

**E 100 Block 20 Introduction to the Book of Revelation
November 2011 -- both churches. Revelation 1:1 -- 19 ; 6: 1-8**

1. Introduction

The final, 20th Block in our readings through the Bible -- the last book -- the book of Revelation.

At least it easy to find!

Revelation -- otherwise known as the Apocalypse meaning something uncovered.

And yet at first read you get the impression that nothing is revealed or uncovered at all.

A book of prophecy that seems to be totally obscure and impenetrable for the modern reader.

As usual we have two weeks to cover this block (though interrupted next week by Remembrance Sunday).

So this week and in a fortnight's time we shall look at Revelation And then we come to Advent Sunday -- which is convenient because that continues the theme of the return of Christ.

Plan of the Two Sermons -- much as with the other blocks in this series .

This first week I want to look at the general approach to this book. Guides and hints to help you as you are reading through it over the next fortnight.

The second week we shall look in more detail at one passage.

So now -- a near impossible task -- how to interpret Revelation in 15 (40) minutes!

2. What's in it -- outline. OHP

Introduction (Chapter 1)

Messages to 7 Churches in Turkey (Chapter 2 and 3)

A vision of worship in heaven (Chapter 4)

God's Judgment and the Defeat of His Enemies (Chapters 4 to 19)

[Seven Seals; Seven Trumpets; Seven Bowls of God's anger.]

(Much death, destruction and tribulation -- with many nonhuman participants -- angels -- and wierd creatures -- dragons and beasts)

The Final Judgment -- A Renewed Heaven & Earth (Chapters 20, 21, 22)

So, how do we begin to interpret and understand this book?

3. Some Basic Principles

i) A book written to encourage early Christians who were being persecuted and killed. (John himself exiled to Island of Patmos) To show them that, despite all the evil drawn up against them, they will share in the final victory -- which will be God's.

ii) A book written in a certain style -- which would be understandable to those early Christians -- particularly those with a Jewish background, but not immediately obvious to the Romans and the other persecutors.

Hence we see much use of symbolism -- and particularly biblical symbolism, and allusions to events in the Old and New Testaments. This book is not meant to be read literally! It is pure symbolism. The difficulty for us is trying to interpret what the symbols meant -- to crack the code.

iii) Further, the book is repetitive rather than strictly chronological. The pouring out of the seven Bowls of God's anger may be recording the same things as the blowing of the seven trumpets and the opening of the seven Seals -- like the four Gospels -- the same events but from different angles.

4. What are the prophecies about?

Christians hold differing views.

(Which is okay -- this is not a life or death salvation issue)

All Christians have always agreed that there will be a final resurrection, a final judgment, the final return of Christ and the establishment of renewed heavens and earth.

But before then --

The first approach is that the prophecies from chapter 4 to 19 are all about what will happen in the future -- they describe the terrible things that will happen before the return of Jesus. OHP -- Future

This wasn't the dominant view for most of church history. Certainly, Saint Augustine in the fifth century did not hold this view, neither did the great majority of the theologians of the Middle Ages. The Protestant Reformers did not hold this view, nor the 17th and 18th century Puritans , nor the Victorian Christian thinkers. But, strangely, in the 20th century -- and particularly in America today, it has become the majority view.

(I was brought up on it as the only view)

The problem with this approach is that it makes Revelation impossible to understand -- people are always looking at wars and famines and earthquakes and assuming that this is the one predicted in Revelation.

The second approach is that the prophecies from chapter 4 to 19, are not exclusively future. They're what has been happening for the last 2000 years and is continuing to happen as history unfolds. Good and evil, the church and the world are struggling against each other. OHP -- All of History Past and Present

But, alongside this, there's also a case for saying that a lot of what is prophesied in these chapters can be explained much more easily if we take them to be a prophecy of a significant and specific historical event.

It was this -- (Like the Greeks the Jews once tried to pull out of Europe and it did not go well)

In AD 67 -- the Jews rebelled against Roman rule.

The subsequent Roman reprisal was terrible -- and it ended in the devastation of Israel and Jerusalem and the total destruction of the Temple in AD 70.

OHP -- Past (Fall of Jerusalem)

5. Some Examples

So let's look at a few examples to demonstrate this point. -- (several hours to cover more)

i) "Things which must shortly take place".

Several times in chapter 1 the nearness of the events prophesied is emphasised -- 1: 1 "must happen soon"; 1:3 -- "the time is almost here". Hardly applicable to something thousands of years in the future -- but fitting something happening 2 or three years hence.

Speaking of his own prophecy of wars and destruction in Matthew chapter 24, which parallel the book of Revelation, Jesus says "truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Jesus himself predicted that a coming in judgment upon the people who crucified him would happen soon. (not his final coming) AD67 - 70 fits nicely

ii) "The Sixth King" Revelation 17:9 -- 10. -- read. The seven Hills -- an allusion to the seven Hills on which Rome was built. The five dead

kings -- the first five Caesars, usually counted from Julius Caesar -- the sixth one currently ruling in AD 64 -- Nero.

iii) The Number 666 -- Revelation 13:18 -- read from 16.

The ancient Hebrew spelling of Nero Caesar has a numerical value of 666.

iv) 42 months -- (a time, two times, and half a time = 3 1/2 years)

The time from declaration of war to the fall of Jerusalem.

v) The References to Israel and Jerusalem.

Many references which refer to the judgment of Israel in the old Testament are re-used in Revelation. The terms Babylon, Sodom, Egypt were all used to describe Jerusalem, as was the harlot bride of chapters 17 and 18.

Etc.

6. Practical Application

Interesting, but what possible use to my Christian life now.?

Well, if you take the future view then it is a pretty grim future ahead. The church will grow in coming times but only modestly. Everything will get worse in the world until, quite near the end, Christ will step in to put everything right.

If you take the historical out-working view --

The horrors described in Revelation have already passed. The Kingdom of God is already among us and is growing. Things will get better before Jesus returns. The kingdom will grow until it has filled the whole earth and the majority of people will have become Christians, as the Holy Spirit draws more and more people into the church. Among those to be converted will be the Jews.

This is a prophecy of hope -- not just to those early Christians but us -- and a motivation to get on with it.