

A Study of the Book of Revelation

Week 2: September 20, 2009

How would you define prophecy?

“John has a different understanding of prophecy than we do. We think of prophecy in terms of foretelling the future. We see prophecy as ‘history written in advance,’ or as being about predictions of the future events, but John has a different understanding. For John there are two elements in prophecy. First, prophecy is an inspired message, received directly from God.⁴ . . . Second, prophecy for John involves true testimony to Jesus. . . . The function of prophecy is to direct people to the one Lord Jesus Christ, and to call people to live in faithful obedience to this Lord. Prophecy is about directing people in the life of faith. . . . For John true prophecy is not so much about laying out a road map to the future, as it is about calling people to live for Jesus in both the present and the future. The focus of prophecy is in faithful teaching and exhortation. . . . If we follow John’s guidance, we will find Revelation not so much a road map to the future, but a call for obedience and faithfulness.”

- (*Come, Lord Jesus* by Mark Braaten, pg 5-6)

“Today’s end-times writings draw on a method for looking at prophecy that was invented less than two hundred years ago and, by now, is a dominant American view. In this system, the Bible – particularly the books of Daniel and Revelation – spell out in detail God’s pre-ordained script of predictions for the end of the world.

Many other Christians read the biblical story differently, and I am one of them. The Bible does not provide a predictive screenplay for worldwide violence and disaster in the Middle East. Revelation’s gift to us is a story of God who loves us and comes to live with us. Biblical prophets are not predictors of end-time events, they are inspired voices calling people to repentance and justice. They tell the wonderful and crucial story of God’s faithfulness. They give us hope.”

- (*The Rapture Exposed* by Barbara Rossing, pg. xvii)

Revelation 1:1-11

Background Information

(The following information is adapted from *Come Lord Jesus* by Mark Braatan, pg 2-9)

Who wrote Revelation?

- Rev. 1:9 identifies the author as John of Patmos and appears to assume that the recipients of this letter would know who John was
- Probably not John, the son of Zebedee, disciple of Jesus
- Probably not the same writer as the Gospel of John
- What we do know about John of Patmos
 - Banished to Island of Patmos for preaching the word of God
 - Someone who knew the seven churches addressed in Revelation
 - A person of deep faith

When was Revelation written?

- Probably written at the end of the first century around 95 or 96 AD
- Early church father Irenaeus said that Revelation was written at the end of the reign of Domitian (81 - 96 AD)
- Rome is referred to as “Babylon” which became a common practice in Judaism after Romans destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in 70 AD

Why is Revelation addressed to only seven churches and what are the implications of having the book addressed to specific churches?

- Possibility 1 - John simply picked these seven churches for unknown reasons.
- Possibility 2 - Seven is considered to be a complete number. John uses sets of seven in other areas of Revelation as a part of the symbolism of the letter. Perhaps these seven churches are meant to represent the complete church
- Regardless of why seven churches were chosen, John addresses particular issues within each of these congregations, so the letter has a very specific context in mind.

How is Revelation to be viewed?

“As we seek to understand Revelation, it is helpful to keep four categories in mind. Revelation is a letter, a prophecy, an apocalypse, and a spiral of visions.”

- (Braatan, pg. 4-5)

- *A Letter*
 - Contains standard letter formatting: greetings, blessings, listing of sender and recipients
 - Similar in form to letters of Paul
 - Addressed to first century churches in Asia-Minor, not to 21st Century Christians
- *A Prophecy*
 - Inspired message from God
 - True testimony directing people to Jesus
 - A call to faithful obedience and direction for a life of faith
 - Implications for the future, but not a road map for the future
- *An Apocalypse*
 - From the Greek word meaning “revelation” or “unveiling”
 - “Apocalyptic literature was a picturesque, symbolic type of writing. It involved rich imagery and cosmic battles. Apocalyptic literature often included angels, supernatural beings, plagues and trials, and battles between God and Satan. Often it focused on the end of the world. Apocalyptic literature was expressive, pronounced, and made use of rich and often bizarre images It was concerned with justice, that God and God’s people be vindicated in a sinful world. It often contained words of warning for nonbelievers, and words of encouragement for believers. One of the functions of apocalyptic literature was to provide hope for people in difficult situation.” (Braatan, pg. 7).
 - Style of literature that developed and flourished between 200 BC and 200 AD and thus the style would have been familiar to original readers of Revelation
- *A Spiral of Visions*
 - Revelation contains “cycles of visions, repetitions, and deepening developments of reoccurring themes. Revelation is written as a spiral, with ideas and themes developed, then redeveloped and intensified as the book moves onward.” (Braatan, pg. 8)
 - Not written in a chronological manner, more like “a powerful hymn, the messages are repeated in ongoing verses and refrains” (Braatan, pg. 9)