELIGION" OF THE TIME, NAMELY THE WORSHIP OF CAESAR, THE ROMAN EMPEROR? SHOULD THEY RESIST?"

(THESE CHRISTIANS) WOULD HAVE BEEN MOSTLY POOR, MEETING IN ONE ANOTHER'S HOMES. BY CONTRAST, PEOPLE WERE BUILDING GRAND AND EXPENSIVE TEMPLES FOR CAESAR AND HIS FAMILY IN VARIOUS CITIES, EAGER TO SHOW ROME HOW LOYAL THEY WERE. WHAT WOULD JESUS HIMSELF SAY ABOUT THIS? DID IT MEAN THAT, AFTER ALL, THE CHRISTIANS WERE WASTING THEIR TIME, FOLLOWING A CRUCIFIED JEW RATHER THAN THE ONE WHO WAS RATHER OBVIOUSLY THE "LORD OF THE WORLD" (AKA CAESAR)? REVELATION IS WRITTEN TO SAY "NO" TO THAT QUESTION." (NT WRIGHT, REVELATION FOR EVERYONE, PAGES 3-4)

AND SO HOW APPROPRIATE THAT JOHN'S OPENING LINES SEND "GRACE AND PEACE...FROM HIM WHO IS AND WHO WAS AND WHO IS TO COME", THE CREATOR GOD HIMSELF, YAHWEH, AND "FROM JESUS CHRIST, THE FAITHFUL WITNESS, THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD, AND (TRUE AND ACTUAL) RULER OF THE KINGS OF THE EARTH. (REVELATION 1:4-5).

BEFORE JOHN REVEALS ANY PROPHECY, HE STARTS AT THE FOUNDATION - YAHWEH IS GOD. JESUS IS KING, TO WHOM THE POWER AND HONOR BELONGS. AND WHAT OF THESE POOR AND PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS?

THEY ARE LOVED AND RELEASED FROM THEIR SINS BY CHRIST'S BLOOD (1:5)

THEY ARE KINGS AND PRIESTS TO GOD (1:6)

AND BEHOLD, CHRIST IS COMING...AND EVERY EYE WILL SEE HIM (1:7)

THAT'S QUITE THE INTRODUCTION.

AS WE BEGIN OUR (SLOW) JOURNEY THROUGH REVELATION, REMEMBER WHO GOD IS AND WHAT HE'S DONE, REMEMBER THAT CHRIST LOVES YOU, HAS DIED FOR YOU AND IS COMING AGAIN FOR YOU, AND REMEMBER THAT WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOUR FUTURE HOLDS IS BASED ON THAT REVELATION, AND THAT REVELATION ALONE. IF YOU KNOW AND BELIEVE THE GOSPEL AND THAT GOD'S LOVE AND PRESENCE IS NEAR, YOU CAN FACE THE DAYS AHEAD WITH CONFIDENCE AND HOPE.

AS WE READ, WE WILL LEARN THINGS, ASK NEW QUESTIONS, BE AMAZED BY AND GROW IN OUR FEAR OF THE LORD. THIS LETTER WILL HELP US BE MORE FAITHFUL TO CHRIST AND LOVING TO OTHERS. THIS JOURNEY THROUGH REVELATION IS NOT ONE WE NEED TO BE AFRAID OF, BUT ONE THAT WILL BE A BLESSING - IF WE READ, HEAR AND HEED "THE WORDS OF THIS PROPHECY...AND THE THINGS IN IT...FOR THE TIME IS NEAR" (REVELATION 1:3)