

REVELATION IS NOT A SCARY BOOK

- A. Introduction: We're working on a series about the second coming of Jesus. We're considering what Jesus' return meant to His first followers, the people who walked and talked with Him. They lived with the awareness that He would return, and this expectancy gave them hope in the midst of life's challenges.
1. The second coming is not a side issue—it is an integral part of the gospel. When Jesus returns, He will complete God's plan for a family with whom He can live forever on this earth. Eph 1:4-5
 - a. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin at the Cross so that all who put faith in Him can be transformed from sinners into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God. John 1:12-13
 - b. He will come again to restore this planet to a fit forever home for God and His family. Jesus will cleanse it of all the corruption and death caused by sin, and renew and restore the earth. Rev 21-22
 2. The Bible makes it very clear that the years just prior to the second coming of Jesus will be filled with tribulation unlike anything the world has ever seen. Jesus Himself said so. Matt 24:21
 - a. Jesus' first followers weren't alarmed by this fact because they knew from the Old Testament prophets, as well as what Jesus told them, that God's people will make it through the chaos ahead. And they knew the end result—the completion of God's plan for a family and earth restored. b.

The circumstances that will produce the tribulation in these final years are setting up now and will increasingly affect our lives in negative ways. We're considering what the first Christians knew about Jesus' return that gave them hope, so that we can also live with that same expectancy.
 3. To understand what will happen before the Lord's return, we need to know that there is a counterfeit kingdom in this world, presided over by Satan (Luke 4:6; John 12:31; II Cor 4:4; I John 5:19; etc.). Jesus is coming back to remove this usurper and destroy his kingdom (Rev 11:15).
 - a. Just before Jesus returns, Satan will offer the world a false Messiah (an anti or in place of Christ) in an attempt to hold on to his kingdom. This man will declare himself to be God and preside over a global system of government, economy, and religion. Rev 13:1-18; II Thess 2:3-4
 1. For a period of time, the world will embrace this false Christ and reject the true Creator and Savior. This Satan inspired and empowered man's actions, and the responses of the people of the world to him, will produce the tribulation of the final years of this age.
 2. He will 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 would die. Matt 24:21-22
 - b. The technology for a worldwide system ruled by a tyrant leader with full control over the world's population is now in place, and the world is primed for a God-like leader.
 1. There is increasing talk about coming together as a world community to address global issues such as climate change, poverty, and injustice, etc. The response to the recent pandemic shows a willingness across the globe to surrender national sovereignty to a world organization.
 2. In recent decades, there's been an unprecedented abandonment of Christianity in once Christian nations. With this has come a rejection of Judeo-Christian ethics and morality as a restraining force in society, resulting in a dramatic increase in unchecked lawlessness and wickedness.
 4. World conditions will get worse. To have peace of mind in the face of these increasingly turbulent times, we must understand what is happening and why and learn to keep our focus on the end result. Jesus is coming back and He will get us through until He gets us out. We have more to say tonight.
 - a. We're going to look at the Book of Revelation. Revelation includes information about this final period of tribulation and gives us insight into the first Christians' view of the second coming.
 - b. Revelation seems like a weird book stuck on the end of the Bible that describes a great apocalypse and the destruction of the world. But Revelation is actually a book of hope and ultimate victory.

- B. First, some background on Revelation. In AD 95 John (an original apostle) was exiled on Patmos, an island

off the coast of Turkey. The Lord Jesus appeared to John and told him to write down what he saw and heard.

1. The information John was given is recorded in the Book of Revelation. The Greek word that is translated revelation (*apokalupisis*) means to reveal, unveil, or bring to light. The Book of Revelation is an unveiling (or revealing) of Jesus and the completion of God's plan. Rev 1:1

a. Rev 1:4—John sent the scroll (book) to seven churches in Asia (present day Turkey). Tradition tells us that, in his later years, John became the overseer of these churches. John was writing to people he knew and loved, not to scare or confuse them, but to encourage them. b.

Revelation was written by a real person to real people with real issues to really help them. It gives information that if taken to heart can bless and encourage. Note how the book opens and closes.

1. Rev 1:3—God blesses the one who reads this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to it and obey what it says (NLT).

2. Rev 22:7—Blessed (happy and to be envied) is he who observes and lays to heart and keeps the truths of the prophecy—the predictions, consolations and warnings—contained in this little book (Amp).

c. When John wrote his book, sixty years had passed since Jesus went back to Heaven, and He had not yet returned. False teachers were infiltrating the churches. Scoffers were rising up and sneering at the fact that Jesus had not returned (II Pet 3:3-4). Apathy was setting in among some believers.

1. And, although hundreds of churches had been established across the Roman Empire, persecution, ranging from mild to severe was under way. Many believers were martyred, including James (John's brother) in A.D. 40, Peter in A.D. 64-66, and Paul in A.D. 67 or 68.

2. Imagine how these believers felt when they heard the news that the Lord had recently appeared to John with messages for them from Jesus Himself. They would have been overjoyed by the scroll's contents. It assured them that Jesus had not forgotten them, He will return, and God's plan for a kingdom and family on this earth renewed and restored will be completed.

2. One reason that we struggle with the Book of Revelation is because of its strange language. But the language would not have been strange to the first readers. Consider these two points.

a. Revelation is an example of apocalyptic literature—a style of prophetic literature that flourished from 200 BC to AD 140. Non-biblical authors in that period wrote in this style, as did several major Hebrew prophets—Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah.

1. 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.

2. 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.

A. Revelation has more references to the Old Testament than any other New Testament book, in part because it records the completion of God's plan to reclaim the family and the family home. God has been talking about the end since the beginning. Acts 3:21

B. Revelation was not new information. It was additional information that confirmed what the first Christians already knew from the Old Testament prophets. Much of John's book is a repeat and an expansion of inform given to the prophet Daniel.

b. John was a 1st century man who was trying to describe the 21st century life, technology, and warfare he witnessed in his vision—things for which he and his readers had no words. John used terms that his first readers were familiar with to try to describe what he saw (more on this in a moment).

1. No one knows yet what every verse means. Reading parts of Revelation is like reading Isaiah 53 before Jesus was crucified. The prophet Isaiah wrote 700 years before the event and, for centuries, it was unclear who was pictured in Isa 53—until it happened and Jesus was crucified.

2. When the events described in Revelation occur it will be clear what everything means. We

aren't going to do a verse-by-verse study. There are plenty of books that address every verse.

If you choose to read such a book, remember that much of it is speculation. And, don't lose sight of the big picture and the end result—Jesus will complete the plan!

3. A brief outline of Revelation is helpful. John first recorded his vision of Jesus (Rev 1) and then specific messages for each church (Rev 2-3). The rest of the book (Rev 4-22) is prophetic (predictive) and describes mainly future events leading up to Jesus' return and the establishment of God's kingdom and the renewing of the earth.

a. The action can be a little difficult to follow because the narrative switches back and forth from what is happening in Heaven to what is occurring on earth. And, as the action unfolds, informational passages are inserted at various points (chapters 7; 10-11:13; 12; 13; 14; 17; 18-19:6).

b. Chapters 6, 8, 9, 15, and 16 are a chronological description of increasingly catastrophic events on earth. John saw 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.

1. 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 (WWIII).

2. The various events that follow each seal, trumpet, and bowl lead to unprecedented suffering on the earth. By the time the 6th trumpet sounds half the population of the world is dead.

c. The events described are connected to Jesus, not because He makes them happen, but because God wants it clearly understood that the calamity earth experiences in this unique period of human history, is a direct consequence of their rejection of Him for a false Christ.

C. The first Christians had some knowledge of this final war because many of the Old Testament prophets wrote down their visions of it. The exact scenario of how, when, and why the war starts is not completely clear yet.

1. I'm not going to give a detailed description of these military actions. Many books have been written by good men in modern times to try to sort it all out. But, as with books written about Revelation, much of the content is speculation. It will be clear what everything means once the events occur.

a. I want to try to take the freaky element out of the Book of Revelation for you, and help you see how 1st century AD and 7th century BC men described technology they did not have words for.

1. Ezekiel saw invading armies in Israel the distant future (latter times). He described them as a cloud and a great shaking. In modern warfare, highly mobile, well equipped armies moving at top speed, stir up clouds of dust and shake the ground as they cover the land. Ezek 38:16-20

2. Ezekiel described the battle as horrific quaking, torrential rain, hailstones, fire, and brimstone.

Fire is mentioned by other prophets as the destructive force in these final battles. Ezek

38:21-22; Ezek 39:6; Isa 24:5-6; Joel 1:19-20

b. The scenes these prophets describe in terms that they and their readers understood bear a remarkable likeness to a nuclear and chemical exchange. Since the building of the first atomic bombs in WWII there have been two nuclear explosions in wartime (Hiroshima and Nagasaki), as well as many tests.

1. When the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, people were literally incinerated by the ensuing fireballs. Weapons much more powerful than those used in WWII now exist.

A. Isa 13:6-13 speaks of men's faces being as flames. The intense heat and blinding light of a large thermonuclear blast can set people on fire for a radius of up to 100 miles.

B. Open air hydrogen bomb tests conducted after WWII produced hailstorms—hail that put large dents in the upper deck armor of the test ships. In the Book of Revelation, John described hundred pound hailstones falling from the sky. Rev 16:21

2. Ezekiel mentioned brimstone. Brimstone is sulfur, which is a principle ingredient in many chemical and nerve gases. Ezek 38:22—burning sulfur (NLT).

2. In the Book of Revelation John described what happens when the sixth seal on the scroll that Jesus held is opened (Rev 6:12-15). Note the similarity between his descriptions and the Old Testament prophets.
 - a. John saw a great earthquake (*seismos*), a word that can mean a terrible shaking. If John saw the earth shake due to nuclear blast, earthquake was the only word he knew to describe it.
 - b. John saw the sun become black and the moon become red. The prophet Joel, Jesus, and Peter all made similar statements Joel 2:30-31; Matt 24:29; Luke 21:25; Acts 2:19
 1. Their words resemble a description of the nuclear winter that scientists say will follow a nuclear war. The debris blasted into the atmosphere will blot out light and heat from the sun.
 2. John next spoke of stars falling. John could be describing multiple warheads streaking through the sky as they fall upon their intended targets, using the words available to him.
 - c. John witnessed the sky roll up. We know from observing the effects of detonated nuclear weapons that in a thermonuclear explosion, the atmosphere is pushed back on itself and creates a vacuum. Then it pushes back into the vacuum with almost as much force. Much of the damage of the occurs connection with the violent movement of the atmosphere or the sky rolling up like a scroll.
3. My point is that the information in Revelation is not a description of a freaky “throw down of wrath” from Heaven. What John saw was consistent with 21st century warfare and its effects.

D. Conclusion: We have more, but consider these points as we close. Revelation is not meant to be a scary book. It is a book of triumph. God’s plan for a family in the world He created will be completed. And the first readers knew that the Lord will preserve His people unto the day of His coming.

1. Even though much of Revelation describes the end of this present age, there is information applicable to every generation. The Book of Revelation would have encouraged that first generation of believers.
2. Although the final global ruler was not on the scene at that time, the world as those people knew it was under the control of the Roman Empire. Rome had absolute power over the all the territory and people it controlled, and the Emperor was considered a god who was to be worshipped by all (like Antichrist).
 - a. Revelation ends with Jesus vanquishing the final Antichrist and his kingdom, taking control of this this world, cleansing and renewing it, and bringing the capital of Heaven to earth. Rev 11:15; 21:1-5
 - b. John witnessed what Daniel the prophet wrote about: The Son of Man (whom they now knew was Jesus Christ) destroy the final wicked ruler and establish His forever kingdom on earth. Dan 7:11-14
1. Revelation was a reminder to these early believers that Jesus had not forgotten them and would preserve them unto His kingdom—even though it was not established in their lifetime.
 2. Those first believers are in Heaven right now waiting to return to earth with the Lord when He comes back to complete God’s plan for a family on this earth. I Thess 4:13-14; Jude 14-15; etc.
3. Rev 10:7—But when the seventh angel blew his trumpet, then God’s veiled plan—mysterious through the ages ever since it was announced by his servants, the prophets—would be fulfilled (TLB).
 - a. Revelation is a book of prophecy. We’re living in a time when everyone seems to have a prophecy about something. But according to the Bible, the purpose of predictive prophecy is to reveal Jesus.
 1. Rev 19:10—Worship God. For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus (NLT); It is the truth concerning Jesus that inspires all prophecy (Knox).
 2. Prophecy doesn’t magnify the devil and his activities. It glorifies God by giving information in advance that only He could know. When it comes to pass as God said it would, He is glorified.
 - b. The Book of Revelation is about Jesus and His ultimate victory over Satan and his kingdom. His message for believers is: Stay faithful to Me no matter what. The end result is worth. Much more next week!