

Write it down!

Rev. 1

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[Biblical text at the end of sermon for those online.

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Introduction

No New Testament book has caused as much controversy and as much speculation as the Book of the Revelation. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes wrote my favourite commentary on this book and said, “The fact that the book of Revelation is placed last in the NT does not mean that it is held to be less important than the other books.” Eugene Peterson, author of the translation/paraphrase, “The Message,” says of it, “The Bible ends with a flourish: vision and song, doom and deliverance, terror and triumph. The rush of colour and sound, image and energy, leaves us reeling.” Peterson goes on to say significantly “we find ourselves enlisted as participants in a multidimensional act of Christian worship.”

That might sound a bit scary. Like being pushed onto a carnival roller coaster before we emotionally or physically are ready. We spend the first few moments of the ride, or maybe the entire ride looking backwards, trying to catch up with reality.

I’m reminded of the story of Bruce, a young executive who went to his boss’ house one evening for a soiree. He was desperately in love with the boss’ daughter. Amazingly that night, the boss made a declaration near the swimming pool where everyone had gathered. The pool was a sight worthy of Steve Irwin. The pool was filled with crocodiles. The boss raised his glass of champagne and announced “If anyone is willing to swim from one end to the other of this pool, I will give him my daughter’s hand in marriage.”

The words had barely escaped the boss’ mouth when a splash was heard. “There goes Bruce,” someone shouted. And sure enough, swimming faster than Thorpedo was Bruce. He made it from one end to the other in lightning speed and leapt to his feet at the last.

The crowd cheered and the boss was true to his promise. He announced, “Tonight I give my daughter to Bruce. Son, I have to ask, how did you do it? What manner of bravery do you live by?”

Bruce, catching his breath and bowing thankfully, said, “I have to ask one question. ...[Pause [... Who pushed me?”

Maybe that’s the way you feel about the mysterious reading of this text. Maybe you feel like it’s a giant roller coaster and you have to ask... who pushed me into this?

And if you are not yet a follower of Y’shua, you are worried when I mention “Christian worship” as Peterson says in his commentary. Hey, you might be saying, I

didn't sign up for this. I'm just here to suss things out and listen and learn. OK < fair enough. No need for alarm or fear. Let's get through the book together and see what it has to say to us standing on the sideline, in touch, ready to catch a glimpse of some amazing pictorials and some sights and sounds worthy of the Creator of the Universe.

Is that fair?

Ray Stedman was pastor of a large church in California and wrote about Revelation as the scariest book in the Bible. Dr. Earl Palmer, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley, said in his exposition of this book, "Revelation is hard to understand, but it is impossible to forget."

How to read the book

There are four basic methods of interpreting this book. Now before you tune out and worry that I'm going to go into some long-winded academic description, it's important to know who is writing and to whom and why. Otherwise you might find a love letter or a summary of electrical charges on a bill each found in front of your home and think they are of equal importance. Let's see how many unpack this book.

The first is called 'futurist.' This then would be a forecast of a future yet to happen.

The second is 'preterist.' This would be a description of things that have already happened 'before' since the Latin word 'praeter' means 'before.' It describes First Century information.

The third is 'historical' about events between Y'shua's death and his second coming. It's a combination of the previous two views.

The fourth is 'idealized' and merely a metaphorical description of non-historical activities and realities. It's a fable all dressed up.

Now, I want to describe what I see as the book's purpose and guard you from the wacky and weird. Arnold Fruchtenbaum describes what some do to this book as "newspaper exegesis," that is, reading the Sydney Morning Herald and seeing every word as biblical fulfilment.

Stedman says, "It is not an accident that this is the last book of the Bible. It gathers themes from the whole Bible and brings them into focus in its pages. Someone has well said that the book of Genesis and the book of Revelation are like two bookends that hold the Bible together. In Genesis you have the story of the beginning of human sin; in Revelation you have the end of it recounted. In Genesis there is the beginning of civilization and of history; in Revelation we learn the end of both. In Genesis you learn of the beginning of the judgments of God upon mankind; in Revelation you see the end of them. These two books belong together. "

Look, there are over 500 quotes from the Tenach. And only in 22 chapters. That's an average of over 25 per week, so I won't be citing each one. But you have to read this book with the awareness that God was summarizing the entirety of history, by the constant allusions to the Older Testament. It was the montage on which he painted the new book; it's the scenery and the substantive conclusion. It's the alpha and the omega. It's the aleph and the tav. It's the whole ball game. You cannot start at Revelation and understand the Bible. You have to read it through, and finish here.

Yesterday I was at the airport awaiting a few of our JFJ Board members who are here this morning. And while I waited, I was guessing from where people had come. The man who was dragged out and his hair dishevelled appeared to have come from a

long way, and his numerous bags gave evidence of an extended stay. The man in a singlet with only a backpack appeared to be flying in from Tassie or Broken Hill and had heaps of energy. That's what I want you to do with the reading of this book. See where a text comes from and say "aha, that's from Broken Hill, or that's from Exodus or that's from Hosea and that means...." When you know where something is from, you know where you are going a bit better, amen?

Let's dig in

It's first "The revelation of Y'shua the Messiah." (v. 1) It's not the revelation of the end times. It's not the revelation of John. It belongs to Y'shua. It's about Y'shua. He is the purpose of the book. And this makes sense if we are looking for a summary of the entire 65 books which precedes this.

And the purpose is even more fully clarified in "which God gave him to show his bond-servants." That is, the purpose of the revelation is for us to see and to understand and ...we will find out later, to worship.

We see also in verse one 'which must shortly take place.' There is something impressive about the urgency of the message. Something is very soon going to happen and you will know it. It's as sure as the testimony of Y'shua given on the Mt of Transfiguration or the Mt Sinai.

By the way 'revelation' is the Greek word "apocalypse" and means just that, revealing or unveiling. A taking away of that which obscures. Like the removing of the veil over Moses or the opening of the eyes of the Lucan disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Verse three says, "Blessed is the one who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it. The time is near." Peterson says, "Time is just about up." Do you know this is the only place in the Bible where we are guaranteed a blessing for reading! No wonder it's so important to hear this passage. We may not get all the symbolism; we may not understand futurist or preterist or apocalypse, but we certainly can understand blessings, and that's what we want. So we must read and heed. We have to listen to what is said and we have to choose to do what is written. That's a simple formula for success here in this book and in this life.

Remember the one called to read Torah recites a blessing and receives one as well. Maybe that's in view. I believe the book was designed to be read as a unit, although we will take 22 weeks to study it. Maybe at home you want to read through the entire book each week. It's a blessing!

And remember, hearing without doing is not sufficient for the blessing. What a waste to learn and not do what we learn, amen?

Now, "prophecy involves not only future events but also the ethical and spiritual exhortations and warnings contained in the writing. Thus John immediately sets off his writing from the late Jewish apocalyptic literature (which did not issue from the prophets) and puts himself on a par with the OT prophets." (NIV Commentary)

Now we move to the people who will be initially reading this letter, which turns out to be an epistle, like Colossians or Galatians. They are the 7 churches in Turkey. Why do I say that? Listen how it opens, "Grace and peace" like Paul started 9 of his letters. And many other reasons.

From Him who is and who was and who is to come. If that's not a reflection of OT sound bytes, I don't know one. He is the Eternal God, as Moses met in Exodus 3. Even as we sing in Adon Olam, v'hoo haya, v'hoo hoveh, v'hoo yihyeh l'tirafarh.

Seven is a key number of this book. When you find seven of anything in this book, it is a symbol of completeness, of perfection or plenitude. This is the Spirit of God in the fullness of his being. This is a reflection of Isaiah. In Chapter 11, Verse 2, the prophet speaks of The Spirit coming upon the Messiah, and he says:

1 The Spirit of the Lord [number one] will rest on him --

2 The Spirit of wisdom [number two] and of understanding [three],

3 The Spirit of counsel [four] and of power [five],

4 The Spirit of knowledge [six] and of the fear of the Lord [seven]

So 7 spirits are the Holy Spirit in his fullness. Also he may be borrowing from the imagery of Zechariah 4, where the prophet sees a lamp stand with seven bowls supplied with oil from two nearby olive trees, John seems to connect the church ("lamp stands" [v. 20]) to the ministry of the Holy Spirit (3:1; 4:5; 5:6).

Although when I say 7 is key, I think 3 is a key number as well. The formula for who was is and will come. The formula here in verse 5 and 6 for 'the faithful, the firstborn, the ruler' So he is introduced here, as the truth teller, the life giver, and the lawmaker. or again in what he did, same verses, 'who loves us, who freed us, who caused us to be a kingdom of priests.'

God delivered us from in by sending Y'shua to die for us. Awesome. He willingly died in our place and gave his blood to deliver us from sin and the sin hold on us. What a powerful story the crucifixion is and made famous of late by Mel Gibson in the movie The Passion. And although it was a bit of Hollywood, the story is true—Y'shua is the Messiah who died for us, to free us from living for ourselves so we could live for God and others.

This triad formula of song and sound is consistent throughout the book. It regularly reminds us of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It calls to mind the body, soul and spirit of man. And it's the normal triangular thinking of John, which steadies his writing. Have you noticed a table with three legs would never rock, but a four-legged one well might? Why? Because three points form a geometric plane and thus always adapt to the situation, while a four-legged one is more rigid and less adaptive to a floor, which is not so regular. I like John's use of 3s. I feel more stable.

And there will be the number 12 and the number 1000 and we will get to those in time.

Verse 7 widens the scope for all people. It's not just for Jews. Every eye will see him. All the tribes of earth, not just the 12 tribes of Israel. And all will mourn, not only Jewish people (Zech 12.10). At the end of verse 7 we see two words, 'even so, amen.' These are the same word, but one in Greek and the other Hebrew. How perfect to combine the two languages to instruct us of universality, another key theme in this book. What is good for the Jews is good for the world.

The encounter

John writes this book because of the encounter. Maybe it's similar to Bruce and the crocodiles. He had no idea what he would see in the vision. John describes it as a loud voice got his attention and then he turned and saw this flaming sword, the lamp

stands, and the one in the middle of it all and heard the voice tell him to transcribe the following. Note the use of the word 'like.' Now this is different than the modern use of the term used by teenagers to mean 'to say' or such. NO, this is the classic 'simile' or 'metaphor' usage and helps put the scenery in place.

v. 13, "one like a son of man, clothed in a robe ...

Rev. 1.14 And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire;

Rev. 1.15 and His feet were like burnished bronze, ...and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

Rev. 1.16 ... and His face was like the sun shining in its strength."

The imagery of the metaphor is powerful and shows the ethereal quality that John is painting. In fact, if he were a good painter, I would go see this scene in his gallery. Wouldn't you?

By the way, the verse 13 'long robe and gold band' are priestly garments, reminding us of Y'shua's current role as priest for us, making intercession before the heavenly throne on our behalf. Awesome.

The response of John and the response of Y'shua

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said,

"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One;

I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." [Rev 1:17-19]

This is John's commission to write this book, and his reaction is one frequently seen whenever a man encounters the glorious God. He "fell at his feet as though dead," struck dumb by the awesomeness of the character of God. Isaiah does the same when he sees the Lord high and lifted up with his train filling the temple. Job does this also when to him is revealed the wisdom and wonder of God. Throughout the Bible it is the only place to be when God appears -- fall on your face as though dead. But the reaction of Jesus is typical, very characteristic of him. Notice that he does three things. First, he touched him! He laid his right hand upon him. Read the Gospels and Y'shua is always touching people. When he healed a leper he touched him. When he opened the eyes of the blind he put his hands upon their eyes. So here, he touched him.

And, then, he reassured him. "Fear not," he said. "Don't be afraid. I am not your enemy. I am your friend. I am the First and the Last. [i.e., I set the boundaries of time and history. Everybody must live within the limits that I have determined]. I am the Living One [I am always available.] I am alive forevermore, forever and ever. [There will never be a moment when you need me that I will not be there, available to you.] And I hold the keys of death and Hades [death, the enemy of the physical life]; Hades [or Hell], the enemy of the spiritual life. [I am in charge of both places, both forces.] So you need not fear."

Then he commissioned John: "Write!" And he told him what to write -- in three divisions. "Write what you have seen," That covers what we are looking today in Chapter 1. And write, "what is now," i.e., Chapters 2 and 3 of this book, the letters to

the seven churches. And write, "what will take place later." This would be Chapters 4-22, the rest of the book of Revelation. So Y'shua himself gives us the divisions of this book, and if we follow them, we will understand well the Lord's instruction.

Summary

So: What should you learn/hear today as a result of reading this text? Or what lessons do we learn from today's teaching?

- 1) Be blessed by reading this book regularly
- 2) Worship the One who died and who rose again
- 3) Be a priest and serve other people in this world
- 4) Obey God when he tells you to write or to do or to.... anything
- 5) Look forward to the day of his return and live like it's today

Invitation

So... let me ask you. Today we give that choice to you. Maybe you are mourning the crucifixion. Maybe your eye is seeing him. If you would like to be delivered from your sin by the blood of Y'shua, then pray this prayer and receive His love and grace. Father, forgive me in the name of Y'shua for all my sins. He was the Saviour and the fulfilment of all prophecies about Messiah. He is the one and the only one who can save me from my selfishness, from my sin. I acknowledge Y'shua as that one who wants to free me, and who alone can free me. I repent of my sin and accept Y'shua as my deliverer. By faith I am now born again by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer, please talk to me after the service is over, [\[or email me if you are reading this online\]](#) so we can talk about growing in this knowledge and this relationship with God.

Actual text

Rev. 1.1 ¶ The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,

Rev. 1.2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Rev. 1.3 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.

Rev. 1.4 ¶ 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;

Rev. 1.5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood,

Rev. 1.6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Rev. 1.7 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. Even so. Amen.

Rev. 1.8 ¶ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Rev. 1.9 ¶ 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.

Rev. 1.10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,

Rev. 1.11 saying, “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.”

Rev. 1.12 And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;

Rev. 1.13 and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle.

Rev. 1.14 And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire;

Rev. 1.15 and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

Rev. 1.16 And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

Rev. 1.17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,

Rev. 1.18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Rev. 1.19 “Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things.

Rev. 1.20 “As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lamp stands are the seven churches.