

Dear Friends,

Several years ago, while researching various writings on the Book of Revelation, I read a memorable observation about how Christians across the centuries since John wrote the Book interpret its teachings. During seasons of intense persecution and trial, Christians read the message of Revelation as a source of comfort and encouragement. Despite the frightening beasts and images, in the end, Jesus wins and delivers His beloved children. During seasons of relative comfort and safety, Christians interpret the message as one or another mystical and mysterious code message, more relying on their imagination than on the letter itself.

A basic and wise rule of hermeneutics, of Biblical interpretation, should be applied to our study and interpretation of Revelation. Throughout Scripture, anchor your faith in the literal teachings of Scripture. Interpret any symbolic passage in harmony with those literal passages. Sadly often, Bible students reverse this wise habit, anchoring

their faith in their creative interpretation of the symbolic lessons of Scripture and interpreting the literal passages according to their "Private interpretation" of the symbolic. The result of this approach to Scripture is predictable, confusion and weak faith.

Having lived in this country through an extended season of relative security from persecution, it is no surprise that the prevailing populist interpretations of Revelation in our Christian culture follows each individual believer's imaginative flare, not the literal teachings of Scripture, and definitely not John's inspired opening and key to the Holy Spirit's intended message.

If we follow John's opening words, our "Take-away" from a study of Revelation should be "Jesus in His glory defeats all adversaries and delivers His beloved children into eternal glory." When we invest our imagination and emotions into finding creative "This represents" ideas about the various beasts in the book, we fail John's--indeed, the Holy

Spirit's--key for right interpretation which appears in our study verses for this week.

Lord, please guide our minds to see Jesus, victorious Jesus, saving Jesus, and loving Jesus in Revelation's message. Prod our thoughts as we read this book to remember Jesus' words to the overwhelmed John in the beginning of the book. Despite the image of amazing glory, the glorious Savior gently touched John and said, "Fear not." He likewise touches us and speaks those same words to us today as we read this precious book.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Revelation

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the

word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. (Revelation 1:1-3 KJV 1900)

Most writings and preaching on the Book of Revelation ignores and contradicts these verses. Populist teaching of our day and for the last two hundred years teaches that the Book deals with “End times.” According to this view, little to nothing in the letter deals with believers across the centuries between John’s writing and the final era before the Second Coming, much less at the time John wrote Revelation.

However, John begins Revelation with the Holy Spirit’s inspired timeline, “...**things which must shortly come to pass**,” and “...**the time is at hand**.” When John and Jesus started preaching, both men emphasized “...**the kingdom of heaven (Or God) is at hand**.” Jesus further clarified the presence of His kingdom.

The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.
(Luke 16:16 KJV 1900)

People couldn't press into a kingdom in the first century if that kingdom wouldn't exist for long centuries to come. They could only press into it if it existed at the time. Clearly, "*at hand*" in the New Testament means that the object of the lesson is present at the time. When John used this word in his introduction to Revelation, he set the timeline of the letter. Yes, in the closing chapters, John deals with end times to highlight the present power and victory of the Lord's kingdom, just as other New Testament writers taught end times truth for similar reasons. However, all the other New Testament letters dealt primarily with how their readers should conduct their present lives with a "*Kingdom of God*" perspective. Given John's opening words, we should interpret Revelation in the same manner.

One example of this point. There is nothing in John's writing to lead us to think that

those seven churches to whom he wrote were not real struggling, suffering churches that existed at the time John wrote the letter, and they needed the encouragement of John's words. Any interpretation of Revelation that either symbolizes those churches (Populist teaching often symbolizes each church as prophetic of a "Church age" that shall unfold between John's writing and the Second Coming) or that ignores those struggling believers and supposedly teaches only about end times fails the inspired words in our study passage and in the first chapter of the letter.

Secondly, John identifies the inspired focus and emphasis of his letter, "*The revelation of Jesus Christ.*" The Spirit did not direct John to write a message that emphasized hybrid frightening beasts and all the adversaries of our Lord Jesus. When we read Revelation, John directs us to read through those beasts and **keep our minds focused on Jesus**. I dearly love a story about a conversation between an older believer and a seminary student. The seminary student noticed that the old man was reading in Revelation. He asked, "Do you understand what

you are reading?” The old man quietly replied, “I think so.” Which prompted the young seminarian to ask, “So what is Revelation about?” And the old man wisely—and correctly—responded, “Jesus wins!” That dear old believer had far more insight into the true message of Revelation than the young seminarian.

John’s choice of the word “revelation,” translated from the Greek root for the English “Apocalypse,” adds to John’s intended focus in this letter. Apocalyptic literary genre was a common genre of ancient Jewish writers. What is this literary genre? I summarize below the major characteristics of ancient apocalyptic literary genre, especially as used by ancient Jewish writers from the website, Biblicalhermeneuticsstackexchange.com. (From the owners of this website. “Biblical Hermeneutics Stack Exchange is a question and answer site for professors, theologians, and those interested in exegetical analysis of biblical texts.”)

1. “Apocalyptic literature developed as a distinctly Jewish genre. It began with them

and developed with them. The Christians continued to use it.

2. "...the genre teaches God will deliver believers from the direst straits, and these persecutions were harsh.

3. "All apocalyptic literature claims to be revelation of new/hidden knowledge. Hence the name.

4. "Apocalyptic literature often uses prophetic vision formula to see the future, 'and I saw...' This phrase appears many times in Revelation.

5. "The literature uses mysterious and symbolic language.

6. "***Main theme throughout the life of the genre is surety of God's victory over evil.***"

That dear old Christian man didn't have seminary training, but he had wise and godly insight into the truth of Revelation. It is likely that ancient writers used this genre to communicate a hopeful encouraging message to its intended audience of divine intervention and supernatural victory, despite their formidable adversaries,

while obscuring the message from those adversaries, should they intercept the writing.

Apocalyptic genre is unique. It is not allegorical genre. Sadly, most writing and preaching I've read/heard ignores this genre and interprets Revelation as allegory. In allegorical genre, every detail provided "Represents" something. You don't read any detail that does not have an allegorical meaning.

Apocalyptic genre should be interpreted with a much "Broader brush" than allegory. It was written during a season of intense and overwhelming danger. The readers would not have the time to read the message and sort out endless allegorical meanings. By their circumstance, they would rather read the message and quickly see the big picture outcome, drawing hope and encouragement from its message. Despite all the dangers, the hopeless situation they faced, they would be delivered by a sudden and supernatural intervention. When folks write whole books and preach whole sermons about the hybrid beasts or horses of different color, typically concluding with no proof, only a personal assertion, "This

represents...” they miss the mark and fail the divine intent with the stated purpose which John identifies in his opening words to Revelation. If we are not preaching Jesus from Revelation, specifically His care for His people, and His ultimate or final deliverance of them, we have missed John’s stated purpose for the letter, “***The revelation of Jesus Christ.***” The Book of Revelation is not a script for a horror movie. The frightening hybrid beasts and images appear to signify the powers and beings who oppose Jesus (And God). But, in the end of each narrative, Jesus always wins.

Occasionally John seems to prepare his readers to expect the victorious end at the conclusion of a given lesson, but then it is delayed. But the Book does not end with a question mark. Before we reach the final chapter, the end comes, and Jesus defeats all His—and our—adversaries, and His people join Him in a glorious and eternal day.

To those struggling Christians in the seven churches named at the beginning of the Book, or to you and me in our own Christian journey and struggles, Revelation assures us. Despite all the

storms and trials of life, however fierce and devastating at the moment, in the end, Jesus wins, and we join Him in an endless victory celebration.

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. Who receives the blessing of Revelation's message? The imaginative believer who presents the most novel "This represents" idea? No. The believer who develops the most complex overview of the Book? No. The blessing is reserved for those believers who read the Book, truly get John's theme, and join that dear old believer who summed up the whole Book and its message in two words, "Jesus wins!" I treasure my moments with those believers.

Who is this victorious Conqueror who defeats all the evil beings and forces and, in the end, delivers His people from all their troubles into eternal joy and fellowship with Him? Read Revelation 1:13-16 to see Him in His amazing glory. But don't stop reading.

And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.
(Revelation 1:17-18 KJV 1900)

If you or I saw Him today in that same glory, we would be as overwhelmed as John. But underscore in your mind what He said to the overwhelmed John. “***Fear not!***” More glorious words could not be uttered to a fainting fearful child of God’s loving grace. Yes, He is just as glorious as He appears. And, despite the glory, nothing in Him gives you reason to fear, only reason to draw near in loving adoration and worship. As much as we can possibly sing the song of praise to Him today, we should do it. Allow nothing—nothing whatever—to detract our minds or choke our voices off-key to His glorious and worthy praise. Want to know the song you’ll sing when you arrive in glory? Those who are there are already singing it. You shall join them on that day!

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:9-10 KJV 1900)

If we keep this glorious hymn embedded in our hearts throughout our pilgrim journey, we daily live with a heart and mind eagerly looking forward to that coming day.

He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (Revelation 22:20-21 KJV 1900)

And we join John in his final refrain of Revelation, “**Even so, come, Lord Jesus!**” This, my friends, is the true story of Revelation. Protect its rich comforts as an invaluable

treasure. Allow no one or nothing to tickle your mind away from it. Let's join together in a preview of that glorious heavenly hymn. Will you sing it with me now?

Jesus wins!

Elder Joe Holder