

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lessons 76 & 77

Revelation – Parts One & Two

I. Introduction

Probably no other book in the Bible brings out as many strong feelings among Evangelicals as the final book in the Bible known as Revelation. It contains highly symbolic language that often leads to heated debates among Christians. Recent world events including, but not limited to, conflicts in the Middle East, the reunification of Europe, natural disasters, and the increased and widespread persecution of the Christian Church, have brought about a rise in the interest and curiosity among Christians as to how these things fit into God's timeline for future events and the last days.

Some choose not to read or study Revelation because it seems confusing and possibly raises as many questions as it answers. Others study the book along with additional prophetic literature and become so consumed with it that they develop tunnel vision and a preoccupation with signs and future events. Finally, some study Revelation because the Lord said, "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" (Revelation 1:3). They receive it as God's word which is true and is profitable and useful in God's development of their life. This third group of people will also, most likely, come to conclusions as to how God's plan for the last days will finally play out, however, they always hold those opinions with grace and humility and resist the temptation to become intolerant of people who might come to different understandings of the same passages of God's Holy Word.

II. Author

The Apostle John is the most obvious candidate for the authorship of Revelation. First, the name John is mentioned four times in 1:1, 4, and 9 and again in 22:8. Secondly, the early Church held to the belief that John was the receiver and recorder of the Revelation. Third, certain terms are strikingly similar between the Revelation and the Gospel of John. Terms such as "Logos," "the Lamb," "he who overcomes," and "tabernacle" are used both in John's gospel and the Revelation. These are terms and phrases that are almost exclusively unique to the Johannine literature and Revelation.

III. Date

Dating for the book has ranged from about 68 to the early 90's A.D. during the reign of either Nero or Domitian. It was during a time of great difficulty for the Church with systematic persecution. The early Church held that the Emperor Domitian had banished the Apostle John to the isle of Patmos.

IV. Interpretations

There are basically four systems of interpretations of the book of Revelation. Even if a student of the scriptures never learns any of the following terms, their understanding and interpretation will mostly fall into one of these systematic approaches. However, with the plethora of good study Bibles that are now available to us, it is unlikely that a serious Bible student will fail to ever come across these terms.

1. **Preterist** – This approach of interpretation sees the events of Revelation as only taking place in the Roman Empire while John was still living. Most of the events, according to this view, have already taken place under the persecutions of Nero or Domitian.
2. **Historist** – This approach interprets the book as describing a long chain of events from Patmos to the end of history. The sections describing the seals, the trumpets and the bowls all refer to specific events in history and their relationship to the Church.
3. **Idealist** – This view sees all of the events of Revelation as being strictly allegorical picturing the ongoing struggle between the forces of heaven and hell, and God's ultimate victory over Satan.
4. **Futurist** – This view interprets the events of Revelation, especially from chapter four on, to be in the future and provides a chronology of the end times.

The most important thing to remember is that God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and His word will endure forever. The words of Revelation are to be taken seriously by Christians today as much as they were in the first century when the Apostle John delivered them.

V. Transcending Points of Chapter One

Why should you study Revelation? Because in verse one it says, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bondservants...” That alone should be enough to encourage us to read and study Revelation just like we do all of God’s word. The entire Bible is important...yes, even Leviticus! It is all part of His-story and His redemptive plan. While not all portions will necessarily have equal application in our lives at any given moment, it is still all about God and teaches us about Him. So, as we look at chapter one, lets keep the following points in the forefront of our minds.

1. The Reality of Blessing for Then and Now (v.1-3)

It means nothing to just read these words as we would any other piece of historical literature. Even this passage of God’s word is profitable and useful in our lives. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” The words to the seven churches are timeless and are for local congregations of all generations to heed as much as they were for the seven literal churches of John’s day.

2. Revealing Jesus for Who He Is (v.4ff)

- a. The deliverer of the Revelation (v.1a)
- b. The faithful witness (v.5a)
- c. The first-born of the dead (v.5b). Compare this with Colossians 1:18.
- d. The ruler of the kings of the earth (v.5c)
- e. The one who loves us (v.5d)
- f. The one who released us (v.5e)
- g. The one who is coming again (v.7)
- h. The eternal one (v.8)
- i. The one who stands in the center of His Church (vv.12-13)

3. Responding to Jesus Because of Who He Is (v. 17)

We are overcome with the sense of unworthiness and humility. John became like a dead man. He was fearful, but was comforted by the Savior (v. 17b).

Points for Home

- Christ is still walking in the center of His Church – trust Him.
- Christ is still speaking through His word – listen to Him.
- `Christ is still personally encountering us by His Spirit – worship Him.