

### **Lesson 3 of Introductory Material** **The Purpose of Revelation/Symbols in Revelation**

Introduction: As we have noted, Revelation for many people is a “scary” book. But is its purpose to simply scare people with frightening imagery? Of course not. Whether something is frightening or not often depends on your perspective. Giving a talk in front of people is one of the greatest fears for many people, but there are some people who are not afraid of public speaking at all, in fact they even enjoy it! A large and mean-looking dog may strike fear into the heart of a mailman, but to its family is a gentle giant who licks and plays with them. The ideas of fear, symbolism, and the purpose of Revelation are all delved into during this lesson.

#### Type of Literature:

First of all we need to understand the type of literature that Revelation is. One of the basic hermeneutical principles for understanding Scripture is to recognize what type of writing it is. For example a historical narrative (the Gospels) of the life of Jesus is to be understood differently than poetic language in the Psalms. A direct command from God is not the same type of meaning as a wise saying in the Proverbs.

It goes without saying that Revelation is a unique book in the Bible. It certainly has a different “feel” than other portions of Scripture as you read through it. Revelation is the English translation of the Greek word *apocalypse* which literally means “an unveiling” or “unfolding”. There is other apocalyptic literature in the Bible (portions of some of the Old Testament books like Daniel and Ezekiel for example), but even among these Revelation is unique. Turn to page 12 in Lesson one of the God’s Word for Today portion of the study guide.

View Video *Explaining All the Scary Stuff in Revelation: Scary Stuff Part II* (12 minutes)

1. How does the example given in the video help us understand that fear is often a matter of perspective?

Contrary to popular belief, Revelation was not written to scare people. Quite the opposite, in fact, as it was meant to give the early Christians hope and comfort amongst the opposition, trials, and suffering that they were enduring under the Roman persecution under Domitian (as we learned about in the last lesson).

So as we read through Revelation, what are the main themes that we should keep in mind as far as the purpose of this book?

1. God has a plan for and remains in control of His creation.
2. God warns His people to be prepared for opposition, trials, and suffering.

3. Satan has already been defeated.
4. Christians are assured of a final victory over Satan and his agents.

See also page 11 in Lesson one of the *God's Word for Today* study for more information on the purpose of the letter. Some additional perspectives on the purpose:

-This sums it up well: *A primary purpose of the letter was to encourage Christians in every age who must suffer because of their faith in and allegiance to Jesus Christ as their only Lord and Savior.*

-Revelation is a missionary book. We are called to be God's instruments. We are to share the message of sin and judgment, but also the message that in Christ victory is won over sin, death, and the devil.

-Revelation is appropriately placed at the end of the Bible. Chronologically, Revelation is the last book of the Bible to be written. It fulfills the things spoken of earlier in Scripture, including restoring what was lost due to the fall of sin in the first book of the Bible, Genesis.

2. Most importantly remember that Revelation is a book about \_\_\_\_\_!

In fact, to summarize the whole Bible's message in one word is best done by answering "Jesus." When we read our Bibles, from Genesis to Revelation, we must keep Jesus in view. A Christological reading of the Scripture keeps the focus on God rescuing His rebellious people from their sin. The Messiah is promised in the Old Testament and this promise is fulfilled in Jesus in the New Testament.

3. Note that "Revelation" is \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_ (although many people often say the name incorrectly). The Revelation was given to St. John in a vision, but not only is this one vision but the vision is ultimately about one thing-more accurately one person. Remember that Revelation literally means "an unveiling". What is unveiled to St. John is the ultimate victory of Jesus.

Now we move toward an introduction of the symbols used in Revelation. It is important to know what these symbols mean to correctly interpret Revelation.

4. Would it be accurate to say that the original audience of the Book (really a circular letter), the churches of Asia Minor in the First Century, understood Revelation much better than most people today? Why?

5. Rev. Klaus explains that Revelation was written in "code". What does he mean by this? What is a code? What are some reasons as to why Revelation would be written in "code"?

6. Do we see other examples in the Bible of a “code language” being used?

7. Discuss some of the examples of symbols from the video and how they may be understood differently at different times or in different cultures. Can you think of any more examples?

Note that these are a just a few examples and more examples will be given later. Pages 12-13 of Lesson 1 of *God's Word for Today* discussing symbolic language as well.