

A Study of the Book of Revelation
Week 3: September 27, 2009

Read Revelation 1:1-8

“John begins the book by pointing to Jesus. This book will be ‘the revelation of Jesus Christ’ given by God. John is clear from line one. This book is a message from God, and Jesus is the means by which God shares this message. . . . John goes on to explain more about the origins of this revelation. This message came by a chain. It is rooted in God, and then proceeded from God to Jesus to an angel to John. (This type of chain is common in apocalyptic literature. It served to ensure the transcendence of God.) Make no mistake, John insists. John is writing the manuscript, but the author is the Almighty. . . . It is important to note again that for John, prophecy was not a road map to the future. Prophecy was teaching and exhortation, given by God, that directed people to Jesus.” (Braatan, pg. 15-16)

Why is it important to know that the intent of Revelation is to point to Jesus?

What do you think John means when he tells us to keep what is written?

What do verses 5 and 6 tell us about John’s understanding of Jesus?

Compare Verse 7 to these texts from Daniel and Zechariah. What can this teach us about John’s use of the Old Testament?

Daniel 7:13 - 14 (NRSV) ¹³As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. ¹⁴To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Zechariah 12:10 (NRSV) ¹⁰And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

Read Revelation 1:9-20

“John once again introduces himself, this time as a ‘brother’ who shares with the people the life of faith. John makes no claim to being one of the original twelve apostles. He is obviously someone well known to the recipients, as he feels no need for further introduction. He emphasizes that he shares with the Christians ‘the persecution, the kingdom, and the patient endurance.’” (Braatan, pg. 18)

“John further explains that he was ‘in the spirit on the Lord’s day’ when he saw and heard a message. We’re not sure exactly what John means by this. Was he in prayer, in worship, in a vision, or in some other spiritual experience? Whatever the exact experience, we need to take John at his word here. John received a revelation as a gift from God, and he shares it in this book. Two points are worth noting here. First, spiritual experiences were well accepted in New Testament times. . . . Second, John does not focus on his own experience, but on the message that God gave him. For John what is vital is to what happened to him, but the message that God shared.” (Braatan, pg. 18-19)

How do we experience and understand spiritual experiences in today’s world?

What message do you think God gives us? How can we focus on sharing the message God gives to us?

Symbols

“Note the language that John uses. He uses the words ‘like’ and ‘as.’ The challenge that John has is, how does one describe Jesus in his full glory? There is simply no adequate language for doing that. So John uses the language of symbolism and simile to paint a picture of the glory of Jesus. We can analyze this picture and take it apart and understand what the various symbols point out. But we also need to step back and simply see and experience the images. . . .

John uses symbols to speak of and to point to deeper realities. We need to be careful in Revelation not to take the symbols literally. We rather need to ask, what is John saying when he uses symbols? Two examples are helpful. First, when John says that Jesus has white hair, he is really not concerned about Jesus’ hair color. He rather is telling us that Jesus is the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9) and thereby shares in the wonder of God. Second, when John writes that ‘from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword,’ we ought not think of a dagger that hangs from Jesus’ teeth. (If that image is literally true, it becomes impossible and grotesque.) It is rather symbolism drawn from Isaiah 49 that proclaims that Jesus is the one who truly speaks the Word of God. When John uses symbols, we need to ask what the symbols say.

John uses symbols to speak of and point to deeper realities. This needs to be recognized now, and remembered as we proceed with the book. Too often when people go further on in Revelation and come to things like Armageddon and 666 and the thousand-year reign, they forget that these too are symbols, and not to be taken literally. We do well to continually ask how John uses his symbols, and let that show us how to understand the message.” (Braatan, pg. 20-21)

John is very clear in verse 20 that he is using symbolic language. Given John’s clarity, why do you think people have trouble accepting that images in Revelation as symbols?

How would you use symbolic language to describe the majesty of the Son of God?