

The last book of the Bible is a mystery – and yet at the same time it is a revelation of that mystery. Many renowned Bible Scholars and commentators have not risked their reputations in writing about this ‘mystery’, as there have been so many different interpretations of it throughout the centuries. Even men like John Calvin, who had so much insight into Holy Scripture, did not write a commentary on it.

Adam Clarke decided against writing about it as he said that, “There are already so many different interpretations of it that he did not want to add another monument to the littleness and folly of the human mind.” He studied what others had said, but came to the conclusion that the other writers, more bold than he was, were just as puzzled as he was.

John Wesley had things to say about the beginning and the closing chapters of the Book, but admitted that the meaning of the chapters in-between remained a mystery to him.

You might ask then why should someone like me try to do what those more gifted than I have been reluctant to do? Maybe it is because that I am not a biblical scholar in the academic sense that maybe in reading it as a novice I might even learn something that would benefit myself and others . The Holy Spirit is the author of all scripture, and without his help we will never begin to understand the meaning and importance of this book.

It is not as the AV title suggests – ‘A Revelation of St. John, the Divine’ – it is more like the RSV – ‘The Revelation to John’ – and the NIV - simply ‘Revelation’. But this is too short a title, and not even beginning to define what we are about to start this series of studies seeking to do.

It is a revelation of WHAT - and of WHOM?

v1 – It is ‘the revelation of Jesus Christ – given by God to show to his servants’.

So it seems to say that it is a revelation of who Jesus really is, and what will yet be done because of who He is. It is endorsed by God the Father – who reveals to Jesus the Son, who in turn, by an angel, reveals himself and his future work to his servants on earth through his servant John. John wrote down what he saw and heard so that we as servants of God might learn from it as well.

So the ‘revelation’ was given by God - and made known to John by the sending of an angel.

For what purpose was this ‘revelation’ made?

To show him ‘what must soon take place’ v1b

The purpose is more fully expressed in 1v19 – “Write what you have seen –what is now, and what will take place later.’ Cp this with the prophetic view of Jesus in Matthew ch22- 25.

There are 4 views which have been developed down the centuries – and depending upon the one the commentator favours will be seen in the interpretation that is given.

These are as follows –

a) **The PRETERIST** .-This asserts that most of what there is in revelation has already happened during the time of the Roman Empire

b) **The HISTORICAL** – this tries to put the various prophecies into set periods of time in the

world's history. It was a prophecy of what 'was about to happen' in

John's day,

and some of which has happened during the 2000 years since.

When this view is applied rigidly what results is called 'Dispensationalism'. i.e. the events fit chronologically into church history and therefore once they have taken place that 'dispensation' is history, and the next dispensation begins. This view was held by men like Schofield and taught widely by the Group called the Brethren.

But it is too restrictive - and while it cannot prevent God doing his mighty work of Grace and Salvation over and over again in every age – it does restrict the understanding of the whole truth by conditioning our minds as to what is possible or not.

c) The IDEALIST – that Revelation is symbolic truth hidden in the imagery of the visions and words. i.e. it is more 'spiritual' than 'factual'.

d) The FUTURORIST – it is prophecy which in the most part still has to be fulfilled.

In ch.2-3 the 7 churches represent actual historical churches of the 1st Century A.D.

4 and also the church at various stages in history. This does not confine the character of any one of these 7 churches to represent the church in a certain 'dispensation' (as in the Historical view) but indicates that all the characteristics in the Letters to these churches were happening in the same time period, then these same differences can apply to the church in varying degrees in any age.

The Futuristic View is the one that most Evangelical Christians hold and will be the basis of these studies.

The comment by Donald Richardson [an American theologian] – is –“We should approach the book with that humility of spirit which is willing at all times to frankly say, ‘I do not know.’” We could say the same but add – We are willing to try to get to know more that we know now.

I think the problem of interpretation lies in the difference the way our Western minds think compared with those of the Eastern Biblical period. Science could not explain things to them as we might want it to do so today – so they were more dependent and willing to be enlightened by revelation than we are.

The relevance of the prophecies of the Revelation have maybe a more direct significance today when we view them in the light of 2 World Wars within 30 years in the last Century – the rise of Communism and its threat to the Christian faith – the militancy of other faiths against the Christian faith; the speed at which catastrophic things happen in our day and the suddenness of disaster and judgement falling on those opposed to the God we worship.

I do not see the events in Revelation as a straight or continuous line from the Past in to the Final Future – but rather just one truth of the triumph of our Saviour over Satan as the central truth and this is expanded by a series of concentric circles opening up further truth of the total and final victory of Christ over all things

Revelation is the only Book of the New Testament to describe Jesus Christ as He now is, and tell us what He is going to do. It centres our minds on his Return to rule and reign on the earth. This book is concerned with the final victory of 'good over evil' – of Christ over Satan

and his anti-Christ. It has to do with the enthronement of Christ – at 1st in heaven and then over all the earth. – and finally, over a new heaven and a new earth.

This programme is centred on his glorious Return - but here again, your understanding of the timing and the nature of that Return will affect how you interpret Revelation.

It centres on the 1000 years reign of Christ on the earth - which is referred to as the Millennium

When will this Millennium take place in the plan of prophecy?

Will it take place before, or after the return of Christ?

There are 3 views about the answer to those questions.

1. The Bible teaches that the return of Christ will be in 2 stages.

First in the air for the church – and then to the earth with the church. cp1Thess. 4 vv 13-18

When the church has been taken with Christ to heaven there will be no need for the Holy Spirit to remain on the earth either. And there will be a period of 7 years when Satan will rule unopposed on the earth and this will be a period of great stress for Israel.

It is called the ‘Great Tribulation’ cp 7v14

At the end of these 7 years the Lord will return to the earth with the church and Satan will be bound and cast into the pit- whilst Christ reigns with his church for 1000 years.

At the end of the 1000 years Satan will be released and will deceive the world again – but he will eventually face defeat at the hands of Christ. This is called the PRE-Millennium View – i.e. the Rapture of the church takes place before the Tribulation

2.. This view assumes that the Millennium is the fruit of the fulfilment of God’s promises to Israel, and involves their restoration in faith, and their re-establishment as a nation. It will involve an actual king of the line of David ruling on an actual throne among the nations of the earth.

The 1000 years is the age of the church and the return of Christ – the ‘parousia’ - personal appearance of Christ comes later. **This is called the A-Millennium view** – i.e. the Tribulation comes before the Rapture and the church will have to endure it.

3. The third interpretation is that the kingdom will be established on the earth by the preaching of the Gospel acting as ‘leaven’ until ‘ the whole lump is leavened’, and that there will be a gradual ushering in of the ‘age of righteousness’ as the whole world gradually becomes better and more godly – more Christian?) ... Then Christ will come to rule what is already here. **This view is called the Post- Millennium view.**

For the purpose of these studies I am assuming that you hold, as I do, the view that is best supported by Scripture (e.g. 1Thess.4 vv13-18) that Christ’s Return will be in 2 stages

a) In the air for the church - and 7 years later

b) To the earth with the church to usher in the 1000 years of his righteous rule on the earth.

That means – you are a Pre-Millenniumist – and believe that you will be caught up to meet Jesus in the air and ushered into glory before the Great Tribulation hits this unbelieving world.

v9b – This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to John on the Isle of Patmos about A.D. 96 – as the last surviving Apostle,

Some have disputed that the John mentioned here is someone other than the ‘Beloved Disciple’ – but there is greater proof for it being the John of the Gospels rather than someone-else called John.

The time is also disputed – some say it could have been written to suffering saints during the time of Nero and his persecution of the church c AD65 – but it is more likely to be the persecution by Emperor Domitian about AD 96

The Revelation given to John was to show us the Man Christ Jesus – exalted to heaven and ruling in power over

all creation

The Gospels show the humanity and humility of Jesus. Revelation shows his power and glory

There is a conflict between Satan and Christ – and also between Satan and the church on earth. Satanic powers have tried to discredit this Book; to disclaim Christ’s integrity and glory; to prevent God’s people anticipating Christ’s Return and victory; to deceive people into having false hopes of leniency from a holy God whom they have offended.

This Book is about righteousness prevailing, and justice flowing down from God like a might stream.

Why study this Book?

There are several reasons, but the main one is to help us to see and understand what God is doing in his world – and is still going to do. We are to share in the final victory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so we should be prepared for the events that will precede that victory.

Our Study will – Reveal Christ as the Saviour and Redeemer of men
As the Lord of the church
And as the Judge of the whole earth.

This Book will stir the heart; stiffen our resolve to persevere; and deepen our commitment to follow the Lord if we are to share in the victory celebrations.

Cp 1v4b - ‘Grace and peace to you- from Him- who was; and is; and is to come.’
22v20 - “I am coming soon.” Amen! Come Lord Jesus – ‘Maranatha.

Analysis of the Book

Based n the Futuristic View of interpretation - and the Pre-Millennium sequence of events .. i.e. the Church will be translated to heaven before the Great Tribulation of earth begins.

There are many very detailed outlines of the Book -but here is one which contains the salient points

1. Christ and the Church age – ch.1-3

2. Christ and the Age of the Great Tribulation. Ch. 4-18

This is in 2 parts and 2 places.

i.e. the 7 year period which is divided into 2 periods of 3 ½ years each

Some events are in heaven and some are on the earth

e.g. Christ at first in heaven- and then the Tribulation on the earth after the Rapture of the church.

3. Christ and the future ages - ch.19-22

This age includes –

i. The Marriage supper of the Lamb and the BEMA judgement of believers - and the rewarding according to faithfulness. cp19 vv1-10

ii. The glorious appearing of Christ with the church cp 19vv11-21

iii. The 1000 years of the Millennium Reign of Christ and the binding of Satan cp 20vv1-11

iv. The releasing of Satan from the pit after the 1000 years ch.20 vv7-10

This concludes with Satan finally defeated and doomed – and also brings the final judgement of unbelievers.

v. The Creation of a new Heaven and a new earth cp.21 vv1-7

vi. The Lord’s last message to the waiting church 21vv12-20

vii. The Church’s reply – v20b Maranatha = Come , Lord Jesus.

The Book is not written to confuse us – but to make things clear to us. And to give us fore-warning and understanding of the times in which we live, and the future we may have to face.

This is not a ‘closed book’, although many have made it so.

It is a revealing of Christ and the future – It is an unveiling of who our Saviour really is.

1. God’s plan for this world is revealed.

We may not know what the future holds ... but we do know the one who holds the future. The future is in God’s hands and ends with the emphatic defeat of Satan – and the conclusive victory of Christ over him.

2. The Book completes Bible truth -Genesis is the beginning - and Revelation is the ending.

Compare the 2 Testaments

Genesis

Revelation

Begins in Paradise

Ends in Paradise

Denied the fruit of the Tree of Life

Given the fruit to eat 22v2

Rebellion against God begins

Rebellion against God ends

Records the first Murder – lies and drunkenness

Finishes with a city where those who do these things are not admitted 21v27

Sorrow caused by Sin

No more tears 21v4

Records the 1st death of a man

There is no more death there 21v6

A curse is imposed because of sin

The curse is removed 22v3

Satan is active as a liar; tempter and seducer of men. Satan is doomed for ever

Genesis 3 v15 – ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman; between her seed and your seed. You shall bruise his heel, but He will crush your head.’

At the Cross Satan bruised the heel of Jesus – But this prediction is finally fulfilled in Revelation 20 v10 “And the Devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of fire, where the Beast and the False prophet had been

thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.’

So after that lengthy Introduction to the Book we will turn to what it says - remembering

- i. When the words make plain sense don't make them into non-sense.
 - ii. Locate where and when the events are taking place i.e. on earth or in heaven
 - iii. Remember that the Book isn't always chronological, and events often overlap one another.
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The Prologue - read 1 vv1-3

v1 – The Revelation of Jesus Christ i.e. of who he is and what he does.

It is an unveiling of Him in glory and in the future.

It allows us to see Jesus as he now is – and not as He once was.

Only those who are His will see that glory – as in the Tabernacle it is veiled from outsiders and seen only from the inside after the sacrifice has been made and sin atoned for.

Jesus who walked the street and lanes of Jerusalem and Galilee as the Son of Man, is now seated in glory reigning as the Son of God.

vv1-3 are what follows that ‘unveiling.’

In some Bibles (e.g. the Romanian Bible) - Revelation is called the Apocalypse – which is the Greek word which means to ‘uncover’ or to ‘reveal’.

Paul uses the word 13 times e.g. Romans 16v25 – The revelation of the mystery

Gal.1v12 – He received the Gospel by revelation from Jesus Christ

2 Thess.1v7 The Lord Jesus Christ will be revealed from heaven –

and 1Cor.1v7 ‘As you eagerly wait for the revealing of Christ Jesus.’

The nature of this revelation is not clear from the phrase – The Revelation OF Jesus Christ.’

Is it a revelation only of Him?

Is it a revelation that belongs to him? - Which God Gave him.

Is it a revelation which is His because God gave it to him, but which he in turn gives to his servants?

This would be supported by the use of John in the Gospels, where God is the source of revelation; and Jesus is the communicator of that revelation to men.

The purpose for this revelation is given in v1 – It was to make known to his servants ‘what must soon take place’. The use of the word ‘must’ is not to signify that they would happen quickly, but rather that they must happen inevitably according to God’s clock and not ours.

God gave the revelation to His Son -who then sent an angel to make it known to John- and through John to the church – to us. Angels will appear many times as we study this Book – always sent with a message from God.

The Message came to John . Which ‘John’ has always been a source of difference among the biblical scholars – especially those who always refer to the 4th Gospel rather than the ‘Gospel of John’. This is because John is not mentioned by name, but is taken to be the ‘disciple who Jesus loved’ - which is his way of not drawing attention to himself.

Some have suggested a different 'John' because the style of writing in Revelation is different from the Gospel - but there are other reasons why this may be so. John's first language was not Greek, but he wrote the Gospel at a time when he would have access to Greek scholarship and maybe even Greek believers who edited what he wrote. (I did a similar thing when trying to preach in Romanian. I wrote down what I wanted to say in poor Romanian and my Romanian friend corrected it into good Romanian).

Even if this were not the case it was the Holy Spirit and the angel who gave him the words to say and write down.

Here in Revelation he was – in the Spirit of the Lord on the Lord's day ' cp1v10.

He wasn't inspired to write what he thought about the revelation - but to write what he was told.

I believe that it was John the Apostle who wrote this and that he was the last surviving Apostle of Jesus – although by this time a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos. He was an old man at this time and the reason for being imprisoned on Patmos, and made to work in the salt mines there is given in v9 – 'He suffered as many did at that time – because of the Word of God and his witness to Jesus as his Lord and Saviour.

v2 - He affirms that what he saw and heard was true - and that is was so because it was the Word of God and the words of Jesus Christ

v3 is a blessed promise to all his readers – including you and me.

The promise is to 3 groups – i. to those who read the book
ii. to those who hear what it is saying
and iii. to those who read , hear and take it to heart.

This blessing (or happiness) depends than on the reading of God's Word – either publicly or privately ; on the hearing of God's Word – because it is from God to you.; and taking it to heart in order to believe and obey it. James says clearly 1v22 – 'Do not merely listen to the word ... Do what it says''

The reason is also given – because the time is near.

This does not stipulate a time on the calendar or the hour of the day – it is not chronological time – the word used in 'Kairos' which means the time for the fulfilment of what is revealed is close at hand'

We are living in times when things are coming to pass and it is later than many think in the course of God's dealings with the world he made.

So – let us read in order to understand - and take to heart all that we learn so that we can share with Christ our Saviour in his final victory.

After every study we should be able to say – 'Even so – Come Lord Jesus'.

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