

## HOPE FROM REVELATION

- A. Introduction: Introduction: We're talking about how to deal with the troubling times that our country and this world are facing. To do so we must learn to see these circumstances in terms of what the Bible says.
1. The Lord Jesus Christ is coming back to this earth in the not too distant future. I believe that we are close enough to His return that many of us will see it, and the Bible informs us that His return will be preceded by increasingly troubling events on this earth.
    - a. Jesus compared some of these events to birth pains, meaning that they will increase in frequency and intensity as His return draws closer. The example of birth pangs gives us insight into how we deal with the challenges ahead. Just like a woman in labor we must focus on the end result. Matt 24:6-8
      1. Jesus statement presumes that we know the end result: the completion of God's plan to have a family in a world free from sorrow, pain, and loss.
      2. This world is not as God intended it to be and He is presently carrying out a plan to restore it. That plan is known as redemption. The plan will culminate with Jesus' return.
    - b. To have peace and joy in the midst of the increasing turmoil coming on this earth you must learn to keep you focus on the end result, the end of the plan.
  2. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Him. And He fashioned this planet to be a home for Himself and His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18
    - a. The first man Adam chose independence from God through sin. As the head of the human race and earth's first steward, his actions dramatically affected the human race and the planet. Men were made sinners by nature and a curse of corruption and death entered creation. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12
      1. At that point God began to unveil His plan of redemption with the announcement of a coming Redeemer who would undo the damage—the Seed (Jesus) of the woman (Mary). Gen 3:15
      2. From that point on God revealed increasing aspects of His plan as He set aside and preserved the people group through whom the Promised Seed would come. These people were the descendants of a man named Abraham and eventually grew into the nation of Israel. Acts 3:21
    - b. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for man's sin on the Cross and open the way for sinners to be transformed into sons and daughters of God. He will come again to cleanse the earth of all sin, corruption, and death and restore it to a fit forever home for the Lord and His family.
      1. This world isn't the way it's supposed to be, and it's not going to go on forever the way it is— This world in its present form is passing away (I Cor 7:31, NIV). And that's a good thing!
      2. However, many people are in great anxiety of what is happening all around us and are desperate to stop it. But we can't because it's not simply a matter of fixing things up by making the world a better place. There is a root problem. This world is badly damaged because of sin. Mankind can't fix it. We need supernatural help. The chaos will end when Jesus returns.
  3. Last week we talked about the Book of Revelation and how it is a book of comfort and hope because it gives the end of the plan. Revelation contains specific messages for seven churches in existence at the time the book was written (chapters 2 and 3) along with an account of events leading up to the renovation of this world and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom on earth (chapters 4-22).
    - a. We struggle with the Book of Revelation and miss the encouragement in it because we don't consider it in terms of what it meant to the first hearers and readers.
    - b. We're not going to do a verse by verse study of Revelation. Rather, I'm trying to show how it fits with the rest of the Bible, how the first readers would have heard it, and why it is a book of hope.
- B. The Book of Revelation was written by John the apostle about AD 95 when he was an old man. He was exiled for his faith in Christ on the island of Patmos of the coast of modern day Turkey.
1. Revelation is difficult for modern readers because of the language the apostle John used. But it was

perfectly acceptable and plain to the first readers and hearers.

- a. Revelation is an example of apocalyptic literature that was popular from 200 BC to AD 140. This type of writing uses symbolic imagery to convey the message. Other Bible authors also wrote in this style—Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah.
  - b. Revelation was not new information to the first readers and hearers. It was additional information that confirmed what the first Christians already knew from the Old Testament prophets. John used at least 300 symbols, but 9/10s of them are defined somewhere in the Old Testament—or by the context in the Book of Revelation itself.
2. Much of John's book is a repeat and an expansion of information given to the prophet Daniel. Daniel's book was completed about 535 BC. At that time Israel was under the control of the Babylonian Empire, which had forcibly removed from their land a half century earlier and taken them away as captives to the land of Babylon.
    - a. In part to encourage His people, God gave Daniel much information about Israel's near and distant future, including events that will precede the coming of the Lord to establish His kingdom on earth.
      1. Through a series of dreams and visions, God revealed to Daniel that four kingdoms would rule over His people prior to the Lord's coming. In one dream these kingdoms were portrayed as a statue with various body parts representing different empires. In another dream the empires were represented as beasts. Dan 2:24-45; Dan 7:1-28
      2. The fourth beast (kingdom) was different from the first three—cruel and terrifying—devouring and trampling its victims. It had ten horns (symbol for kings). Daniel saw a small horn or king emerge, an arrogant, boastful leader who waged war against God's people. Dan 7:19-21
    - b. Daniel's point is the end result—God will ultimately establish His kingdom on earth and swallow up these kingdoms and their leaders. This message gave hope to Daniel's readers. Ultimately, God will establish His kingdom on earth, we will be free, and life will be what it was meant to be.
      1. Dan 2:44—During the reign of these kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed; no one will ever conquer it. It will shatter all these kingdoms into nothingness, but it will stand forever (NLT).
      2. Dan 7:17-18—These four huge beasts represent four kingdoms that will arise from the earth. But in the end, the people of the Most High will be given the kingdom and they will rule forever and ever (NLT).
      3. Dan 7:21-22—As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and was defeating them until the Ancient One came and judged in favor of the holy people of the Most High. Then the time arrived for the holy people to take over the kingdom (NLT).
      4. Dan 7:26-27—But then the court will pass judgment, and all his (the little horn) power will be taken away and completely destroyed. Then the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be given to the holy people of the Most High (NLT).
  3. We can look back at the historical record from Daniel's time until Jesus came into this world and identify the empires Daniel saw—Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome. When John wrote Revelation Israel (along with the known world of that day) was under the control of the Roman Empire.
    - a. For the first thirty years after Jesus returned to Heaven, Rome viewed Christianity as a Jewish sect and exempted them from emperor worship as they did the Jews.
    - b. However, as the church of Jesus became increasingly Gentile, they couldn't be sheltered under the wing of Judaism and Rome's official attitude toward Christians began to change.
      1. Brief and localized persecution began in Rome under Emperor Nero (AD 54-68). Christians were attacked and murdered. Some were used as human torches while others were clothed in sheep skins and thrown to wild dogs in the arena. Peter and Paul were executed in this period.
      2. Domitian (AD 81-96) was the first emperor to require everyone to worship him as a god. Jews

and Christians were labeled atheists and violent persecutions began against both.

3. John wrote Revelation in this period and referred to persecution in Asia (modern Turkey). He mentioned Antipas who was martyred. He is believed to have been a bishop in the city of Pergamos. Tradition says that he was burned to death under a brazen bull. Rev 2:10-13
4. When John wrote Revelation, Israel and the entire Middle East over the last 450 years had been under the control of four successive empires—as Daniel predicted.
  - a. Severe persecution of God’s people by a ruler opposes God through demanding that men worship him is now under way. For all they knew, they were experiencing what Daniel saw in his visions.
    1. Remember, these Christians were expecting Jesus to return soon. No one knew that Jesus’ return to establish His kingdom was still 2,000 years away. They didn’t know that Rome would weaken, divide into two parts (AD 395), and eventually fall to invaders (AD 476).
    2. They know that severe persecution is underway, they have lost loved ones, and they will lose more. Then, they get a message of comfort and hope from Jesus through John. It has the same symbols and the same language as Daniel’s book.
    3. John’s message elaborates on and underscores what Daniel predicted: A beast is coming. The whole world will worship him. But those who stay faithful to Jesus will be delivered, and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. Rev 11:15
  - b. Rev 1:4-6—Notice the first facts about Jesus that John gives His readers: This message is from Him who is faithful. He has conquered death. He is the ruler of the kings of the earth. He loves us and has cleansed us from our sins. He has made us a kingdom of priests to God His Father.
    1. Rev 5:10—John reported that he saw people in Heaven who are still alive and looking forward to returning to earth to reign.
    2. Rev 5:13—John saw every creature (the word is used for man and animal) in Heaven and on the earth praising God. They understand what completion of God’s means: restoration of the family and the family home.
5. John witnessed Jesus open a scroll with seven seals on it, one at a time. The opening of each seal triggered an event in this final world kingdom.
  - a. Rev 6:1-8—The opening of the first four seals released four horses with riders. The first rider, on a white horse went forth to conquer. The second took peace from the earth. The third brought famine. The fourth brought death through sword, hunger, pestilence and wild beasts.
    1. When we put all the information given by all the prophets, we recognize that the first rider is the final world ruler (Daniel’s small horn) who will take peace from the earth. The ensuing warfare will lead to famine, disease, and death.
    2. All of the imagery used by John was familiar to readers who knew the writings of the prophets. For example, bread portioned out by weight and measures (scales) is a symbol of famine (Ezek 4:10-17). And death by sword, hunger, disease, and wild animals is the fourfold consequence (judgment, punishment) that came on Israel for rejecting God (Ezek 14:21).
    3. Daniel revealed that the final world ruler will take peace from the earth and defy Almighty God. The inevitable result will be war, famine, hunger, disease, and death with unburied bodies consumed by wild beasts. Dan 7; Dan 8; Dan 11
  - b. Rev 6:9-10—When the fifth seal opened John saw martyrs in Heaven who had been killed for their faith in Christ standing at the foot of an altar. Remember, John’s readers are facing persecution
    1. But their friends and loved ones are alive in Heaven with the Lord. Not only is this comfort, it is assurance for those still facing the possibility of death by persecution.
    2. Notice, those in Heaven understand that justice is coming. They also know that the turmoil and chaos occurring on the earth is not going to end immediately. Others will die as they have.
  - c. Rev 6:12-14—When the sixth seal opened John saw the earth quake, the sun became dark, the moon

turn blood red, and stars fall from the heavens. This same scenario is describes by several Old Testament prophets as well as Jesus. Isa 13:10; Joel 2:10; Joel 3:15; Matt 24:29.

1. Remember, John is a 1<sup>st</sup> century man who was describing 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare, something for which he and his readers had no words. He used the words available to him and his readers.
2. We discussed in a previous lesson how that these terms are actually consistent with what we now know are the effects of nuclear explosions on the environment.
  - A. Rev 19:21; Rev 16:21—John gave more details about this later in his book, noting that hailstones fall in connection with this freaky cosmic event.
    1. We now know from hydrogen bomb tests in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that not only do they produce intense fireballs and radiation, they have produced hailstorms—hail that put dents on the upper deck armor plating on the test ships.
    2. John’s readers would have heard this in terms of God defeating His enemies. When Joshua led Israel into Canaan to take the land and settle it, the Amorites were defeated by a terrible hailstorm that killed more of the enemy than Joshua’s army. Josh 10:11
  - B. And the heavens departed as a scroll—sky rolled up like a scroll (NLT). When nuclear weapons are detonated, the blast creates a vacuum and the air rushes back in on itself—like a scroll rolling up.
    1. And the mountains and islands will be moved or set in motion. It doesn’t mean that that they disappear because mountains are mentioned in Revelation after this event. Rev 21:10
    2. This didn’t scare the first readers because they understood from the prophets that the world will be changed or renewed not annihilated. Ps 102:25-26 says that the heavens and earth will be changed. This is the same Hebrew word translated renew in Isa 40:31. This world as it is will cease to be because it will be renewed.
- d. Rev 6:15-17—John saw men on earth crying out for the earth to hide them because the time of the Lamb’s wrath has come. Once again, this was familiar imagery for John’s readers.
  1. Isa 2:19—When the Lord rises to shake the earth, his enemies will crawl with fear into holes in the ground. They will hide in caves in the rocks from the terror of the Lord and the glory of his majesty (NLT). Hosea 10:8—(Unrepentant idol worshippers) will beg the mountains to bury them and the hills to fall on them (NLT).
  2. John’s readers understood that the Lord is coming in wrath meant removal of the enemies of His people, and John’s message in His book affirmed this fact (Isa 63:1-5; Rev 14:9-19). It was a message of hope for them.

C. Conclusion: We have more to say next week, but consider these thoughts as we close this lesson.

1. People get caught up in the details of the symbolism in Revelation and miss the big picture.
  - a. Although many of the symbols in Revelation are defined elsewhere in the Bible, many of the particulars are not stated—names of people and place; specifics of how and when events develop.
  - b. These particulars will become clear as the actual events described in Revelation begin to unfold. Right now, the circumstances that will produce a final world empire and ruler with a willing and adoring population are setting up.
2. We need to keep our attention on the big picture. Jesus is coming back to complete the plan of God.
  - a. The separation between the dwelling place of God and of man will end. Heaven and earth will become one on earth once it is renewed and restored. And the curse of corruption and death that entered all of creation will be forever removed. Gen 3:23-24; Rev 21:1-5; Gen 3:17-19; Rev 22:3;
  - b. The kingdoms of this world will once again become the kingdom of our Lord. That is where our hope comes from (Rev 11:15). Lots more next week!