

INTRODUCTORY MESSAGE TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

TEXT: REV. 1:1-20

Introduction:

1. The book of Revelation deals with the doctrine of eschatology, i.e., the doctrine of last things (cf. 1:7).
2. The apostle John, who wrote the book of Revelation, also wrote the Gospel of John, and I, II, and III John.
3. Many Christians avoid studying the book of Revelation because they think it is difficult to understand. The book contains a series of visions, expressed in various symbols, but most of the symbols are not difficult to interpret.
4. Sometimes, the interpretation is given in the same passage (cf. Rev. 1:20; 17:1, 15).
5. Sometimes, the interpretation is found elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Rev. 12:1; Genesis 37:9, 10).
6. Many of the symbols are from the book of Daniel. For example, in Daniel 7 we read that Daniel had a dream and he saw "four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another" (Dan. 7:3).
7. The fourth beast, representing Rome, was "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns" (Dan. 7:7).
8. This beast with the ten horns is very prominent in the book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 12, 16).
9. Daniel 7:8 refers to a "little horn" that will come up from among the other horns (kings). Daniel prophesied, "Behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things" (7:8).
10. This "little horn" is the antichrist, referred to in the Book of Revelation as "the beast" (cf. 17:12, 13; 19:19, 20).
11. The book of Revelation is not difficult to understand if one interprets it literally. There are several different methods of interpretation. I will just mention three of the popular methods of interpretation.
12. Preterist (from the Latin word *preter* -- "past") interpretation -- All of the prophecies in the book of Revelation have already been fulfilled. This strange view is gaining popularity. Preterists teach that most or all of the prophecies concerning the end times refer to events which happened back in AD 70. Therefore, they say the tribulation is past. But most of the book of Revelation deals with the tribulation (chapters

- 4--19). The book of Revelation was written about AD 96. And the book of Revelation teaches that the second coming of Christ is future (cf. 1:7; 19:11-21; 22:12, 20).
13. Preterists try and get around this problem by claiming that the book of Revelation was written before AD 70. But there is no historical evidence for that. The book of Revelation was written about AD 96.
 14. Historical interpretation -- The fulfillment of the prophecies is going on in history. Those who hold this position see the development of church history within world history. According to this theory, the book of Revelation is the prophetic history of the church, and the beast is the pope of Rome. The historical interpretation is no longer popular today, though it is promoted by the Seventh-Day Adventists.
 15. Futurist interpretation -- This is the literal way to interpret the Book of Revelation. Revelation is primarily prophetic and future, especially from Revelation 4 on to the end of the book. This is the position of premillennialism, and most fundamental Baptists.
 16. There are many prophetic books in the Old Testament. There are the four major prophets -- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. And there are twelve minor prophets, from Hosea to Malachi.
 17. The book of Revelation is the only prophetic book in the New Testament. However, there are other prophetic sections in the New Testament, such as the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and 25; portions of I & II Thessalonians, etc.
 18. This evening we will focus on the introduction (1:1), the blessing (1:3), and the outline (1:19).

I. THE INTRODUCTION (1:1, 2).

1. Our Authorized King James Bible says, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," but actually it is, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John" (1:1).
2. "Revelation" means "to uncover" or "to reveal." God wants us to understand the book of Revelation. God has revealed it to us.
3. Daniel 12:9 says, "And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end." But Revelation is not sealed up.
4. Revelation 22:10 says, "And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand."

5. So this is, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1). Christ is the theme of the entire book of Revelation, and Christ is the theme of Revelation chapter 1 (cf. 1:5-8, 17, 18).
6. The word "signified" (1:1) has reference to symbolic visions. The word means, "to give a sign or a signal."
7. God wants us to understand these signs or signals (cf. 1:3).
8. Some Bible readers have been confused over the phrases, "which must shortly come to pass" (1:1), and "for the time is at hand" (1:3).
9. These words express nearness. When these prophecies are fulfilled, things will happen suddenly and quickly.
10. Second Peter 3:8 says, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

II. THE BLESSING (1:3)

1. We have here a threefold blessing: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein..."
2. The book begins with a promised blessing, and concludes with a warning (cf. Revelation 22:18, 19).
3. Revelation 1:3 is the first of seven blessings (beatitudes) in the book of Revelation (cf. 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).
4. The number seven, which symbolizes perfection and completion, is very prominent in the book of Revelation. There are seven letters to seven churches; seven Spirits of God; seven lamps of fire; seven golden candlesticks; seven stars; seven angels; seven horns and seven eyes; seven seals; seven trumpets; seven vials; seven thunders; seven thousand men slain in the earthquake in Revelation 11:13; seven crowns upon the dragon's head; seven heads on the beast that rises up out of the sea; seven last plagues; seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth; and seven kings.
5. Furthermore, the tribulation period will last for seven years.
6. Verses 4 to 8 are a salutation, and then starting in Revelation 1:9 we have the first of many visions. It is a vision of the risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ.
7. John was exiled on the isle of Patmos for preaching the Word of God. This island was in the Aegean Sea, and it was there on the Lord's day that John was "in the Spirit" (1:10).

8. John heard behind him a great voice as of a trumpet. And the One who spoke identified Himself as "Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" (1:11; cf. 1:8, 17).
9. This identifies the Lord Jesus Christ with Jehovah God, who said in Isaiah 41:4, "I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he."
10. "Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isa. 44:6).
11. "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last" (48:12).

III. THE OUTLINE (1:19)

1. The key verse is Revelation 1:19, and it provides the outline for the book of Revelation."
2. Write the things which thou hast seen..." (1:19). This is the past -- chapter 1 (cf. 1:9-18)."And the things which are..." (1:19b). This is the present --what we call the "church age" (Rev. 2 & 3).The Lord told John, "send it to unto the seven churches which are in Asia" (1:11). Today, God's program is the local church. What we have here in the book of Revelation is God's message to His seven (representing complete) churches in this present church age, until He shall come again.
3. There were many more churches in the province of Asia Minor, but these seven represent all of them, and to a certain extent, all the churches of all ages and of all time.
4. The seven churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor form a rough geographical circle, and all of the seven churches were connected by the ancient Roman roads.
5. And our Lord is right "in the midst" of the churches (1:13, cf. vs. 20).Our Lord is described in a very colorful and symbolic way: "clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girded about the breast with a golden girdle" (1:13). This refers to His dignity and kingly authority.
6. "His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow" (1:14). This refers to His purity and to His eternity.

7. "And His eyes were as a flame of fire" (1:14b). This speaks of His omniscience. Hebrews 4:13 says, "But all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."
8. "And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace" (1:15a). This symbolizes judgment. The "voice as the sound of many waters" (1:15b) symbolizes power and authority.
9. The "stars" (1:16) represent the "angels of the seven churches" (1:20). The word "angel" literally means "messenger" and refers to the pastors of the seven churches.
10. The pastors are in our Lord's right hand (1:16). Referring to John the Baptist our Lord says in Matthew 11:10, "For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee." This word translated "messenger" is the Greek word *angelos*, which means a messenger who is sent from God. It could be either a spirit or a man.
11. "And out of His mouth a sharp two-edged sword," the Word of God (1:16; cf. 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21).
12. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."
13. Ephesians 6:17 says we are to take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.
14. "His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength" (1:16b). On the Mount of Transfiguration, we are told that our Lord's "face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Matt. 17:2).
15. Referring to the New Jerusalem, Revelation 21:23 says, "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light of it."
16. After seeing such a magnificent vision, John "fell at his feet as dead" (1:17). "And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (1:17, 18).
17. The third part of our outline is still future -- "and the things which shall be hereafter" (1:19c). Most of the book of Revelation is future (Chapters 4--22). These prophecies have yet to be fulfilled. We will study them in detail in the weeks and months ahead, Lord willing.

CONCLUSION:

1. I will conclude with this simple thought: The seven golden candlesticks represent the churches (1:20), but the churches, and preachers and soulwinners do not create light.
2. The candlestick holds the candle, which gives out the light.
3. John 1:9 says Jesus "was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."
4. Our Lord said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Our job is to send the light, the blessed Gospel light.