

Revelations on Revelation

The last book in the New Testament has always fascinated people. There is something mysterious and strange about it. Some people have developed elaborate schemes of interpretation. They present their own works on the book as necessary for a proper understanding of Revelation. For the majority of Christians, the Book of Revelation is a locked mystery. They shy away from reading the book or from attempting any serious understanding of its contents. Why is this?

One reason the book is so closed to many is that they feel obligated to attach a meaning to every little detail. Also they want to be able to find fulfillments of the prophecies in today's newspaper. In other words, they have believed those who claim you need a special insight from God to understand the book.

John the Apostle was given the visions and he then recorded the conversations and things that he saw that made up the book. The book opens like the gospel of John and the first epistle of John with a prologue. The prologues are very important for understanding his writings.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants^[a] the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. This divine introduction to the book of prophecy of the New Testament is recorded in the opening sentences.

The book then opens with a symbolic appearance of the glorified Messiah Jesus who commands him to write what he sees and hears and send it to the seven churches. What John sees is awe inspiring with every detail subsequently and selectively applied to the seven churches. Thus, an attributed the glorified Christ expressed on a symbol is highlighted to demonstrate the presence and involvement of Jesus in the lives of his people corporately and personally.

If we really pay attention to the statements of Jesus then we have the basic truths necessary to read the book with much spiritual profit. It could be that we will discover the Book of Revelation to be no more difficult to understand than any other book of the New Testament. The key lies in approaching the book properly.

The first thing we must do is to discard the idea that the Revelation is totally incomprehensible or that the message can only be deciphered by a select number of prophecy experts. Doesn't it seem strange that God would end the New Testament with a book that unveils human history and then close it in such a way that only a few prophecy scholars could understand it?

Also doesn't it seem strange that God would send the letter to seven churches of Asia Minor to be read aloud if its major truths could not be understood until the 19th, 20th century or 21st or prophecy experts arose? Strange indeed would be the promise of Rev. 1:3 – *“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written.”* Surely God would not promise such blessings if he knew we couldn't understand or take its message to heart.

You see, the problem does not lie in the Book of Revelation, but in our approach to it. We ask the wrong questions and focus our attention on historically identifying every image and every piece of a vision. Our focus is on the details, rather than the major events and truths. As a result, we miss the central themes of the prophecy. It's the old story of not seeing the forest for the trees.

We could compare the Book of Revelation to a huge painting of the end times. If we move too close to examine each brush stroke the continuity and grandeur of the painting disappears. ***If we are to see it aright, we must view the painting in its entirety.***

John declared that his book of prophecy is an unveiling made possible by Jesus Christ. He is the central figure in history who brings into focus God's redemptive work. In the process of unveiling the consummation of history, Jesus himself is revealed in glory and might. ***If one reads this book and does not see the glorified Christ, he had read it amiss.***

Jesus directed John to send the letter to seven specific local churches in the Roman province of Asia. Within the large letter, seven individual letters were enclosed, each

one addressed to one of the seven churches. Together they received the message that the Lord was sending to the churches of all places and times until he comes again. Thus, the seven churches function as a miniature picture of the church universal- the church representative throughout the world in every age. The fact that the book was sent to the churches is very significant. It says a lot about the contents of the book. Everything in the Revelation pertains to the church, its tribulation, its hope, and its destiny. ***If we read the book and delete the church, then we have read the prophecy wrongly.***

In sending the individual messages to the churches, Jesus manifested himself to John in his glory and majesty. His central message is, “I have the seven churches in my sovereign hands and I have the double-edged sword of God’s living Word to fulfill all of God’s purposes for his people. This evoked in John a desire to worship Christ the Lord! ***If we read the book and our hearts are not lifted up to God and to the Lamb upon the throne in worship we have the book wrongly.***

Let me challenge you to read the book like a child. Here are some practical suggestions for a read. Read the whole book in no more than two sittings. The writing naturally divides at chapter 11:19 and Chapter 12:1. The first half focuses on a series of sevens, first seals then seven trumpets, with each bringing us the brink of Jesus return. The second half focuses on more seven series with characters. Remember to use your mind’s eye as you read to see the changing scenes. The book of Revelation as a whole uses images and visions and symbols from the Old Testament. The major thrust is very clear Jesus is the conquering Lamb through his death and resurrection and he will return to establish the everlasting kingdom for his people. The ultimate goal of God’s covenants will be fulfilled: “*I will be your God and you will be my people, and I will dwell among you*” (Ex. 6:7; 29:45; Ezek. 11:20; 2 Cor. 6:16; Rev. 21:3).

What is the main point of this book? The central thrust of the book is that no matter what the devil throws at God’ people, Jesus has everything under his sovereign control, and he is guiding history to its conclusion at his glorious return. God gave the visions to John to give to the churches for our encouragement and hope. Fear not believer! Look up, people of God, take heart and hope - your redemption draws near!