

Through The Bible  
Session #61 – Revelation  
April 26, 2006

NOTE: This session concludes our study of the Bible which began October 3, 2001. While we hoped to complete this study in one year, obviously we never reached that initial goal. But most feel taking our time has enriched the study. As we conclude with Revelation on 4-26-06, this session will act as a prelude to our more in-depth study of Revelation in the Fall of 2006.

- I. General Comments on Revelation
  - a. Revelation evokes a wide range of reactions and emotions (comfort to the grieving, encouragement to the oppressed, hope to the downtrodden, and warning to the complacent).<sup>1</sup>
  - b. Revelation has inspired painters like Michelangelo, musicians like George Handel, and writers like John Milton.<sup>2</sup>
  - c. Some of our great church hymns (Holy, Holy, Holy; Lo, He comes with Clouds Descending) were inspired by texts in Revelation.<sup>3</sup>
  - d. Also remember that preachers and teachers avoid Revelation. It's confusing, difficult, often seen as poorly arranged, and filled with symbols and imagery we don't always understand.<sup>4</sup>
  - e. In spite of the name (Revelation), we feel the book often conceals more than it reveals.<sup>5</sup>
    - i. Jerome said in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, "Revelation has as many mysteries as it does words."<sup>6</sup>
    - ii. D. H. Lawrence described Revelation as "...the most detestable of all the books of the Bible."<sup>7</sup>
  - f. There's violent imagery: see 6:10; 14:20; 17:6. It turns people off.

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Epist.* 53.8. Cited by Bernard McGinn, "Revelation," *A Literary Companion to the Bible*, edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1987), p. 523.

<sup>7</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, in *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation*, The Cambridge Edition of D. H. Lawrence, edited by Mara Kalnins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 61.

- g. It's easy to get caught up in games of "Match the Prediction" as we seek to connect events described in Revelation with modern events.<sup>8</sup>

## II. Why should we be concerned with Revelation?

- a. It's part of our Bible so we cannot ignore it. God has something to say to us from Revelation.
- b. Revelation contains a powerful presentation of the message of faith.<sup>9</sup>
- c. We have a presentation of God as Almighty (Revelation 1:8) yet also an image of God as one who wipes all tears away (Revelation 7:17).
- d. We have an image in Revelation of how God intended the world to be...and ultimately will be...and this work challenges us to be part of making this a reality.<sup>10</sup>

## III. Revelation as a type of literature

- a. One quickly discovers that you can't read Revelation like you do the other New Testament documents.
- b. Most scholars would classify Revelation as apocalyptic writing.<sup>11</sup> This type of writing is generally unfamiliar to us.
- c. No New Testament writing other than Revelation belongs to this genre of writing. In the Old Testament, Daniel is the closest thing to Revelation in comparing genre of writing.
  - i. Other Old Testament passages that are considered apocalyptic: Zechariah 9-14; Ezekiel 38-39; and Isaiah 24-27.
- d. The word "apocalypse" comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis* (Ἀποκάλυψις) which means "revelation." This word is used in Revelation 1:1.
  - i. Definition of Apocalypse: A genre of revelatory literature mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient,

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<sup>8</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 2.

disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.<sup>12</sup>

- e. This type of writing claims to reveal cosmic secrets to human beings about other worlds.<sup>13</sup>
  - i. The “other worlds and other world events” are: heaven, hell, places of the dead, outer regions of the earth, events of the final days, judgments, rewards, etc.
  - ii. Typically there are other world figures: those for good; those for evil, etc.
- f. In most apocalypses, the human recipient is someone important from the past (i.e., Abraham, Enoch, Daniel, Ezra, Adam, Elijah).
- g. Often the apocalypses are written in response to some crisis. It could be social, political, or theological. For this reason, apocalyptic literature is often called, “crisis literature.”<sup>14</sup>
  - i. The purpose of this crisis literature is to give hope and comfort to those in dire straits. For example, in Daniel, the intended readers were Jews living under persecution of Syrian ruler, Antiochus IV. Jews at this time believed God was dominant but what they saw was that Antiochus was dominant. The book of Daniel gave the Jews an alternative way of looking at things.<sup>15</sup>
- h. Apocalyptic literature also served as protest literature.
  - i. Apocalyptic writers encouraged the reader to not accept things the way they seemed to be. If human rulers or institutions seemed dominant, the apocalyptic writers encouraged people to remain faithful to God.<sup>16</sup>
  - ii. Surprisingly, the apocalyptic writers did not call for action. The belief was that everything was in God’s hands.

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<sup>12</sup> John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, edited by John J. Collins, *Semeia* 14 (1979), p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 5.

- i. This type of writing flourished within Judaism between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.
  - i. Two disastrous revolts of the Jews in Palestine against the Romans (AD 66-74 and AD 132-135) are believed to be partially fueled by people's apocalyptic expectations.<sup>17</sup>
  - ii. Christian writers produced more than twenty apocalypses in the early centuries of the Christian Church.<sup>18</sup> Remember though that the Revelation of John is the only one canonized.

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<sup>17</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), p. 6.