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THE REVELATION *of Jesus Christ*

Bible Study 2018-2019

Notes by Stacy Tyson

AWARE | ALIVE | AWAKE | FREE | FAITHFUL | FRUITFUL

***We proclaim Christ
by warning and teaching all people with all wisdom
so that we may present every person mature in Christ.***

***Toward this goal I also labor,
struggling according to his power
that powerfully works in me.***

| Colossians 1:28-29 |

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

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Outline of Revelation

The following outline is developed around clear structural “chunks” - Introduction/Prologue, Letters to the Seven Churches, Visionary Material, Postlude. The structural key to dividing the visionary material is given in the repeated phrase “Now *after these things* (Gk: *meta tauta*) I **looked**...” or as in the final instance, “Now *after these things* I **heard**...” This is in line with Jesus commission of John in 1:19 “Therefore write what you have seen, what is, and what will take place *after this* (literally, “after these things”, Gk: *meta tauta*).

- 1 Prologue (1:1-20)
 - 1.1 John introduces the Book (1:1-3)
 - 1.2 John greets the churches (1:4-7)
 - 1.3 The Lord declares His identity (1:8)
 - 1.4 John is commissioned to write what he sees (1:9-11)
 - 1.5 John’s first vision of Christ (1:12-20)
- 2 Letters to the Seven Churches (2-3)
 - 2.1 Jesus addresses Ephesus (2:1-7)
 - 2.2 Jesus addresses Smyrna (2:8-11)
 - 2.3 Jesus addresses Pergamum (2:12-17)
 - 2.4 Jesus addresses Thyatira (2:18-29)
 - 2.5 Jesus addresses Sardis (3:1-6)
 - 2.6 Jesus addresses Philadelphia (3:7-13)
 - 2.7 Jesus addresses Laodicea (3:14-22)
- 3 “After these things...” John sees the majesty and splendor of the Heavenly Court (4:1-6:17)
 - 3.1 The Creatures in Heaven worship the One on the Throne (4:1-11)
 - 3.2 The Lamb is worthy to open the Seven Sealed Scroll (5:1-14)

- 3.3 The first six Seals are opened (6:1-17)
- 4 “After these things...” The 144,000 from the 12 Tribes of Israel are sealed (7:1-8)
- 5 “After these things...” The Judgment of God Arrives (7:9—15:5)
 - 5.1 John sees the great multitude from the nations (7:9-17)
 - 5.2 The Seventh Seal is opened (8:1-5)
 - 5.3 Angels with Seven Trumpets appear; Six trumpets are blown (8:6-9:21)
 - 5.4 A giant Angel appears with a Little Scroll (9:1-11)
 - 5.5 John measures the Temple and Two Witnesses appear (11:1-14)
 - 5.6 The Seventh Trumpet is blown and heralds the arrival of the Kingdom (11:15-19)
 - 5.7 The Sign of the Woman and the Dragon appear (12:1-6)
 - 5.8 The Dragon/Satan is cast from Heaven to the Earth (12:7-17)
 - 5.9 The Beast rises from the Sea (13:1-10)
 - 5.10 A second beast rises from the Earth (13:11-18)
 - 5.11 The Lamb appears on Zion with 144,000 from the nations (14:1-5)
 - 5.12 Three Angels bring messages to the Earth (14:6-13)
 - 5.13 The Earth is harvested (14:14-20)
 - 5.14 The Angels with the seven bowls of plagues appear (15:1-4)
- 6 “After these things...” God Pours Out His Final Wrath (15:5-17:18)
 - 6.1 The Seven angels pour out the seven plagues (15:5-16:21)

- 6.2 The Vision of the Great Prostitute and the Beast (17:1-18)
- 7 “After these things...” Babylon is Destroyed (18:1-24)
 - 7.1 An Angel announces the fall of Babylon (18:1-3)
 - 7.2 The lament for the destruction of Babylon (18:4-24)
- 8 “After these things...” The Arrival of The King and the New Creation (19:1-22:21)
 - 8.1 John hears rejoicing in Heaven at the fall of Babylon (19:1-5)
 - 8.2 The marriage supper of the Lamb arrives with great rejoicing (19:6-10)
 - 8.3 The King of kings arrives to make war against the Beast (19:7-21)
 - 8.4 Christ reigns for 1000 years while Satan is imprisoned (20:1-6)
 - 8.5 Satan is released, leads a final rebellion and is finally destroyed (20:7-10)
 - 8.6 A great white throne appears and judgment takes place (20:11-15)
 - 8.7 The New Heaven and Earth appear (21:1-8)
 - 8.8 The New Jerusalem descends from Heaven to Earth (21:9-22:5)
- 9 Postlude: He will arrive soon... (22:6-21)
 - 9.1 The seriousness of this Revelation is restated (22:6-7)
 - 9.2 John reiterates the nature of his visions (22:8-11)
 - 9.3 Jesus gives final warnings, blessings, and invitation (22:12-21)

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1 Introduction: Setting the Stage

1 The Prologue (1:1-20)

1.1 John introduces the Book (1:1-3)

Revelation 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show his servants what must happen very soon. He made it clear by sending his angel to his servant John, 1:2 who then testified to everything that he saw concerning the word of God and the testimony about Jesus Christ. 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy aloud, and blessed are those who hear and obey the things written in it, because the time is near.

- Revelation = “a revealing, an unveiling”
- Jesus, the Agent of Revelation, the testimony about Jesus
God > Jesus > [Angel + John] > His Servants
- Servants = Slaves
- “He made it clear...”
- The Angel sent to John

- “everything that he saw”

- **The Blessing**

There are 7 “Blessed are...” in the book:

1. 1:3 Blessed is **the one who reads the words** of this prophecy aloud, and **blessed are those who hear and obey** the things written in it, because the time is near!

2. 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: **‘Blessed are the dead, those who die in the Lord from this moment on!’**” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so they can rest from their hard work, because their deeds will follow them.”

3. 16:15 (Look! I will come like a thief! **Blessed is the one who stays alert and does not lose his clothes** so that he will not have to walk around naked and his shameful condition be seen.)

4. 19:9 Then the angel said to me, “Write the following: **Blessed are those who are invited to the banquet at the wedding celebration of the Lamb!**” He also said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

5. 20:6 **Blessed and holy is the one who takes part in the first resurrection.** The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

6. 22:7 (Look! I am coming soon! **Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy expressed in this book.**)

7. 22:14 **Blessed are those who wash their robes** so they can have access to the tree of life and can enter into the city by the gates.

- “what must happen very soon,” “the time is near”

(1) The Author

Revelation 1:9 I, John, your brother ... was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony about Jesus.

(1.1) Speculation: John Mark, unknown John...

(1.2) John the Seer, John the Servant, etc.

“The first to reject apostolic authorship was Marcion, the second-century Gnostic who rejected all non-Pauline books (apart from an edited version of Luke) because of their Jewish influence.”
(Osborne, 3)

(1.3) **The Apostle John**
(the same John who walked with Jesus)

- There is a strong witness of Apostolic Fathers who believed John the Apostle wrote the book (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria)
- The Gospel of John and Revelation share a common mission: the reveal Christ in order to bring about repentance.
- There are many similarities between the John's Gospel and Revelation, like their emphasis in showing Jesus' deity by use of the "oneness" theme: "I and the Father are One..."
- Several NT scholars, Henry B. Swete being one, who have shown that there are ample linguistic similarities between John's writings (*see comments on the quotation of Zechariah 12:10 in Revelation 1:7 in the notes ahead)

(2) Time and Place of Writing

The dating of the book of the Revelation is more critical than some of the others books of the Bible due to the fact that the date of writing will affect the interpretation of the book in a fairly significant way.

(2.1) Option 1: The Reign of Nero before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70

*Those who date the book to this time take the **Preterist View** of interpretation which interprets the book as symbolically referring to the fall of Jerusalem. **We will discuss these different modes of interpretation when we get to chapter 4.*

(2.2) Option 2: The Reign of Domitian ca. AD 95 during exile on Patmos

*Those who use this date usually hold the **Idealist** or **Futurist** views. John clearly states that he *was on* the island of Patmos when these visions came. The past tense of this statement may mean that he was no longer on the island. It is also clear that he was banished there in response to his preaching.

“Patmos (pat´ muhs), one of the Sporades Islands in the Aegean Sea. It lies about thirty-seven miles southwest of Miletus, a city on the coast of western Asia Minor. It is a small island, about ten miles long from north to south and six miles wide at its broadest point. ... banishment was a common punishment during the Imperial period for a variety of offenses, including unauthorized practice of divination, magic, or astrology. Prophecy may have been viewed by the Romans as falling into the same category, and prophecy with political implications, like that expressed by John in the book of Revelation, would have been particularly suspect. Three of the islands in the Sporades are listed in extrabiblical sources as places where political offenders were banished (Pliny Natural History 4.69–70; Tacitus Annals 4.30). Adela Yarbro Collins, “Patmos,” ed. Mark Allan Powell, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (Revised and Updated) (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 746–747.

(3) The Style of Revelation

One of the reasons that the author of Revelation is thought to be someone besides John the Apostle is the difference in the style of Greek used in the Gospel of John and Revelation. The Greek in Revelation is weird to say the least:

“... [the author] places nominatives in opposition to other cases, irregularly uses participles, constructs broken sentences, adds unnecessary pronouns, mixes up genders, numbers and cases and introduces several unusual constructions.” Several explanations are possible for the differences in Greek, however, such as an amanuensis who helped smooth out similar rough Greek in the Gospel, or (perhaps more likely) the apocalyptic form itself and the effects of the visions on John as he wrote. **It is commonly conceded that there is a type of Hebraic Greek in the Apocalypse.** Moreover, many of the solecisms [blunders, mistakes] appear deliberate, perhaps due to theological emphasis or the visionary experience. **Such powerful experiences as the ecstatic visions would naturally affect one’s writing style.**” (Osborne, 4)

(4) The Social and Cultural Context of Revelation

Revelation is addressed to seven historical churches in western Asia Minor under the Roman Empire of the 1st Century AD. This suggests that in spite of the unique “visionary” content, it must be read as a historical document addressing actual historical realities.



(5) The Conflict with the Empire

Historically, we know that the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2-3 were situated in cities already submissive to the Roman Empire. These churches would not have considered themselves subjugated by the Empire as the Jewish Christians in the Holy Land would have. These provinces, however, were clearly part of the Empire and would have faced challenges unique to that context.

The Rule of the Roman Emperors:		
Reign	Name	TITLES AND
31BC-AD14	Augustus	The first true Roman emperor described as the chief benefactor and savior of Rome.
AD 14-37	Tiberius	The Caesar during Jesus life.
AD 37-41	Gaius (Caligula)	Generally considered to be insane. <i>Wanted his statue to be placed in the Temple.</i>
AD 41-54	Claudius	Murdered his wife Agrippina so that his adopted son Nero could succeed him.
AD 54-68	Nero	Blamed the burning of Rome on Christians; persecuted Christians
AD 68-69	Galba	Assassinated after seven months
AD 69	Otho	Committed suicide after 90 days
AD 69	Vitellius	
AD 69-79	Vespasian	These two, father and son, led the Roman forces to victory in the Jewish Revolt of AD70.
AD 79-81	Titus	
AD 81-96	Domitian	*During this time, failure to worship the emperor became a punishable offense.

(6) The Conflict with the Imperial Cult

- The Priene Inscription from 9BC:

“Since providence, which has ordered the whole of our life, showing concern and zeal, has set it in most perfect order by giving [him] to us, filling him with virtue for doing the work of a benefactor among men, sending him as a savior both for us and for those who come after us, that he might end war and arrange all things and since he, by his appearance, excelling even our own anticipation of the good news

(*euangelion*) surpassing all previous benefactors and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god, was the beginning for the world and for the good news to men that came by way of him..." (*I am indebted to Joseph Fantin of Dallas Theological Seminary for this text*)

Politically, the seven cities of the letters in Revelation would have competed for honor and recognition from the Emperor. The Emperor was considered to be the benefactor and savior of the civilized world and thus he began to be worshiped as a god in the flesh. This gave rise to the Imperial Cult which by the time of Domitian would have placed great pressure on Christians who struggled to keep their allegiance to Christ in a society which was held together by its allegiance to the Emperor.

By the time of Domitian, Christianity was clearly set apart as an enemy of the empire. Thus, anyone who would not pledge allegiance to the Emperor and the Empire would be punished. It was during the time of Domitian that the first wide spread persecutions of Christians began to break out.

“In the eastern Mediterranean, however, most peoples showed their loyalty to Rome by worshiping not only the goddess Roma (Rome) but also the emperor. Different Asian cities had competed for the honor of hosting emperor temples, with Ephesus and then Smyrna as the principal sites of such cults. All seven cities of Asia Minor whose churches are directly addressed in Revelation were exposed to the imperial cult. Increasingly as Domitian’s reign went on, people were calling Domitian “master” and “god” (Dio Cassius, 67.13.4).⁶² Domitian also became a tyrant who repressed a number of minority groups he saw as potentially threatening, including Roman Jews, philosophers, and astrologers.” (Keener, 37-38)

“It may well be the case that Christians in Asia Minor, unaccustomed to having a bunker mentality, may have been extremely traumatized by any persecution at all, for they had not been conditioned to expect such a response to their beliefs and behavior, especially if most of them were Gentile Christians in these congregations. (Witherington, 22)

(7) Unique Aspects of Revelation

(7.1) Revelation and the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament)

There are approximately 270-400 references, quotes or allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures, more than any other New Testament book. Out of 404 verses in Revelation, only 126 contain no allusion to the Hebrew Scriptures.

Revelation is a fitting conclusion to the Bible which was opened by Genesis. Revelation is also closely associated with the “end time” material of Daniel.

(7.2) What is the Genre (*type of literature*) of Revelation?

Prophetic

This is literature that developed most extensively in the Hebrew Scriptures. Prophets, set apart and called by God, speak the words of God as Covenant mediators and enforcers. Although the prophet is often given glimpses of future events to confirm his message, the main point of the prophetic material is to encourage the faithful and call the faithless to faithfulness.

Apocalyptic

This is a type of literature that is still hotly debated in terms of its form and content. It was produced mainly in the times from 200 BC to AD 100. Generally speaking the apocalyptic literature tells the story of a person, usually an important person from the past, who is given a vision or message from the “other world” by an angel or other-worldly-being that helps make sense out of the “real world.” It is often filled with bizarre images, hyperbolic metaphors that seek to unveil mysteries and truths from God’s perspective. At the heart of this literature is the problem of evil and the question of what God is going to do about it.

Mounce suggests the following helpful distinctions of apocalyptic literature:

- It is **focused toward the future** (eschatological) when the final reckoning will suddenly break in upon the present.
- It is **dualistic** in that it presents two worlds struggling for control, one righteous and one evil. It also presents two ages: the present one corrupted with evil and the one to come where righteousness will be perfected.
- It has a **pessimistic attitude about mankind’s ability** to do anything to change the present age in a positive way.

- It usually has a **deterministic framework** where everything moves forward toward in a timely, divinely preordained, pre-determined end.
- It is carried along by often **bizarre symbolism which is rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures**, but which may also be drawn from ancient (pagan) mythology in order to reveal the universal nature of the One True Story that is the root and source of all other stories.
(Mounce, 19ff)

Although Revelation shares many of these qualities, Mounce is helpful in pointing out the way Revelation is different from apocalyptic literature:

- ***The book calls itself a prophecy*** (see next heading).
- John is a real prophet in his time who speaks directly to his audience.
- Although Revelation is pessimistic about the present age, it hopes toward the return of Christ. It speaks in the spirit of Jesus in John 16:33, *“In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage—I have conquered the world.”*
- Apocalyptic literature usually views this present age as meaningless because of its evil. Revelation, however, sees this present age as the beginning stage of God’s saving work.
- Revelation has a practical moral and spiritual urgency as it calls the actual churches of history to repentance and faithfulness.
- Revelation leaves interpretation up to the reader as something that can be done. It does not hide its message in incomprehensible mysteries, but reveals future truth in ways that anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear can understand and apply. (Mounce, 23-25)

*Apocalyptic-Prophetic

The fact that Revelation refers to itself as **prophecy** 5 times (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19) means that we should view it primarily as such. The fact that the book is addressed to seven historical churches and to the church as a whole, as a form of “covenant enforcement,” also points to its prophetic nature. How-

ever, the images and other worldly symbols and visions clearly give the book an apocalyptic feel. It may be that Revelation is a unique, hybrid literature both prophetic and apocalyptic, which is to say that it is a prophecy given to us in apocalyptic form.

(8) Purpose

- (8.1) Through John, Jesus Christ encourages the churches so that they will not conform to the pagan/anti-christ ways of the prevailing culture.
- (8.2) Jesus wants his people to know that no matter how bad things get on earth, He is in control and will return to vindicate their suffering and to make all things right.
- (8.3) Jesus wants to encourage his people to persevere in their faithfulness even in the most difficult of times.
- (8.4) Jesus wants his people to know that this life is not the end; there is a more glorious New Creation awaiting us.