

REVELATION: A BOOK OF TRIUMPH

- A. Introduction: We are in the middle of a series on the second coming of Jesus. Perhaps you've wondered why we need to study this topic. It doesn't seem to relate everyday life. It sounds like science fiction. There are so many different opinions about it. What if Jesus' return is thousands of years away?
1. The second coming of Jesus is not a side issue. It is a fundamental part of Christian doctrine (teaching). There are twenty-seven documents (or books and letters) in the New Testament. Only four of them make no reference to the second coming, and three of those writings are short, personal letters.
 - a. When we study the New Testament documents we find that the second coming was part of the message that the first apostles (eyewitnesses of Jesus) proclaimed as they preached the gospel.
 - b. The apostle Paul was only in the Greek city of Thessalonica for a few weeks when severe persecution drove him out. Yet, in that short time, he gave them much information about Jesus' second coming. I Thess 1:9-10; I Thess 5:1-9; II Thess 2:1-12; etc.
 2. Jesus' return is not unrelated to everyday life. He's coming back to complete God's ultimate plan for us. This world the way it is isn't the way God created it to be, filled with sin, corruption, and death. It's not going to stay this way forever. There's a good end in sight and that give us hope. I Cor 7:31
 - a. God created men and women to become His sons and daughters, and He made the earth to be a forever home for Himself and His family. Because of sin, humans are disqualified for the family, the earth is infused with corruption and death, and a usurper (Satan) has established a counterfeit kingdom that negatively influences this world. Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; II Cor 4:4; I John 5:19; etc.
 - b. At His first coming, Jesus paid for sin through His sacrificial death on the Cross so that sinful people can be restored to the family through faith in Him. He will come again to restore the family home by cleansing it of all corruption and death. Eph 1:4-5; John 1:12-13; Rev 21-22; etc.
 3. God has been talking about the end since the beginning because He is working out His a plan. A plan by definition has a beginning, middle, and end. God's plan will be completed when Jesus returns.
 - a. Peter, in one of his first public sermons said: For (Jesus) must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his prophets (Acts 3:21, NLT).
 - b. Paul wrote: But now he (Jesus) has appeared at the fulfillment of the ages to abolish sin once and for all by the sacrifice of himself...and now to those who eagerly await him, he will appear a second time; not to deal with sin, but to bring us the fullness of salvation (Heb 9:26-28, TPT).
 1. Full salvation includes resurrection of the dead. Resurrection of the dead is the reuniting of the inward and outward parts of our being that separate at death, so we can live on earth again.
 2. Restoration of the earth includes releasing this planet from the curse of corruption and death that infused it when Adam sinned, and restoring it to pre-sin conditions.
 - c. When you truly understand what the second coming is all about it makes you eager to see Jesus return. Life will finally be what we long for, with no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain. Rev 21:4
 4. In this series we are considering the second coming in terms of the big picture or the overall plan of God for humanity. And we are considering what the hope of Jesus' return meant to the first generation of Christians—men and women who walked and talked with Jesus. We have more to say tonight.
- B. Last week we began to talk about the Book of Revelation. Revelation scares a lot of people because it seems to depict an angry God who has finally had it with humanity and decides to destroy the world with a cosmic throw-down. But that's not how the first Christians understood the book. Consider these thoughts.
1. When Jesus returned to Heaven after His crucifixion and resurrection, His first promise to His followers was: I'll be back (Acts 1:9-11). However, the years passed and Jesus did not return. Scoffers arose and apathy set in. And, persecution of Christians by the Roman government began.
 - a. In AD 95 Jesus appeared to John the apostle and gave him the information recorded in the Book of

Revelation. The first Christians would have been overjoyed to hear that the Lord had recently appeared to John and given him information about His return.

- b. For them, Revelation was a book of hope and ultimate victory. It assured this first generation of believers that Jesus had not forgotten them. And, it assured them that Jesus will one day return and complete God's plan for humanity and this world.
 1. Jesus gave John messages for seven churches located in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) and then described events in Heaven and on earth in the years leading up to Jesus' return to establish His kingdom and renew the earth. John saw God and His family on earth. Rev 2-3; Rev 4-22
 2. Jesus showed John the rise of a final world ruler (a false Christ) who will draw the world into a war that brings massive suffering and death to humanity.
 - A. The language in Revelation is strange to us because a 1st century man was describing 21st century technology and warfare—something for which he and his readers had no words.
 - B. When we read Revelation with that thought in mind, we see that what John described bears resemblance to what we now know as the effects of a nuclear and chemical exchange.
2. Revelation is an example of apocalyptic literature—a style of prophetic (predictive) literature that was popular from 200 BC to AD 140. Apocalyptic literature uses symbolic imagery to convey the message.
 - a. John used at least 300 symbols in his book. Nine-tenths of them are defined either by the context in the Book of Revelation or somewhere in the Old Testament.
 - b. The Book of Revelation was not new information. It was additional information that confirmed what the first Christians knew from the Old Testament prophets, particularly the prophet Daniel. Daniel's book is an example of apocalyptic literature and is also filled with many symbols.
 1. Daniel was the first prophet to be given detailed information about conditions on earth just prior to the coming of the Lord to take control of this world and establish His kingdom on earth.
 2. In his visions Daniel saw the final world ruler (called a horn—a symbol for a king) and his kingdom, which he described as a ferocious beast with iron teeth. But Daniel also witnessed his ultimate defeat as the Lord destroyed that kingdom and set up His eternal kingdom. Dan 7
 - c. In Rev 13:1-18 John saw what Daniel saw—a fierce beast coming out of the sea. It was revealed to John that the Beast (the system and the leader) will have power from Satan, rule for 3 ½ years, and have control over world government, economy, and religion.
 1. This final world ruler, and his actions and the reactions of people to him, will produce much of the destruction described in the Book of Revelation. Through this man and his followers, Satan will attempt to stop the rightful king, Jesus, from returning to earth. Rev 19:19
 2. Satan tried to stop Jesus' first coming. Through the centuries Satan has attempted to work through a man to take over the world and set up world government and religion (Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin). But he has been restrained until the time of the end. Matt 2:16; II Thess 2:7-9
3. Most of Revelation describes what will happen when this wicked ruler (the ultimate false Christ) comes to power. Revelation, chapters 6, 8, 9, 15, and 16, is a chronological description of increasingly catastrophic events on earth that begin when Jesus opens seven seals on a scroll, one at a time.
 - a. Rev 6—When the first seal opens, the final world ruler is released (1-2). At first he seems to bring peace (Dan 8:25). When the second seal opens, peace is taken away (v3-4). The opening of the third seal results in food shortages (v5-6). The fourth seal unleashes mass death by war (v7-8).
 - b. The fifth seal opens, and persecution of those who refuse to worship the Beast begins (v9-11). The sixth seal results in events consistent with 21st century nuclear destruction and its effects on the earth, described in 1st century terms (v12-14).
 1. When the seventh seal is opened, the first of seven angels goes forth to blow trumpets. As each angel blows his trumpet, more destruction occurs on earth (Rev 8:1-9:21). The sounding of the seventh trumpet signaled the transfer of the world to Christ (Rev 11:15).
 - 2.

Finally, John saw seven angels pour out seven bowls of wrath, and still more catastrophic events take place (Rev 16:1-21). It isn't clear at what point these series of events begin or how long they last. The trumpets and bowls may be concurrent. The bowls may occur between the 6th and 7th trumpet. Remember, no one yet knows what every verse in Revelation means.

c. These events are referred to as the wrath of the Lamb and are connected to Jesus, not because He makes them happen, but because the Lord wants it clearly understood that the calamity earth experiences at this time is a direct result of their rejection of Him for a false Christ. Rev 6:16-17

1. God's wrath is His right and just response to sin. When God judges men on earth (administers justice), He gives them over to the consequences of their actions. Rom 1:18-32

2. The trouble John sees is not from God, but from people without God. In these years, with the restraint removed, the wickedness of Satan and the wickedness in men's hearts apart from God will be demonstrated as never before, and God will give them over to it. Rev 12:12; II Tim 3:1-5

C. The information in the Book of Revelation terrifies many of us. But it didn't frighten the first readers because they understood John's message in terms of what the Old Testament prophets wrote.

1. The action begins in the Book of Revelation when Jesus opens a scroll that unleashes judgment on people who have rejected Him. John's readers would have been familiar with this symbolism. a.

About 1500 years earlier, when God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage and brought them back to Canaan (present-day Israel), He warned them that if they worshipped the gods of the people in the land He would allow their enemies to overrun them and remove them from Canaan. Deut 4:25-28

1. Israel repeatedly went into idolatry and all its related immorality. God warned them over and over through His prophets that if they did not turn back to Him, judgment would come—they would be overrun by their enemies and removed from the land. That's exactly what happened.

2. At one point God gave Ezekiel a scroll of judgment to proclaim to Israel—(a scroll) “covered with funeral songs, other words of sorrow, and pronouncements of doom” (Ezek 2:10, NLT).

b. The judgment on these people came because of their rejection of Almighty God in favor of idols.

Judgment in the last few years of this age will come because men choose to worship a false Christ.

2. Half of the prophets wrote about the Day of the Lord, a time of wrath and judgment that will precede the Lord's arrival to set up His kingdom and restore the earth. But all these prophets wrote that God's people will make it through the turmoil. Jer 30:7; Joel 2:11; Joel 2:30-32; Zeph 1:14-18; 3:14-16

a. John saw angels blowing trumpets: In the Old Testament trumpets were blown to sound an alarm. The prophet Joel connected the blowing of a trumpet with the Day of the Lord. The blast was a warning that time is running out for wicked men: Turn to the Lord before it is too late. Joel 2:1-3

b. John saw angels pouring out bowls of wrath: The prophets pictured God's wrath as a cup of intoxication, causing men to reel and stagger to destruction. Jer 25:15-17; Jer 51:7-8; Ezek 23:32-35

1. The original hearers of Revelation understood that the unrepentant wicked must drink from the cup of judgment, but that the righteous have a different destiny. Ps 75:7-10

2. While He was on earth, Jesus revealed that He took the cup of God's wrath when He bore our sin on the Cross, so that those who put faith in Him won't have to drink from it. Matt 26:39-42

3. First century Christians were aware that the Day of the Lord will include a time of wrath and judgment. But they weren't afraid because they understood that judgment is an administration of justice. Justice means punishing evil but it also means rewarding good.

a. They knew from the writings of the prophets and from information Jesus gave them that God has promised since the beginning to remove from His creation all that is not of Him. Matt 13:37-43

1. Jude 14-15—Now Enoch, who lived seven generations after Adam, prophesied about these (wicked) people (who will come at the end of this age). He said, Look, the Lord is coming with thousands of his holy ones. He will bring the people of the world to judgment. He will

convict the ungodly of all the evil things they have done in rebellion (NLT).

2. Ps 37:28-29—For the Lord loves justice, and he will never abandon the godly. He will keep them safe forever, but the children of the wicked will perish. The godly will inherit the land (the earth) and will live there forever (NLT).

b. Jesus also revealed to Paul that Christians who are alive when this day of reckoning begins will be caught up to be with the Lord without dying and miss the judgment. I Thess 4:13-18; I Cor 15:51-52

1. The Bible is clear that many people will come to saving knowledge of Jesus after believers are taken to Heaven, but they will face severe persecution from this wicked final ruler. Rev 7:9-17

2. They will be viciously pursued and persecuted by this false Christ for refusing to worship him as God. Many will be martyred for their faith in Christ. Rev 7:9-13

4. Sincere Christians have a tendency to get fixed on singular points in the Book of Revelation such as the mark of the beast. Then they 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 these 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 Greek word translated seal means to stamp with a signet or private mark for security or reservation. The Old Testament has examples of people being 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

D. Conclusion: We have more to say next week, but consider this point as we close. Revelation was first and foremost a book written to real people by another real person to communicate important information that would encourage them. The book was copied and circulated to other churches throughout the Roman world.

1. Although the final global ruler was not on the scene when John wrote Revelation, 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. The Emperor was considered a god who was to be worshipped by all.

a. When Jesus appeared to John, persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire was underway. John himself was exiled on the island of Patmos, and Peter and Paul had already been executed.

1. In John's vision Jesus referred to persecution in Asia Minor and mentioned man who was martyred. Antipas is believed to have been a bishop in the city of Pergamos (one of the cities given a message). Tradition says he was burned to death under a brazen bull. Rev 2:10-13

2. John saw martyrs in Heaven, and multitudes of those who have died through the centuries, waiting to return to earth with Jesus. What encouragement this was! Rev 5:10; Rev 6:9-11

b. The first Christians knew that God's people will make it through whatever is ahead. This doesn't mean that no one will die. (Because of the curse of sin that is presently in this world, everyone dies of something.) It means that death can't thwart God's ultimate plan for our lives.

2. Revelation ends with Jesus vanquishing the final world ruler and his kingdom, taking control of the world, cleansing and renewing it, and coming to live with His people on earth forever. Rev 21:1-5

3. To those who first heard the Book of Revelation, it was a book of triumph—God's plan for a family in the world He made for us will be completed. It reassured them that the Lord will preserve His people unto the day of His coming. We need that same encouragement as this world grows darker and darker.