

“Eschatology”
(Part 14: The Book of Revelation, Review)

III. The Book of Revelation.

A. Review.

1. There are several views of Revelation:
 - a. The Historic view: the book outlines in a linear fashion the events that take place between the first and second coming (popular during the Reformation and Puritan eras).
 - b. The Futurist view: the events are yet future, correlate with the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy, are primarily meant for Israel, but come upon the whole world (Dispensational Premillennialism). They are right that the events have primarily to do with Israel, but wrong in that they are future, especially that they take place after the Second Coming (see earlier lectures on the Second Coming).
 - c. The Idealist futurist view: Revelation a series of seven cycles, each covering the time frame between the first and second comings of Christ, but describing events in a symbolic way with ever increasing intensity (typical Amillennial view).
 - d. The Radical Preterist view (from the Latin word *praeter*, which means past, beyond): sees the book as entirely fulfilled, describing events that took place at the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70.
 - e. The Partial/Moderate Preterist view: the majority of the book was fulfilled in AD 70, recognizes that portions of it (such as the Second Coming of Christ, the Cosmic Renewal, and the Final Judgment) are yet future (held by many Postmillennialists today).

2. These different views are due, in part, to differing principles of Biblical interpretation (hermeneutics).
 - a. Dispensational Premillennialists understand the book of Revelation literally wherever possible.
 - b. Historic Premillennialists, Amillennialists and Postmillennialists allow for symbolic language, though they differ as to what the symbols actually mean.
 - (i) It’s important to interpret each kind of literature (genre) in Scripture according to its particular characteristics.
 - (a) History is generally the straightforward recording of the details; letters are generally straightforward statements; poetry and prophecy, however, are full of figures of speech and symbols.
 - (b) Numbers 12:6-8 gives us the key to understanding prophecy. “He said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, he is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you

not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?” This tells us that the Lord generally revealed His plan to the prophets in figurative and highly symbolic language (Cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12).

(ii) The OT prophets spoke of the glories of the Messianic Age in terms of types and figures, drawing from their own culture to describe the unfamiliar with the familiar. The book of Revelation uses many familiar symbols from the OT prophetic literature to explain what would soon take place.

3. The Moderate Preterist view.

a. The book is a prophetic communication from Christ: Chapter 1.

b. It is addressed to seven historical churches: Chapters 2-3.

c. It was meant:

(i) To warn them of God’s coming judgment on the Jews: Chapters 4-19.

(ii) To explain to them the course of events in general during the time between Christ’s First and Second Comings: Chapter 20:1-10.

(iii) To warn them that the Final Judgment would follow: Chapter 20:11-15.

(iv) To encourage them of the blessings that all who followed Jesus would receive in the New Heavens and Earth: Chapters 21-22.

d. The first 19 chapters of the book have been fulfilled; we’re in the time frame mentioned in Revelation 20:1-10; and 20:11-22:21 are yet future.

B. Audience, Character, Purpose and Date.

1. Audience: Christ addresses this letter through John to seven historical churches that these events would directly impact: “John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. . . . Write in a book what you see, and send *it* to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea” (1:4-5; 11; cf. chapters 2-3; 22:16).

2. Character: The book is called a revelation or apocalypse (uncovering, disclosing, revealing [Friberg]) because it is understandable – it was meant to reveal God’s plan, not to hide it, so that the church might be ready for this event: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near” (1:3; 2:7, 11, 17; 22:7).

3. Purpose: What is the message?

a. Troublesome times were ahead: “Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (3:10).

b. These events were near (not 2000 years off, but close at hand).

(i) “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which *must soon* take place” (1:1).

- (ii) “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for *the time is near*” (1:3; cf. 22:6, 7, 12, 20).
- c. The Tribulation was at hand and in some sense had already begun.
- (i) “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance *which are* in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:9). (NB: “*The tribulation*”).
 - (ii) This was the Lord’s judgment against the Jews for their betrayal and murder of His Son and for killing His prophets:
 - (a) “When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth (*i.e.*, land)?’ And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also” (Rev. 6:9-11).
 - (b) This is what Jesus warned during His earthly ministry:
 - (1) “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall *the guilt of* all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon *this generation*. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (Matt. 23:33-38).
 - (2) “Jesus said to them, ‘Did you never read in the Scriptures, “The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust”’ (Matt. 21:42-44).
4. When was the book written? Just prior to AD 70.
- a. John warned the churches that the Tribulation was *near*, and in some sense had already begun, which means it was written prior to AD 70.

- b. The Temple, which was destroyed in AD 70, was still standing in the holy city (Jerusalem), which means it was written before that event: “Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, ‘Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months’” (11:1).
- c. The sixth king (or Caesar – in this case, Nero [AD 54-68]) was then ruling: “And the angel said to me, ‘Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. . . . Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while’” (17:9-10).
- d. The purpose of the Tribulation, of which John is writing, argues for a date prior to AD 70, *i.e.*, to prepare the churches for the coming of Christ in judgment against unbelieving Israel: “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen” (1:7).

C. Theme: Christ’s Judgment on First Century Israel - “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen” (1:7).

- 1. The Tribulation would focus on Israel.
 - a. We see this in the theme of Revelation.
 - (i) Those who pierced Him would see Him – not the Jews of a future generation, but that generation: Jesus told Caiaphas, “Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64).
 - (ii) All the tribes of the earth (the land of Israel) would mourn over Him – Jesus said this would happen in conjunction with the destruction of the Temple: “And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). This would not be a mourning of repentance, but of sorrow that God’s judgment has fallen on them for their murder of the Messiah.
 - (iii) His coming with the clouds is a symbol of judgment against them: When God brings judgment on a nation, He represents Himself as riding forth from heaven on the clouds to do battle, “Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and is about to come to Egypt; the idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them” (Isaiah 19:1; cf. Psalm 18:7-15; 104:1-4; Matt. 26:62-64). The Lord was coming to judge them for their crimes.

- b. God would bring judgment on the Jewish nation, take the kingdom from them and give it to another nation (the church; see above Matt. 21:42-44), but only after He had gathered His elect from Israel.
 - (i) The sealing of the 144,000 (twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes; chapter 7) shows us that judgment is stayed until the Lord gathered His people to Himself.
 - (ii) These are the first-fruits to the Lord – the first converts from Israel (Rev. 14:4-5).
 - (iii) These are those gathered by the preaching of the disciples in the book of Acts. Jesus said that the Gospel would be preached to the entire Roman Empire (the world) before the end would come (Matt. 24:14) for this purpose.
 - (iv) These are also those who listened to Jesus' warning to flee Jerusalem (Matt. 24:15-16), who would be protected by Him until the Tribulation was over (Rev. 12:6).

- 2. The Tribulation would focus on the land of Judea during the days of the apostles.
 - a. Jesus warned His disciples who would be in Palestine at the time it escalated: "When you see the abomination of desolation . . . flee to the mountains . . . For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will" (Matt. 24:16-21).
 - b. He said the present generation (not the nation, but those alive at that time) would not die until all these things had taken place: "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place" (v. 34, cf. vv. 32-33).
 - c. The result of the Tribulation on the Jewish people was catastrophic: Josephus writes that 1,100,000 Jews died in this war with Rome; Jerusalem was devastated; the Temple was destroyed; and the sacrificial system came to a definitive end.

- 3. The Tribulation was near in the days of Christ and the disciples – it had to be if it was to fall on the generation that crucified Christ.
 - a. Peter said that the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost indicated the beginning of the last days (*i.e.*, the last days of the Jewish economy before AD 70), "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind'" (Acts 2:15-17).
 - b. It was prophesied that Christ's coming would signal the beginning of the events that would lead to the Tribulation in fulfillment of Daniel's 70th week:
 - (i) "So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy

the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined” (Dan. 9:25-26).

- (ii) “Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15).
- (iii) “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world” (1:1-2). Hebrews in particular was a plea for the Jewish believers to flee from the ceremonial system, since it would soon be destroyed.

- c. John tells his readers it was the last hour, the closing days for ethnic Israel as God’s people: “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). .

4. Outline of chapters 1-19.

- a. Chapter 1 gives us an introduction to the book.
- b. Chapters 2-3 tells us something of those to whom it is addressed, calling them to readiness.
- c. Chapter 4 is a vision of the majesty and authority of God: He is on His throne and the One to whom all are answerable.
- d. Chapter 5 introduces us to the Judge – Jesus Christ – who will prosecute judgment against Israel.
- e. Chapters 6-19 is the prosecution of that judgment against Israel for her covenant infidelity, not the least of which was crucifying the Lord of glory.
 - (i) Gentry calls the book a covenant divorce document.
 - (ii) The Lord is about to put Israel away and take a new bride to Himself: the church.