

## ENCOURAGED BY REVELATION

- A. Introduction: The world around us seems to be going crazy. To walk in peace and joy in the midst of the chaos, you must understand that a plan is unfolding—God’s plan to reclaim this world from sin, corruption, and death through Jesus. Jesus is coming soon to complete the plan of God. That is our hope in this increasingly dark world.
1. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters and He made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. However, both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin, beginning with the first man Adam’s sin. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; etc.
    - a. When God’s plan for a family went off track, the Lord began to unveil His plan to reclaim and restore His family and the family home. This plan is known as redemption.
      1. When Jesus came to earth the first time He activated God plan through His death on the Cross. His sacrifice for our sin opened the way for sinners to be transformed into sons and daughters.
      2. Jesus will come again in the not too distant future to complete God’s plan of redemption by cleansing and restoring the earth to a fit forever family home.
    - b. Heb 9:26-28—He (Jesus) came once for all time, at the end of the age, to remove the power of sin forever by his sacrificial death for us...He will come again but not to deal with our sins again (NLT) ...but to bring full salvation to those who are eagerly...expecting him (Amp).
      1. We live at the end of the age (time period) when things are not the way God intended then to be. The Greek word that is translated end doesn’t mean termination as in end of existence. It means bringing to completion with events coming together at an appointed end.
      2. Full salvation will include the earth renewed, along with resurrection of the dead. Earth will be restored and we will be reunited with our bodies raised from the grave so we can live on earth again. Life on this planet will finally be what God created and intended it to be. Rev 21:1-4
  2. Jesus’ return is often referred to as the second coming. Second coming is a broad term and includes a number of events that occur over a period of time before God’s plan of redemption is fully completed.
    - a. Sincere people have a tendency to focus on individual events (the rapture, the tribulation, the Antichrist, the Millennial Kingdom, etc.) and miss the big picture or what this is all about.
    - b. In these lessons I’m jumping over all of these individual pieces and focusing on the end result— God’s family of redeemed sons and daughters living on this earth after it is renewed and restored. I mention the individual topics only as they relate to the end result.
      1. We’ve been emphasizing the fact that the Bible instructs us to encourage ourselves and each other as we see the day of the Lord’s return approaching (Heb 10:25). To do this, you must have accurate information about what is and will happen before Jesus returns. We’re working on that in this series.
      2. We need to be able to encourage ourselves because the Bible reveals that the years preceding the Lord’s return will be filled with increasing calamity and chaos. Matt 24:6-8; II Tim 3:1-5
    - c. This trouble will be the result of the actions of a final world ruler and the responses of the people of the world to him. Shortly before Jesus returns Satan will offer the world a false christ (Antichrist) who will become the leader of a worldwide system of government, economy, and religion.
      1. This man will ultimately lead the world to the worst war humanity has ever seen. It will be a nuclear, chemical, and biological holocaust. If Jesus did not return, every human being on earth would die. II Thess 2:3-4; 9; Dan 7:9-28; Dan 8:23-27; Rev 13:1-18; Matt 24:21-22; etc.
      2. Much of the Book of Revelation is an account of these final years of tribulation. Although Revelation is meant to be a source of comfort and hope for those who read it, for many, it is a frightening, freaky book. In this lesson we’re going to revisit some points we’ve already made about the Book of Revelation and then add to them.

- B. In about AD 95 Jesus appeared to John the apostle while he was exiled on Patmos, an island off the coast of modern day Turkey. Jesus instructed John to write down what he saw and heard and share it with believers. John addressed it to seven churches in existence at that time in Asia (modern day Turkey).
1. John was writing to people that he knew and loved. These seven churches were in close proximity to each other. Tradition tells us that in the latter part of his life John ministered in and around the city of Ephesus and became the overseer of the seven churches.
    - a. John did not write to scare or confuse them. He wrote to encourage them. Imagine how the recipients would have received John's message. Not only was he dear to them, he was the last surviving apostle—a man who walked and talked with Jesus. Now, he has sent them a scroll with word that Jesus has recently appeared to him and given him messages for these believers.
    - b. Chapter 1 records John's vision of Jesus. Chapters 2 and 3 are specific messages for each church. Chapters 4-22 contain prophetic or predictive information and describe events in the final years leading up to the establishment of God's eternal kingdom on earth once it has been restored.
  2. Chapters 6, 8, 9, 15, and 16 are a chronological description of increasingly catastrophic events on earth. The troubles begin when John sees Jesus open seven seals on a scroll, one at a time, followed by seven angels who blow trumpets one at a time, and seven angels who pour out seven bowls of wrath one at a time. Each seal, trumpet, and bowl is followed by an event on earth.
    - a. These various events lead to unprecedented suffering on the earth. By the time the 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet sounds half the population of the world is dead. The chaos and destruction is not from God.
    - b. The opening of the first seal releases the final world ruler (Antichrist) who eventually brings the world to battle at a campaign known as Armageddon (or WWII, centered in northern Israel). There will be nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare and millions will suffer and die.
    - c. The chaos on earth is connected to actions in Heaven—not because God is behind it or causing it—but because He wants it clearly understood that the calamity the people of earth experience, the ruin they reap, is a direct result of their rejection of Him.
      1. When this final world leader comes onto the world stage, the entire world will reject Almighty God in favor of Antichrist. God will give them over to their choice and all the ensuing consequences. Rom 1:24; 26; 28
      2. Despite the horror of this period, God's grace will be demonstrated in a mighty way. There will be more supernatural signs of the reality of God given during this period than ever before in the history of man. The gospel will be preached throughout the world and multitudes will be saved. Matt 24:14
        - A. Rev 7:9-11—I (John) saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb...these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.
        - B. Rev 11:13—And that [very] hour there was a tremendous earthquake and one tenth of the city (Jerusalem) was destroyed (fell); seven thousand people perished in the earthquake, and those who remained were filled with dread and terror and were awe-struck, and they glorified the Lord of heaven (Amp).
  3. We struggle with the Book of Revelation because of the language. Remember first of all that John was a 1<sup>st</sup> century man who was describing 21<sup>st</sup> century life, technology, and warfare. He used terms that he and his hearers and readers were familiar with (such as referring to what a possible helicopters equipped with guns as tormenting bugs (Rev 9:1-11)).
    - a. Although the writing seems strange to us, it wasn't to the first readers. Revelation is an example of apocalyptic literature, a style of prophetic writing that flourished from 200 BC to AD 140.
      1. Non-biblical authors in that period wrote in this style as did several major Hebrew prophets—

- Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah.
2. Apocalyptic literature uses symbolic imagery to convey the message. A primary theme in these works is a final world cataclysm in which the powers of evil will be defeated by the establishment of the kingdom of God.
  - b. John used at least 300 symbols in his account. But 9/10s of them are defined either by the context in Revelation or somewhere in the Old Testament.
    1. Revelation has more Old Testament references than any other New Testament book because it records the completion God's plan to reclaim the family and the family home. God has been talking about the end since the beginning. Acts 3:21
    2. Revelation ends with the completion of the plan—God on earth with His redeemed family, earth restored and all corruption, sin, and death removed forever: Rev 11:15—The whole world has now become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever (NLT); Rev 21:3-4—God himself will be with them...and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain (NLT); Rev 21:5—Look, I am making all things new (NLT).
  4. The Book of Revelation refers to this period of scrolls, trumpets, and bowls is referred to as the day of the Lamb's wrath and the time of His judgment. Rev 6:16-17; Rev 14:7.
    - a. This language scares us because we hear it as an angry God throwing down on the world because He has finally had enough. But the first readers and hearers heard it as the completion of the plan.
      1. Remember what we've already said about wrath and judgment. Wrath is God's right and just response to mankind's sin. His wrath is not a car wreck, a tornado, or difficult circumstances. It is eternal separation from God. God doesn't dole out wrath on a sin by sin basis.
      2. The wrath due to men for sin went to Jesus on the Cross. If you don't receive Jesus, then His wrath abides on you and you face eternal separation from Him when you die. John 3:36
    - b. From the beginning God, through His prophets, spoke of a time of separating the wicked from the good or a time of judgment. The Greek word translated judgment in the Book of Revelation means a separation, then a decision (or a judgment) for or against. It implies justice or doing what is right. It is part of God's plan to restore the family and the family home.
      1. Rev 11:18—John recorded that he saw men who surround God's throne proclaim: Your wrath has come and the time that the dead should be judged. This includes punishment and reward.
      2. Those in God's family will be rewarded with a new home (the new earth). Those who have rejected the Lord will be forever banished from His presence (the second death). II Thess 1:7-9
      3. Remember that Jesus Himself told His disciples that at the end of this age the angels will remove all that is sinful, all that corrupts, from His kingdom—and that is a good thing. It's part of the process of restoring the family home. Matt 13:41-43
  5. John's first hearers and readers heard judgment and wrath in terms of the Old Testament prophets. Remember that the Old Testament prophets referred to what we call the second coming as the Day of the Lord—the time when He will deal with the ungodly, deliver His people, and then live with them forever.
    - a. Rev 14:14-20 makes reference to harvesting the earth and describes the Lord and His angels putting sickles into the earth and casting the harvest into the winepress of God's wrath.
      1. In Isa 63:1-6 the Lord comes to announce Israel's salvation. His garments are stained red as if He had been treading out grapes.
      2. The Lord states that that He has in fact trodden down Israel's enemies because the time has come to ransom His people. That's what the coming of the Lord in wrath meant to them.
    - b. The prophet Joel made a number of references to the Day of the Lord. In Joel 3:1-2; 12-17 he wrote that all nations will be gathered to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.
      1. Joel used the imagery figuratively as the place where the judgment of the final world ruler and his forces will take place. Decision means threshing or a harvesting process (v14).

2. This was a familiar historical reference to an actual place where the united enemies of Israel were overthrown by God's power. The first readers got Joel's point: God protects and delivers those who are His. II Chron 20:26
  3. Joel 2:30-32—Joel foresaw the sun turned to darkness and the moon turned blood red in connection with the day of the Lord. John saw the same thing (Rev 6:12).
    - A. We noted in a previous lesson that this resembles a description of the nuclear winter that scientists say will follow a thermonuclear war. The debris blasted into the atmosphere will blot out light and heat from the sun and moon.
    - B. But Joel made it clear that whosoever calls on name of Lord shall be delivered. Peter quoted this passage and clearly connecting the prophecy to Jesus' coming. Acts 2:17-21
  6. Sincere Christians have a tendency to get fixed on singular points in the Book of Revelation such as the mark of the beast and terrify themselves over the prospect of accidentally taking the mark or being forced to take it. Rev 13:16-17
    - a. When you carefully read the passages you see that receiving the mark is an expression of worship and submission to the final world ruler (Rev 14:9-11; Rev 16:2; Rev 19:20; Rev 20:4). It's not something you accidentally receive. Accepting the mark is an expression of the fact that you believe the ruler is who he claims to be—God.
    - b. The first readers of Revelation knew that there is another side to being marked. John made reference to groups of people that had the seal of God on them and were protected. Rev 7:3; Rev 9:4
      1. The word Greek word translated seal means to stamp with a signet or private mark for security or reservation. The Old Testament has examples of people marked for protection—Israel on the night of Passover (Ex 12:7); the godly in the midst of Israel when the nation was given over to vile idol worship and about to be destroyed (Ezek 9:4).
      2. The first readers knew from the apostles' teachings that they were sealed by the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption (the return of Jesus to complete the plan). Eph 4:30
  7. The first readers and hearers of the Book of Revelation saw it not as a scary book but a book of triumph—God's plan for a family in the world He made for us will be completed. They knew that He will preserve His people unto the day of His coming.
- C. Conclusion—We have more to say next week. But consider these thoughts as we close.
1. Lessons like this don't seem practical when you look at all the crazy things going on around us. But when you understand the end result, it will help you deal with the increasing chaos.
    - a. The apostle Paul faced death as a martyr with the knowledge that he has a future and a hope in Jesus and that God would preserve him until the day of his coming. II Tim 1:12; II Tim 4:18
    - b. Paul is presently enjoying the bliss of Heaven but he, like us, is awaiting the day of full salvation when his body will be raised and he will come to live with our Savior on earth forever.
  2. An end is coming—and that's a good thing! God's plan to restore the family and the family home will be completed. The Book of Revelation makes this clear.
  3. The Lord will get His people through whatever is ahead until He gets us out. And that's a good thing!