

Introduction to Revelation, Part II- What is this Book About?

Call to Worship: Psalm 2

Hymn #678- *Christ Shall Have Dominion*

1st Scripture: Acts 1:1-14

Hymn #269- *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*

2nd Scripture: Revelation 1:1-4a

Hymn #218- *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name!*

Introduction:

As our Lord was preparing to ascend to the right hand of the Father, His disciples had approached Him again asking if He was now going to “restore the kingdom to Israel.” All along, they had this vision of the physical nation of Israel being restored to a position of rule and dominance over the rest of the earth, and surely, now that their Lord had conquered death itself, having risen from the dead, He would usher in His Kingdom and reign on the throne of Israel. But what happened next was quite unexpected. Jesus left them with a new task; they were to continue where He had left off with His earthly ministry, namely, the building of Christ’s church on the foundation of His ultimate victory on the cross. And following this final charge, ultimately to go and make disciples of all nations, to baptize them and to teach them all things that Christ had commanded them, our Lord had ascended into the heavens until a cloud had received Him and taken Him out of their sight. And then, like a group of children still searching for any remnant of a balloon that had just lifted way up into the clouds, they just gazed upward...that is, until two men dressed in white robes (believed to be angels) interrupted them with the words, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Often times, I think that the church of our day is as confused as the disciples were, when it comes to understanding the current mission with which God has charged us. We can find ourselves gazing off into space looking for some form of special revelation rather than concentrating on the very clear task that is before us, always anticipating the final return of Christ. Revelation does a fine job of cueing us in on what we can expect in the days that lead up to the final return of Christ and the consummation of His Kingdom, with the intent of motivating

us to utilize this understanding as a means of trekking forward for the glory of Christ *in the present*. Revelation speaks of the future, not in a way that is as specific as the curious would hope, but in a way that would move us to act in the present. But sadly, too often, people are so stuck in the future, looking to identify “even the secret things that belong to God,” rather than catching the general and clear theme, which more than suffices to lead us to do what we need to do now in spite of what we don’t know.

Last week, we saw that Revelation is meant to “reveal;” to expose what really is, in the light of *what seems to be* by every outward appearance. We saw how Revelation pulls away the curtain for all who “hear” its message in truth, so that we might be blessed and make our way through this life with discernment and every ability to overcome and avoid the traps that are continually set by our spiritual enemy, the devil himself. And furthermore, we saw that this is a Book; a prophetic message (directly from God) that calls for some form of obedience. Revelation presents us with moral obligations; not moral obligations that supplement the Gospel, but moral obligations that proceed out of the Gospel and out of a living faith in Christ. And in all of this, we were beginning to make our way toward understanding the general theme and message of this Book. We have begun to consider the question, “What is this Book about?”

This morning then, in concluding this introduction, I want us to reach this destination by considering the following two things:

- 1) We will consider a general overview of this Book by dividing it into seven sections
- 2) We will seek to arrive at the general theme of this Book

I. A general overview of Revelation

As we prepare to work through this material, let me just say that it is here that I believe William Hendriksen offers some of the most profound insight concerning the Book of Revelation. It would be an understatement to say that this dear brother has laid a precious foundation for understanding the general make-up of this book, and it would be a further understatement to say that he has greatly influenced me in this regard. His insights have had such a profound effect on me, that it would be criminal for me not to at least mention him.

While I would not set these divisions in stone, I would say that dividing this Book into the following seven sections is both warranted and helpful when seeking to lay out a basic framework within which the body of the material (symbols and all) can be properly understood and placed.

1) In the first three chapters of this Book, we are presented with a scene where Christ is standing in the midst of seven lampstands, which represent the seven churches who are the original and first recipients of this letter. And as we consider this scene, we come to understand that while this letter must speak first to these seven churches, clearly these seven churches (with their strong points and weak points) very much represent the churches of all times, from John's day until the end of history as we know it. In fact, even the number "7" here tells us that. To be sure, there were more than seven churches even in Asia Minor, but the number "7" here is meant to give us the ideas of "completeness" or "fullness." Now, I am generally not a big fan of numerology, but clearly in this type of literature, numbers have meaning. In fact, the number 7 is used 54 times in the Book of Revelation. And so, John is indeed writing to "The seven churches in Asia," but he is also addressing every church, which is represented by these seven churches and which shares in the very same strong points and weaknesses. Christ dwells in the midst of *not* just these seven churches, but all of His churches, and lo He is with them even to the end of the age.

And within these first three chapters, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is revealed in a very powerful and prominent way (in Chapter 1), we find our Lord addressing these seven churches individually, commending their strong points, while pointing out their weaknesses and sinful compromises, with the intent of calling them to repent where and if necessary. Those who are faithful are simply charged to persevere and they are warned about upcoming trials and persecutions in advance, so that they will be able to face them without growing weary, upon understanding what the rest of this Book unveils. These chapters bring forth the moral obligations very clearly; they call the churches to a life of faithful obedience in the light of what Christ reveals about the future of this world in the chapters that follow.

2) The second section of Revelation takes us from chapter four through the end of chapter seven. The previous three chapters began to expose the reality of persecutions, trials and temptations to compromise, coming fiercely against the church, and this brings the apostle to

view in greater detail, what the church ought to expect throughout the duration of her existence until Christ returns. Should we think it abnormal for the church to experience constant warfare, battles and all manner of trials? Or is it all peace from here on in, because after all, we are now in Christ. And so, it is more than fitting to note that right at the beginning of this section, we are brought into the throne room of God, where we are able to behold our great God as the center of all things and as the all sovereign power, who rules over every detail of history. If we are going to endure whatever we must face, it is critical that we first catch a glimpse of the great throne room of God, remembering who it is who directs all of history and the affairs of His church.

And it is there that Christ shows Himself alone worthy to take the scroll from the hand of God, so that God's plan for history and the church (all that is revealed in the chapters to follow) will indeed unfold and take place right according to plan. The main hindrance of sin has been removed by the Lamb that was slain, and the Lion of Judah can now conquer on behalf of His people to the fullest! When I was brought to meditate on this particular chapter, brethren, I have to confess, it led me to tears and to worship. Needless to say, I look forward to getting there in the preaching. And then, in chapter six, as the Lamb begins to break open the seals that sealed that scroll, the seals reveal various destructions that will come upon the earth, affecting all people, including the church (throughout the duration of the church age). To be sure, sufferings, afflictions, persecutions and temptations to compromise with a compelling world of materialism will come upon the church all throughout her history. We are given symbols that disclose for us the many trials which will come upon the church, because wherever the church is faithful to Christ; wherever there is light, the world and its darkness will seek to flush it right out. And so, we come to the fifth seal, where those who have died in Christ and those who have suffered martyrdom cry out continually for God to vindicate their deaths. It seems hopeless for the church, but God encourages her by dressing her in His righteousness and by promising that the time of her vindication will indeed come.

And then the militant church; the church still battling on earth is greatly encouraged to know that they can remain faithful unto death, because although they face difficult persecutions and trials and calls to compromise, they are sealed by God Himself, so that they will persevere even through the times of great tribulation. And then the final seals are broken, and we are

brought to the end of history with a very short description of the final judgment that will come upon the wicked.

3) The next section of the Book takes us from chapter eight to the end of chapter eleven. And here, we are taken back to see some of the more specific ways that God deals with the wicked (and those who persecute the church) throughout the history of the church age. We are given a list of seven trumpet judgments, which actually serve as a means of judging some of the wicked, but also as a means of warning the majority. These trumpets are warnings that come out of the “seals” in response to the cries of the persecuted righteous. They are lower level catastrophes that attempt to warn the wicked that a greater and final judgment is soon coming on all who don’t repent. And while some do indeed repent, many do not heed these warnings. And at the last trumpet judgment, we are brought once again to that scene of the final judgment, where Christ returns and finishes His work on earth. And we are given a further description of the final destruction of the wicked.

And it is important to note at this point, that as we move into the last four sections of this Book, the apostle is led to the second major division of the entire Book, where he begins to get a picture of the underlying spiritual warfare that is at the root of all that we have gone over so far. You see, the natural question to ask at this point is, “Why is all of this happening to the church? Why is the world against the church? Why are Christians persecuted, oppressed, killed or lured toward the materialistic sway of the world? Why are the wicked so set on destroying the church, which ultimately leads to their own destruction?” The second half of the Book answers these questions, by revealing the spiritual powers of darkness that underlie all that is seen at the surface level of world events and the persecutions of mankind.

4) And so, the fourth section of this Book takes us from chapter twelve to the end of chapter fourteen. And here, we are brought right back to the time when the Christ was preparing to enter this world. And we find the dragon (the devil) awaiting that coming promise all the way from the time his curse was pronounced upon him in Genesis chapter three. He had persecuted the Old Covenant people of God all throughout history, doing all he could to flush out the line of this precious Seed, but he was unsuccessful. And now, this Messiah was to come, and the dragon would do all that he could to defeat Him once He arrived. But of course, the Christ had conquered by means of His death and His resurrection, and He had ascended on high, having

been given all power and authority in heaven and on earth. And the dragon (the devil) was by this means ultimately defeated and kicked out of heaven. And now, recognizing the short time he has until he himself is judged, he vents his anger at God and Christ by seeking to destroy His church.

And it is here that we begin to see why the church is constantly under attack. And the devil employs different means of seeking to destroy the church via two beasts, made up of government powers and false religious influences. And these two beasts work through the rest of the world, which is under the power and sway of the devil, and that is where the persecution and attacks come from. These are the underlying powers that work through government powers, false religions and worldly seductions, as a means of seeking to destroy the church. But again, we are encouraged to see Christ working on behalf of His people, keeping them safe and shielding them from any spiritual defeat, as they persevere and stand firm even to the expense of their physical well being. And once again, as we come to the end of chapter fourteen, we are brought to that scene of the final judgment, where the wicked are defeated and punished, and the vision of this end is even more graphic.

5) The fifth section takes us from chapter fifteen to the end of chapter sixteen. Those who have survived the warning trumpets and have yet refused to repent, here meet their final doom. God is done warning; the temple doors are shut, as it were; intercession is no longer received on behalf of the unsaved, and God pours out His seven bowls of wrath. Whereas, the trumpets warned and took the lives of a minority, the bowl judgments are universal...the warnings are done. And the last bowl once again takes us to the final judgment scene, from a bit of a different angle, and further revelation is given to describe this great and terrible judgment.

6) The sixth section takes us from chapter seventeen to the end of chapter nineteen. And here, we are given great details concerning the destruction of one of the other allies of the dragon, namely, the “whore of Babylon.” She was introduced very briefly earlier, but now we are reminded in great detail of her seductress ways, and how she, unlike the beasts, would perform a more subtle and yet very effective attack against Christ’s church. She would expend all of her efforts seeking to lure the church into compromise by means of dangling the luxuries of materialism and all manner of lustful temptations before the church and the world. She presents herself as eternal and everlasting all throughout history, but the world will be shocked in the end,

when they find that the one in whom they have put all of their stock and trust is ultimately defeated and conquered forever. And all in heaven rejoice at her destruction, while the world mourns. With the two beasts, this whore is ultimately destroyed at the return of Christ, which again is described in new detail at the end of chapter nineteen.

7) And then lastly, the seventh section takes us from chapter twenty through the end of the Book of Revelation, chapter twenty-two. And here, we are given an accounting of the final defeat of the dragon (the devil; that serpent of old). He is defeated at the same final battle scene, where his allies have been defeated, and they are all cast into hell. And all of those who did not repent; all who served the devil and his beasts; all who were given over to the sway of the whore, following the final judgment, are likewise cast into hell, where the dragon and his allies have been cast. And they will suffer eternal torments forever and ever.

And the righteous; those who have endured and stood fast, remaining faithful in Christ; those who have not loved their lives to the end (having not compromised) are carried into God's glorious heaven, as the new Jerusalem (the Bride of Christ), forever to dwell with Christ in glory! And all things are made new. The earth is purified and made new, and there is no more sin, sorrow, pain, tears, death...etc. For the former things will have passed away. And God will dwell with His people forever!

This is a general overview of the Book, brethren. There is certainly much more that fills this broad picture in, but this is the general outline of the message of this Book, which Lord willing, we will walk through in a far more detailed way in the times ahead. But having taken an aerial flight through the content of this Book, let us now close by bringing this all into one general theme, and thereby, conclude this introduction to the Book of Revelation.

II. The general theme of this Book

The general theme of this Book involves God's sovereign plan for history, which especially includes the ultimate judgment of the wicked and the preservation of His church all for the glory of Jesus Christ. It is meant to inform the people of God of the way in which God has sovereignly ordained to unfold history, including the certain sufferings and trials and

temptations that will come upon the church, which if faithfully endured, will actually serve to purify her rather than destroy her. We ought not to be surprised by the warfare that we must face. We ought not to be surprised by the many sorrows that we experience. But reminding ourselves of God's sovereign control over all things, and the guaranteed victory we have in Christ, will drive us to endure so that Christ might be glorified in both our witness and our sanctification, which progresses through our suffering. Like Christ, in fact, the church is made victorious through suffering. We ultimately overcome our enemies; we overcome the beasts and the whore and all enemies of Christ by refusing to compromise, and by standing firm to the end, even unto death.

John himself, the author of this Book, knew this suffering first hand. He was not living the good life, enjoying all of the fleeting pleasures of the world, when he penned this vision. No, he was in exile. He was banished to the Isle of Patmos because of the testimony he bore in Christ. His own example was a further testimony to that which was revealed in the letter.

And because this was written first to the seven churches of Asia Minor, we ought to expect that first and foremost we would understand the many symbols of Revelation as symbolizing realities that existed in their own day. Hence, we will see a great emphasis on the threats and persecutions of the Roman Empire, which eventually fell in accordance with the judgments revealed in this Book. But Rome is only one reality to which some of these symbols point. The picture given is bigger than Rome and bigger than the first century alone, travelling through all successive centuries, until Christ Himself should return and bring about the ultimate and final defeat of the dragon and his allies.

Next time, Lord willing, we will begin working through the Book, where we left off at verse four. May God be pleased to lead us to take all that we consider in this Book very seriously. These things must and ought to affect us brethren! This isn't Hollywood material. This is reality and never dying souls hang in the balance.

The Gospel

It is important to note that there are only two kinds of people in this world, and Revelation makes this very clear. There are those who are washed by the blood of Christ; those who are forgiven for all of their sins and destined for glory, namely, Christ's true church. And there are those who are condemned servants of the devil; those who love the world and oppose Christ and His Kingdom. Which are you?

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24&25