

## INTRODUCTION to the book of REVELATION

*Teacher: John M. Brown, Olive Hill Church of Christ, Sunday Bible Class, June 2014*

***Revelation is a book of comfort and hope! Though various interpretations have been placed upon it, we'll see in this study it is a record of God's judgment against the Roman Empire which was terribly persecuting 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians. God is ultimately Victor, His children ultimately victorious, and His truth vindicated. From this, Christians of all eras, epochs, and cultures can be assured of God's presence and the final victory of God's truth.***

### I. PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

- A. Always remember the Bible is God's inspired, infallible Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- B. Always understand the Bible in light of its *historical background*, the *purpose and plan of each book*, the *context*, the *meaning of words*, and *pertinent parallel passages*.
- C. Let the Bible be the final authority; don't accept something as true unless the Bible verifies!

### II. AUTHOR Revelation 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8

GOD -----> JESUS -----> ANGELS -----> JOHN -----> **SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA**

### III. TO WHOM WRITTEN: Revelation 1:4; 1:11, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea

### IV. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

- A. It is written to give comfort and assurance to the church in the face of impending persecution
- B. See Revelation 2:10; 6:9; 7:14-15; 12:12; 20:4, 10

### V. THEME OF THE BOOK: Revelation 17:14

*"These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords and King of kings; and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful."*

### VI. TIME FRAME OF THE BOOK

#### A. **Revelation 1:1, 3**

1. "...things which must shortly come to pass"
  - a. "MUST" = Gk, **DEI** (a word implying moral necessity)
  - b. "SHORTLY" = Gk, **EN TAXEI**: "swiftly, speedily, quickly, soon"  
(note some other uses of this word: Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Romans 16:20; Revelation 1:1; 22:6)
2. "for the time is at hand" = near, close!

## B. Revelation 22:6, 10

1. "...things which must shortly be done"
2. "seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand."
  - a. Remember to whom written: is there any message for the seven churches?
  - b. Compare also Daniel 8:1, 26

C. We are forced by John's language to assign a meaning to the book of Revelation that would have primary significance to the ones to whom it was written (the seven churches of Asia). To assign a meaning to Revelation hundreds or thousands of years removed from the 1<sup>st</sup> persecuted saints to whom John addresses this book is to ignore John's own "time frame" for his writing.

## VII. THEORIES OF INTERPRETATION

A. FUTURIST: this views the book as dealing wholly with events at the end of time.

B. CONTINUOUS HISTORICAL: considers the book an unfolding of church history from John's day until the present time, noting the apostasies of Roman Catholicism, etc.

C. PRETERIST: views the book as completely fulfilled in the past with no message for the church today.

### **OBJECTIONS TO THESE THEORIES:**

#### FUTURIST:

1. This is inconsistent with John's statements in the book at 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10. Always remember John is writing to the seven churches about things which must shortly come to pass.
2. This puts the book out of contact with the needs of the churches addressed.
3. This is inconsistent with the closing of the book in 22:10

#### CONTINUOUS HISTORICAL

1. This also puts the book out of touch with the early church, to whom it was written.
2. This narrows the scope of the book to apostasy only.
3. This view has led men to calculations of times and periods which have been false.

#### PRETERIST

1. This view has no message except for John's day; but are we not blessed if we read?
2. Though this view is close (John did write primarily for Christians in his day), the lessons of victory, courage, faithfulness, and comfort are lessons for us today!

***THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING*** the book is to make sure one doesn't miss the original, 1<sup>st</sup> century message about things which must "shortly come to pass," while also learning the message of God's victory in all ages.

## VIII. GUIDELINES FOR UNDERSTANDING REVELATION

- A. Realize John wrote primarily to encourage and edify persecuted saints of his day! 1:3; 2:3
- B. Realize that the book is written largely in *symbolic & figurative language*.
  - 1. Revelation 1:1, "...sent and signified" -- "SIGN – I – FIED" : *A book of signs!*
  - 2. Revelation is APOCALYPTIC literature: Revelation 1:1  
**APOKALPSIS** = "*an uncovering; disclosure, revelation, manifestation*"
  - 3. "Literal" = using words in their normal, ordinary sense.
  - 4. "Figurative" = representing by figures or symbols; not usual, literal, exact sense.
    - a. There is much figurative language in the Bible (see for example Psalm 18:2; Luke 13:32; John 2:18-22; 7:37-39)
    - b. There is much figurative language in Revelation (for example, 5:5, 6, 8)
  - 5. One good "rule of thumb": always understand the Bible literally, unless context and word usage forces you to understand it figuratively.
- C. Realize that the book uses *Old Testament terminology with New Testament meaning* (*there are 404 verses in Revelation, with many having direct or indirect allusions to the Old Testament!*)
- D. Remember that to best understand Revelation, we must grasp the overall picture: HOPE!  
Don't get "bogged down" in details and lose the meaning of what John seeks to convey.

## IX. WORLD CONDITIONS AT THE TIME OF REVELATION

- A. THE ROMAN EMPIRE:
  - 1. Morally Rome was exceedingly wicked.
  - 2. Religiously Rome was the center of Emperor Worship, a mixture of fear and superstition – to refuse to worship the Emperor as "Lord" was an act of disloyalty and treason – the Romans attempted to force this Emperor Worship upon Christians.
  - 3. The Roman Empire was large, wealthy, powerful and corrupt. Rome was nearing the height of her "greatness" when Revelation was being written.
- B. CHRISTIANITY
  - 1. Christianity was an illegal, persecuted religion; many false ideas about Christians were believed; Christians refusal to worship the Emperor as "Lord" was considered treasonous, exclusive, and fanatical.
  - 2. Christians were undergoing persecution, viewing a powerful Empire that seemed about to crush them as they were imprisoned, beaten, stoned, robbed, exiled, and pressured to compromise their faith. Would God help? Would Christianity be destroyed? Would the name of Jesus be forgotten? Is there hope? *Revelation provides answers to those questions!*

## X. DATE OF THE BOOK

### Revelation 17:8-11

*Seven heads, seven mountains (Rome sat on seven mountains, seven kings, then an eighth)*

<i>“five are fallen”</i>	1. AUGUSTUS	27BC – 14 AD
	2. TIBERIUS	14 – 37 AD
	3. CALIGULA	37 – 41 AD
	4. CLAUDIUS	41 – 54 AD
	5. NERO	54 – 68 AD

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<i>“one is”</i>	6. VESPASIAN	69 – 79 AD
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<i>“one is yet to come”</i>	7. TITUS	79 – 81 AD
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<i>“an eighth”</i>	8. DOMITIAN	81 – 96 AD
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Thus period during which Revelation was written: 69 – 79 AD

*\*COMPARE also Daniel 7*

## CONCLUSION TO THE INTRODUCTION:

The New Testament records Rome’s persecution against God’s people. Just as God came in judgment against unbelieving Israel (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; Daniel 9; etc.), so God will judge pagan Rome. This is a great message of hope for 1<sup>st</sup> century persecuted saints. Rome will not prevail – God’s people and God’s will prevail!

And we also can take comfort and hope in the message of this book, realizing that God comforts and supports His people and condemns those who would oppress them, in any age (2 Thessalonians 1:5-9). *We have victory in Jesus!*