

Introduction to the Apocalypse, pt. 1

Revelation 1:1

1. THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

- a. Joel Beeke: The word for revelation in Greek is apokalupsis, from which we derive our word apocalypse, and it literally means an uncovering or unveiling of something that was previously hidden or kept secret. Thus, this book is an unveiling or uncovering of Jesus Christ.
- b. The book of Revelation is prophetic but it is also apocalyptic. We can see it closely related in the genre to Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. In the New Testament we have texts like Matthew 24 with a similar apocalyptic nature.
- c. G.K. Beale says, “it is best to understand apocalyptic as an intensification of prophecy.” We can think of heightened escalation. The already but not yet approach. The sense of prophecy that comes to us and more and more is progressively revealed until its full fulfillment is reached.
- d. Matthew Henry recounts it beautifully: “The whole Bible is so; for all revelation comes through Christ and all centres in him; and especially in these last days God has spoken to us by his Son, and concerning his Son. Christ, as the king of his church, has been pleased thus far to let his church know by what rules and methods he will proceed in his government; and, as the prophet of the church, he has made known to us the things that shall be hereafter.”
- e. Beeke again says: The Bible was not written to satisfy the hunger of the human mind for knowledge of future events. Many Christians use the book of Revelation as a kind of horoscope to predict the future. They might as well read the stars. The Bible is not a horoscope; it is a revelation of Jesus Christ. It is to be understood rationally, spiritually, and practically- not superstitiously or speculatively. Indeed, reading Revelation as a horoscope is not only useless but downright sinful because all such efforts are forbidden in Scripture (Deut. 18:9-14). The technical term for this abuse of Scripture is bibliomancy, or using the Bible as a literary divining rod or Ouija board.

2. WHICH GOD GAVE TO CHRIST TO SHOW HIS SERVANTS

- a. John Gill puts it this way: not to him as he is God, for as such he is omniscient, and foreknew whatever would come to pass, and needed no revelation to be made to him, but as he was man and Mediator; and this was given him by God the Father, and put into his hands, to make known as being a part of the administration of his prophetic office:
- b. Michael Wilcock helps us to see: “It is the Revelation of Jesus Christ given by God to his servants. If I am one of those who serve him, then this book is for me, however irrelevant its contents may seem when I first glance through it. It behooves me therefore to persevere in reading it, so that I may receive the blessing its author promises me (1:3).”

3. THE NEARNESS OF THE PROPHECY

- a. Matthew Poole: “The phrase, indeed, signifies shortly, but never what was past, nor always what shall in a few days come to pass; see Luke 18:8; Rom. 16:20; though indeed sometimes it signifies the time immediately following a command, as Acts 12:7; 22:18: and considering it is God’s phrase, to whom a thousand years are but as yesterday, Psal. 90:4, and who calls the things that are not as if they were, and who manifestly calls all those years betwixt Christ’s coming and the end of the world (almost one

thousand seven hundred of which are past already) the last days, we may allow him to say, those things should be shortly, which soon after should begin to be effected, though not finished till Christ's second coming." Matthew Poole, Annotations upon the Holy Bible, vol. 3 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 949."

4. THE DATE OF THE APOCALYPSE

- a. Emperor Worship: Domitian vs. Nero
- b. Persecution of Christians
 - i. Clement (96 AD): "the sudden and repeated calamities and reverses that have befallen us."
- c. The Condition of the Churches in Asia Minor
 - i. Beale: It is plausible that such spiritual deterioration took a significant period of time to develop. For example, that Ephesus had left its "first love" could mean that the church had done so within only a few years of its establishment, but the language may fit better a longer development, perhaps so that the church was in its second generation of existence. The Laodicean church is called "wealthy, but the city experienced a devastating earthquake in 60-61 A.D. Therefore, the natural assumption is that the city took longer than merely three or four years to recover economically. And, as suggested by many commentators, the very existence of the church at Smyrna suggests a later date, since it is possible that the church was not even established until 60-64 A.D.
- d. The Myth of Nero's Reappearance: cf. Rev. 13:3-4; 17:8, 11
 - i. A point of interest is that Domitian was viewed by the Roman aristocracy as a second Nero.
- e. Babylon
 - i. J. Christian Wilson says that in Revelation "Babylon" is never linked with Jerusalem's destruction but represents only the place in which the saints live in exile.
- f. The Earliest Traditions
 - i. Irenaeus: "We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the Apocalypse. For it was seen not very long ago, but almost in our day, toward the end of Domitian's reign."

5. THE AUTHOR OF THE APOCALYPSE

- a. Matthew Henry again: "Observe here the admirable order of divine revelation. God gave it to Christ, and Christ employed an angel to communicate it to the churches. The angels are God's messengers; they are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. They are Christ's servants: principalities and powers are subject to him; all the angels of God are obliged to worship him."

6. APPLICATION