

A Revelation from God to Us

NKJV Notes by Pastor Mike Sasso

Introduction

Though both the church in general and Christians individually often neglect this book, it is a book of utmost importance. The book of Revelation is the last inspired book of the Bible and reveals the climax and culmination of all the themes of both the Old and New Testaments. In this book we shall discover the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, the final state of man (the reward of the righteous and the judgment of the wicked), the demise of Satan, the victory of God, and the establishment of God's eternal Kingdom through Jesus Christ.

There are many good commentaries available today from which one can obtain a comprehensive outline of the book of Revelation. But it is important as you study this book that you understand that throughout church history there have been four basic views of how to interpret the book of Revelation. Therefore, the book of Revelation is the most controversial of all New Testament books.

After reading several explanations of the various views of how to interpret the book of Revelation, I feel that David Guzik puts it simply and concisely -

Since so much controversy has risen over the interpretation of the Book of Revelation, it is helpful to understand the four basic approaches to understanding Revelation. Through the centuries, people have approached Revelation in basically one of these four ways:

- A. The Preterist View: This approach believes that Revelation deals only with the church in John's day. In the Preterist approach, the Book of Revelation doesn't predict anything. John simply describes events of his current day, but he puts them in symbolic "code" so those outside the Christian family couldn't understand his criticism of the Roman government. In the Preterist view, the Book of Revelation was for then.
- B. The Historicist View: This approach believes that Revelation is a sweeping, disordered panorama of all church history. In the Historicist approach, Revelation predicts the future, but the future of the "church age" - not the future of end-time events. In the Historicist view, Revelation is full of symbols that describe now.
 - 1. For example, many have wanted to call someone the beast of Revelation chapter 13, as the Reformers called the Pope. But they didn't necessarily want to believe that the end was very near. So they believed that Revelation spoke of their time, without necessarily speaking to the end times.
- C. The Poetic View: This approach believes that Revelation is a book full of pictures and symbols intended to encourage and comfort persecuted Christians in John's day. In the Poetic or allegorical view, the Book of Revelation isn't literal or historic. Revelation is a book of personal meaning.
- D. The Futurist View: This approach believes that beginning with chapter four, Revelation deals

with the end times, the period directly preceding Jesus' return. In the Futurist view, Revelation is a book that mainly describes the end times.

E. Which approach is correct? Each one is true in some regard. The Book of Revelation did speak to John's day. It does say something to church history. And it does have meaning for our personal life. So while elements of the first three approaches have their place, we can't deny the place of the futurist view. We can know the Book of Revelation speaks with clarity about the end times because of two central principles drawn from Revelation 1:1-3.

1. First, we believe the Book of Revelation must mean something. This is a book Jesus gave to show His servants something. It isn't a book

of meaningless nonsense. It has a promise of blessing, not a promise of confusion.

2. Secondly, we believe the Book of Revelation definitely claims to contain predictive prophecy.

John made it clear: things which must shortly

take place . . . the time is near. John writes about events that were still future in his day.

The above text is taken from David Guzik's commentary available free to all at

www.enduringword.com

Unlike most other New Testament books, Revelation contains very few direct quotations from the Old Testament. Yet it does contain hundreds of allusions to images and phrases from both the Old and New Testaments. Therefore a full knowledge of the entire Bible is most advantageous in understanding this book. Perhaps that is one reason it is placed last in the order of books of the Bible. However, we will find to our delight that much of the allegorical language of this book will be self-interpreted within the very book of Revelation.

Historical Background and Date of Writing

The book of Revelation was written during a time of great persecution for its recipients. The obvious affect of its writing was the encouragement of those who may be called upon to suffer great loss and even death because of their faith. The unveiling of the information contained in this book would definitely remind the reader of the final outcome of their faith encouraging them to "hold fast" to the truth of the Gospel (Rev. 2:25, 3:3, 11) and "be faithful unto death" in order to receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10b). There were two emperors who are believed to have persecuted the church during this time of history. The first is Nero, reigning from 54 AD to 68 AD, and the second is Domitian who reigned from 81 AD to 96 AD. By the time Irenaeus wrote about the book of Revelation in 180 AD he stated that there were many "ancient copies" of this book in existence. This would certainly imply that these copies made from the original were very, very old. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to consider the book of Revelation to have been written before 96 AD, and perhaps even pre-AD 69.

Author

The author identifies himself as "John" in verses 1:1, 1:4, 21:2, and 22:8. There was no dispute among the apostolic fathers that the author of the book of Revelation was the Apostle John. It is also important to note that some of the earliest church fathers – Justin Martyr (165 AD), Irenaeus (180 AD), Clement of Alexandria (215 AD) and Tertullian (220 AD), all unanimously identified the author of Revelation as the Apostle John.

Facts About the Author

- John was the youngest of all the apostles. He was probably just a teenager when Jesus called him.
- John outlived all the other apostles. He lived to be over 100 years old.
- Church history tells us that John was the only apostle who died a “natural death.” Though he did experience persecution and banishment, he was not martyred for his faith.
- John was the brother of James. Together they were the “Sons of Zebedee.” Because of their outspoken and tenacious personalities they were nicknamed “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). See Luke 9:51-54 for a sample of their personalities.
- He was from a family in the fishing business (Matt. 4:21-22).
- John identified himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 20:2, 21:7, 20).
- John was part of Jesus’ inner circle of apostles (Peter, James, and John).
- John knew Jesus intimately! John was with Jesus from the beginning to the end of His ministry. He was present for Jesus’ teachings and miracles. He was present at the last supper. He was there at the crucifixion. And he was the first to visit the empty tomb (John 20:1-8).
- Since John was related to the High Priest of Jesus’ day, he was able to personally witness Jesus’ trial (John 18:15-16; Acts 4:5-6).
- John also was an eyewitness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ! (John 20:19ff)
- This is the same John who wrote the Gospel of John and the epistles 1st, 2nd and 3rd John.

Since John knew what it was like to follow Jesus as a teenager, and then learned how to live as a Christian well into his old age, he knew the ups and downs of the Christian faith. We can learn much from spending time studying the writings of this dear apostle. Yet the book of Revelation is more than just the writings of an apostle. This book is a direct Revelation from God to Jesus to this beloved apostle (v. 1). Therefore, we cannot treat this text as mere opinion or even John’s unique perspective. This book is a record of a direct revelation from God meant to show the servants of God things which must shortly take place.

Before beginning a close examination of this text using these study notes, take some time to read over the first three verses of chapter one in one continuous flow.

STUDY NOTES: verses 1-3

v. 1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Which God Gave Him to Show His Servants - There have been many attempts to label or title this book. Many Bibles title the book, “The Revelation of John,” emphasizing a vision received by an apostle. Others focus on the title “The Revelation of Jesus Christ,” emphasizing that this book reveals Jesus to its readers. But that explanation actually cuts short the complete definition given in verse one. The word “of” is not in the original Greek text but added by the translators. This is a revelation given to Jesus by God to be passed on to Jesus’ followers. Though the reader most definitely will come to know Jesus better through the text of this book, the first verse of the book makes clear what the theme of the book really is. This book is a revelation (a revealing or an unveiling) of things to come, given to Jesus by His Father, to be given to His servants.

Things Which Must Shortly Take Place – This phrase also clarifies the subject of the revelation being given. It is a revelation of things to come. The phrase “which must shortly take place” is taken differently by different people depending upon which of the four major views a person may lean toward. For instance, a Preterist who believes the entire book of Revelation applies only to the early church of John’s time, would take the phrase to mean that which would have happened in John’s immediate future. A Historicist who believes most of the book of Revelation covers history past might take the phrase to mean that which is coming soon after John’s time. A Futurist who believes that the majority of the events recorded in the book of Revelation are events of the end times, might have the most difficulty with this phrase, since we have already experienced 2000 years of history since this phrase was written.

Because I lean toward a Futuristic view of Revelation, allow me to provide you with some possible alternative meanings to this phrase. The word “shortly” is translated from the Greek word “tachos” (takh'-os). This word is found seven times in the Greek New Testament. Four times in the New King James Translation it is translated “shortly” (Acts 25:4; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 1:1, 22:6). And twice it is translated “quickly” (Acts 12:7, 22:18). Once it is translated “speedily” (Luke 18:8). So this Greek word “tachos” can also mean “swiftly” or “quickly.” In other words, it is entirely possible that John is telling us that once these things begin to take place they will take place quickly, swiftly, speedily, or in rapid succession.

Another thing to keep in mind is the fact that in God’s economy “... one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8). But I must admit, I doubt this thought would be of great encouragement to those currently suffering under great persecution.

Of course in the Poetic or allegorical approach, a phrase like this is irrelevant.

And He Sent and Signified it by His Angel – It seems here that there is a divine “passing of the baton” as this revelation is given from God the Father, to Jesus the Son, to His angel, to John, and finally to us, His servants. The word signified here is translated from the Greek word “semaino” (say-mah'-ee-no), which means to make known, or to give a sign. So the way Jesus made known this revelation to John was through His angel. Some have believed this to be the angel Gabriel. This (through angels) is a common way God spoke to his servants throughout the scriptures.

To His Servant John - This is referring to the Apostle John. It is worthy of our attention to note that the Apostle John was not exalted by this revelation, but rather he was humbled. Often in today’s world if a person claims to have received a vision or revelation from God they exalt themselves and glory in their spiritual experiences. But consistently throughout the scriptures we see that those who have had a true experience with the true God are humbled rather than exalted as a result of their encounter. Those who truly know God will therefore refer to themselves as His servants rather than using some lofty title of exaltation.

v. 2 Who Bore Witness to the Word of God - The “who” here is speaking of John. “Who bore witness” means that John is writing to testify of the things he saw and heard in relationship to this revelation which he calls the “word of God.” Notice here that John is calling this revelation

“the word of God”! This is equivalent to an Old Testament prophet saying, “Hear now the Word of the Lord” (cp. Isaiah 1:10; Jeremiah 2:4; Ezekiel 36:1).

And to the Testimony of Jesus Christ - The Apostle John is calling this book the “word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus Christ.” A testimony is an eyewitness report. Revelation 19:10b gives great insight to this phrase: “...For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy

To all Things that He Saw – John is simply stating that he is giving us accurate record of all he saw in this apocalyptic vision.

v. 3 Blessed – Translated from the Greek word “makarios” (mak-ar'-ee-os), meaning happy.

Blessed is He Who Reads and Those Who Hear the Words of this Prophecy, and Keep Those Things Which are Written in it - The context here does not stress a dread or a warning, but rather a blessing and happiness to the reader of this text. But keep in mind the key words here: reads, hear, and keep (obey). The word keep comes from the Greek word “tereo” (tay-reh'-o), which means to hold fast or to attend to carefully. This book, like all the other books of the Bible, is not given for our mere entertainment. We are not promised happiness if we merely read the text or listen to the words. There must be an appropriate response to keep the words of this prophecy in order to be blessed. This principle is true of every book of the Bible.

For the Time is Near – The period of time that this book covers is not far off. Once more, like the phrase “must shortly take place” (v. 1), the Futurist has a difficult time working this phrase into their theology. Considering that there is at least a 2000 year gap between the time of John’s writing and the events he is writing about, the Futurist must keep 2 Peter 3:8 in mind.

“But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8).

TRUTH APPLIED:

1. Review the four traditional views of interpretation of the book of Revelation and make sure everyone in your group understands their meaning.
2. What are some extreme reactions people have had to the book of Revelation over the years and what problems do those reactions cause?
3. Look up the word “revelation” in a dictionary and discuss its implications in relation to our study.

4. What is the theme of this book? (Explain and discuss)

5. Clarify the succession of how many personages this revelation came through to get to us today (v. 1).

6. John calls himself a “servant” of God in verse one. What do we learn from this? What are some unacceptable titles men often assume when they claim to be a representative of God?

7. Did John believe he was actually writing “the word of God”? Explain your answer.

8. What is the blessing promised in verse three? And to whom is the blessing promised? Who is this blessing not promised to? Who therefore should be excited about studying this book?

9. Share your overall impression of what today’s study has accomplished in your heart. What do you think God desires to do you in your life as a result of studying this book? See 2 Peter 3:11-13.

10. If there is any confusion or unanswered questions that specifically apply to today’s study, discuss and clarify now.

CONCLUSION:

I look forward to the unfolding study of the book of Revelation with great expectation. Though I know there are many mysteries to be solved, there are surely many lessons to be learned. May God give us all insight into this book, and a passion for His Word as we begin this journey together.

Looking Ahead With Joy,
Mike Sasso