

The Book of Revelation
 Study 1
 Introductory

Turn with me to the Book of Revelation. This should one of the easiest to find in all the Bible; second only to the first book of the Bible—the book of Genesis.

- It is, of course, fitting that book of Revelation is placed at the end of the Bible
 - As Genesis, being the first book, is the book of beginnings
 - Revelation, being at the end, is the book of endings.
- Where Genesis is the account of the Creation of all things;
 - In many ways, Revelation is the account of the zenith of all thing;
 - It's the culmination of the ages – and really beyond

Have you ever been to a large production stage play? You know like Cats or Annie or Phantom of the Opera or something like that?

- My oldest daughter, Faith, has been in a couple productions in school –
 - She's been in Sound of Music, and in The Little Mermaid
 - They were fun to watch and see the costumes and props and stuff
 - I remember a number of years back, when we were at CC North Bend
 - Dacyl was in a productions called The Christmas Post
 - For our church, it was quite elaborate in it's set up
 - and took a lot of time and effort well in advance of the actual performance

Imagine if you went to see a large production like The Phantom of the Opera

- and when the play began, the stage was completely empty. Nothing on the stage at all.
 - No props, no backdrops, no Opera house, no lighting, no stage furniture
 - And then the actors came on stage – no prearranged places to stand; no costumes
 - They just started acting and singing and on an empty stage in the dark
- Aside from it being weird and a bit awkward, wouldn't it be hard to understand what was going on?
 - Without the all framework the backdrops and the furniture and the costumes bring

- It would be hard to understand what was happening.
 - Maybe you'd understand a little as you slowly catch on,
 - but having the framework of the stage set up really helps put things in the right perspective

This morning, I want to make sure the stage is rightfully set for the Book of Revelation – for what's to come in the weeks ahead

- Like the time it takes to set up a large stage productions before the actual performance
 - I want to make sure the framework is set for our time in study
- I want to take the time to give the necessary historical setting;
 - to give some theological understandings to set our foundation
 - And possibly answers some broad sweeping questions you may have wondered about
- Also, I'd like to encourage you at the onset to take notes throughout this entire study
 - Just grab a large journal of sorts and start taking notes every week
 - Because as we go through, there will inevitably be times when you have questions or don't understand things
 - And taking notes will be of tremendous benefit so you can ask a question or research later
 - Truly, this is a book you'll want to understand – so take many notes
- And if you're wondering just how long it will take us to get through all 404 verses of the 22 chapter book....I have no idea - only God knows.
 - But I want you to know that we will take the necessary time to understand things
 - This book is of tremendous importance and there are, admittedly, a number of difficult things to understand
 - So, when necessary, we will slow down to make sure everyone understand.
- For some, this will be a welcomed pace since there's a lot here.
 - For others, we may go a bit too slow. Balance will be the key so pray for me

With that, let me start this morning by asking a question – ***what crosses your mind when you think about the book of Revelation?***

- Is this a book you read often and consider in your daily walk? Is it a book you meditate through like the rest of scripture?

- Or is this a book you tend to shy away from? Maybe the imagery or the symbolism seems too confusing
 - Or maybe just the entire premise of the book being about the last days keeps you from enjoying.
- Or maybe Revelation is one that stirs up your inner apocalyptic conspiracy gland...
 - So much so that every strange political figure with a mark on his head
 - or whose name could be numerically added up in some cryptic math fashion to identify it with the number 666 makes you salivate?
 - Or does the fear of the unknown, or maybe just the simple lack of consistent interpretation
 - keep you from even considering it as a writing that can be *even* understood?
- To me, it's sad that we have both spectrums throughout Christendom

The book of Revelation is certainly a unique book in the Bible,

- But beyond all its man made controversy and misunderstandings, is not unlike any other book of the Bible in one crucially important way:
 - Revelation, like all other books of the Bible, is a Divine message from God. It is Holy Scripture.
 - It is inspired; it is God breathed; it is God's message to mankind to reveal His heart and His plan
 - And as with the other 65 books, God desires that we understand the message contained there within.
 - "What a cruel and capricious God we would have if He were to give us something that we could not comprehend or understand!" – John Phillis
- In fact, the very namesake of the book – the Revelation – is the revealing.
 - The word "Revelation" is the translation of the Greek word "apokalypsis"
 - It's where we get our word – "Apocalypse"
- The more current use of the word conjures up images of catastrophic destruction or final obliteration
 - But the Greek word simply means: to uncover. <apo> meaning "un" and <kalypto> meaning to cover.
 - It means to "unveiling". To disclose. To uncover something
 - To lay open what has been veiled or covered up

- It means laying bare or to make exposed
 - A disclosure of truth. An appearance.

I hope you see the point! Revelation, by its very nature, is something in which God wants us to see. It's a revealing. It's an uncovering!

- How ironic that so many might think the book cannot be understood
 - Yet its very name signifies that God has uncovered the message of it.
 - It shouldn't be shrouded in this dark cloud of concealment or camouflage of analysis;
 - but it's something that He desires we see and understand
- Matter of fact, the book of Revelation - as we will see in more detail next week – it's the unveiling of the Person of Jesus Christ –
 - look at the first 5 words of chapter 1 "The revelation of Jesus Christ"
 - It's the Revelation of truth about Jesus
 - It's a disclosure of future events surrounding His second coming when Christ will be revealed
 - So why would the Lord NOT want you and I to understand it?
- That's not to say that some of it isn't difficult – there are certainly tough parts for sure
 - But I think if we don't deviate from how we approach the rest of Scripture,
 - then we should be on safe ground in our understanding.

And this brings me to the first of 4 questions I want to answer this morning.

- To set the groundwork for our time in this book,
 - I want to ask and answer 4 baseline questions so we have a good understanding
 - Some of it, admittedly, is a academic but necessary for a strong basis
 - I'll give them to you here so you can anticipate what's coming and then we'll break them down.
- The first; how should we interpret the book of Revelation?
 - With so many differing opinions, how should we approach the book so that we can hear the message God intended for us?
- 2 – What do we do with all the symbolism?
 - So many have said that Revelation is either too hard to understand

- or can't be understood because it is filled with so much symbolism.
 - So, what do we do with all that?
- 3 – What is the book about?
 - When it all boils down, what is the root
- 4 – Last question – how close are we?
 - How close are we to the events of this book happening? Will they happen in our lifetime?

Let's start with our first question – How should we interpret the book of Revelation?

- I find this an appropriate place to start because there are so many varying approaches.
 - But each approach leads to very different conclusions.
- There are basically four main schools of thought in approaching Revelation
 - There is Idealist View.
 - The Preterist view
 - The Historical View
 - And the Futuristic view

The **Idealist** view – also known as the “non-literalist” or “allegorical view”

- The Idealist view regards the book of Revelation as one great allegorical story that goes far beyond the natural symbolism that's found in the book
 - According to this view, the events of Revelation are not tied to specific historical events.
 - The imagery of the book symbolically presents the ongoing struggle throughout the ages of God against Satan, and good against evil.
 - In other words, “The symbols in Revelation are not tied to specific events but point to themes throughout church history” (Walvrod)
 - As NT Scholar, Robert Mounce, summarizes: “Revelation is a theological poem presenting the ageless struggle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. It is a philosophy of history wherein Christian forces are continuously meeting and conquering the demonic forces of evil”
- That all aside, as we move through the book, you'll quickly understand why this view is largely held
 - as wildly disingenuous with the text at best,
 - And heretical at worst.

The second view is called the “**Preterist**” view. “Preterist” meaning “past”.

- The Preterist view, which happens to be the flavor of the month view – held widely within the reformed camp
 - It’s the view that Revelation chapters 4-20 - which are the bulk of the prophecies in the book -
 - That these chapters are primarily a description of the First Jewish war back in the Apostle John’s day,
 - Having its culmination with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD and the persecution of the early church.
 - In the Preterist view, there are no longer predictive prophecies
 - But the book was for **then; not necessarily now**
- In reality, there are two main camps under this banner: **Full preterist and partial preterist**
 - Full preterist holds that Jesus returned in the clouds of judgment against unbelieving Israel in 70AD
 - And that all Bible prophecy, including Revelation, was fulfilled in 70AD
 - According to this view, believers are now living in the new heaven and the new earth.
 - Doesn’t this world seem like the new earth?
 - Full preterism also maintains that there is no future coming of Christ, no final resurrection and no final judgment.
 - The other camp under the Preterist banner is what’s called “Partial Preterism”
 - While the partial view holds the basic tenants of the full view – that Jesus returned in the clouds in 70AD,
 - The Partial holds that there will be a future coming of Jesus, resurrection and final judgment.

The arguments for the Preterist view hinge greatly on the date of the writing of the book of Revelation

- Since the Preterist view claims that the events of Revelation have been completed, for the most part, by 70AD - at the destruction of the temple
 - The book then must have been authored prior to those events, and therefore, prior to 70AD

- Most hold to a 65AD writing claiming that Nero banished John – the writer of Revelation –
 - to the island of Patmos (from where John wrote the letter)
- Ironically, one of the greatest weaknesses of the Preterist view is in fact the pre-70AD writing
 - Though we could go into great detail on this point,
 - let me just point out that the bulk of early church leaders believed that Domitian banished John and not Nero
 - Domitian’s reign was from 81-96AD
- The earliest support for a 95AD writing is overwhelming
 - And the first clear, unambiguous witness to the 65AD date is a one-line attribution in the Syriac translation of the New Testament in 500AD
 - There are only two other witnesses to this date; one in 900AD and another in 1107AD

The third methodology of interpretation is what’s called the **Historical view**.

- Very simply, the Historical view takes the entirety of the book of Revelation as a **symbolic representation of all of church history**
 - From the apostle’s life through the end of the age.
- It’s a sweeping , and often disordered, panoramic view of all of church history
 - It predicts the future, but the future of the church age
 - Not the future of end-time events.
 - As one described it: “Revelation is full of symbols that describe now”
 - Whenever that *now* is
- For example, many who have taken this view in the past have seen
 - Chapters 1-3 as seven periods in church history. The breaking of the seals in chapters 4-7 symbolizes the fall of the Roman Empire.
 - The Trumpet judgments in chapters 8-10 represent the invasions of the Roman Empire.
- Chapters 11-13 in Revelation represent the true church in its struggle against Roman Catholicism.
 - The bowl judgments of Revelation 14-16 represent God’s judgment on the Catholic Church, culminating in the future overthrow of Catholicism depicted in chapters 17-19.
 - Among Protestant historicists of the Reformation, the antichrist in Revelation was believed to be the pope

- It's not a wonder that so much of this surrounds the Catholic church as it's largely considered to be started by a Roman Catholic scholar in the 12th century
- There are several criticisms to this approach but let me just point out one
 - This approach allows for way too wide a variety of interpretations.
 - Adherents have a tendency to interpret the text through the context of their period. That means that many see the climax of the book happening in their generation.
 - And as Walvrod points out "As many as fifty different interpretations of the book of Revelation therefore evolve, depending on the time and circumstances of the expositor."

The fourth view, and the view that we hold here at Calvary, is the **Futuristic view**.

- This is the view that from chapter 4 on through the end is yet to come
 - Outside the first chapter – which is Jesus presenting himself to John
 - And chapters 2 and 3 – which are historical churches to which John was asked to write to
 - The rest of the book is future.
- Although as we go through the book we will present many reasons as to why – let me at least say this:
 - In contrast to the other approaches to Revelation, the futuristic position allows a more literal interpretation of the book's specific prophecies.
 - Though recognizing the frequent symbolism in various prophecies,
 - While the events foreshadowed by these symbols and their interpretation are regarded as being fulfilled in a literal way.

And that brings me to our second question we want to touch on this morning – **What do we do with all the symbolism?**

- For anyone who has read this great book, we understand that there is much symbolism and imagery throughout
 - But because of this, so many have said that Revelation is either too hard to understand or simply can't be understood.
 - So, what do we do with all that?
 - Is there a solid approach to the unique, and somewhat "odd", things we see in Revelation that won't take us off track

- And keep our interpreting on solid ground?
 - There is!

There are a couple of quick rules of interpretation that apply to all of scripture that should keep us on solid ground.

- **The First rule**, we should always try to interpret the scriptures literally unless there is clear evidence to the contrary.
 - Literal interpretation of the Bible means to explain the original sense, or meaning, of the Bible according to the normal customary usage of its language.
 - This means applying the rules of grammar, staying consistent with the historical framework, and the context of the writing.
 - And in doing so, literal interpretation does not discount figurative or symbolic language
 - On the contrary – as Ryrie points out
 - “Symbols, figures of speech and types are all interpreted plainly in this method, and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation. After all, the very existence of any meaning for a figure of speech depends on the reality of the literal meaning of the terms involved. Figures often make the meaning plainer, but it is the literal, normal, or plain meaning that they convey to the reader”
 - Often times the most natural and simple explanation is what is intended to be understood.
- An example of this is chapter 9 that talks about locust that come up from the bottomless pit
 - Turn there:
 - “**9** Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. **2** And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. **3** Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. **4** They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. **5** And they were not given *authority* to kill them, but to torment them *for* five months. Their torment *was* like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. **6** In those

days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.

- **7** The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces *were* like the faces of men. **8** They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' *teeth*. **9** And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings *was* like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. **10** They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power *was* to hurt men five months.
- Now, of course there is much here that I can't deal with but let me point out that many there are many opinions on the locust – what they are.
 - Some have suggested that they are just symbols of pain, some have suggested they are helicopters
 - But the literal, normal, plain meaning of the text is that they are just what they say they are: locust
 - The command given to them to harm the grass or trees; also is what it says it is – there's no indication that it's anything other
 - Same goes for their mission – to bring harm to those that do not have the seal of God on them.
 - Just as literal; just as plain; and we should try to not render the meaning other than what seems natural to the text
 - Unless there is evidence that we shouldn't
- That said, the description of the locust uses the word "like"
 - They are described: LIKE horses prepared for battle; their faces were LIKE the faces of men;
 - The sound of their wings was LIKE that of the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle and so forth
 - We know very plainly that the LIKE indicates not actual
 - It is John seeing something he was not familiar with and describing it with what he knows.

- So when we interpret, we see real locust that look and sound like locusts we've never seen before
 - To me, coming out of the bottomless pit, these are demonic locust – but we'll dive in more when we get there.
 - This is only ONE example
- The point I'm making is that there are rules of interpretation that are used for all of scripture that we can apply to Revelation as well to keep us on firm ground when interpreting.
 - There's no need to go off reservation
 - The scriptures should normally be interpreted according to their natural meaning unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.

The Second quick rule of interpretation is that often times the imagery is defined elsewhere in scripture. – in short “scripture interprets scripture”

- Though the list is quite extensive, here are just a few examples of what I mean
 - The seven stars in Rev 1:16 are defined for us in 1:20 as angels
 - The keys of David spoken of in chapter 3:7, are defined for us in Isa. 22:22 as keys to open and close doors
 - The fallen star in 9:1, is defined for us as the angel of the abyss (likely Satan himself) in verse 11 of the same chapter
 - The vision of the woman and child in chapter 12:1-2, are again defined for us as Israel and the church in chapter 12:5-6
 - And again, the list can go on, but you get the point
 - Often time symbols are already defined for us through scripture
 - and therefore we shouldn't automatically jump to obscure definition that often times add confusion
- As the great Walvrod says “The difficulties of interpreting Revelation have often been made far greater than they really are. They frequently yield to patient study and comparison with other portions of Scripture.”
- So, our approach to this book, as with all scripture, is to do our best to follow these general rules of interpretation:

- to interpret scripture in its natural meaning unless there is clear evidence to the contrary.
 - And to also do our best to let scripture interpret scripture.

Now, **what is the book about?** If we were to tell a friend about Revelation, how should it be briefly described?

- Well, in reality, as we've already alluded to, Revelation is about the revealing of Christ.
 - It's the unveiling and appearance of Jesus Christ.
 - And amidst all the things that are going on, if we miss this primary point
 - We have missed the entire purpose of the book of Revelation
 - So when someone asks you what Revelation is all about
 - Your first response should always be "it's about the revealing of Jesus Christ"
- With that as foundational, I'd like to draw our attention to the key of Revelation.
 - Have you ever tried to unlock something without the proper key? It's impossible.
 - Having the right key is...well...key
- Revelation has its own built-in key – did you know that?
 - It's found in the 19th verse of chapter 1
 - If we want to unlock the door to understanding the book of Revelation, this is the key to it all
 - Verse 19...these are the instructions given to John by Jesus on what he is to write
 - "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this"

Just the plain reading of this verse gives us the key to unlocking the outline and layout of all the book of Revelation

- And we'll get more in-depth when we go verse by verse, but for now, I'll just briefly share with you
 - John is told to write three sections
 - The things that he has seen – that is chapter one.
 - These are things John is being shown in his present

- The things that are – this is chapters 2-3 with the 7 real churches that Jesus had messages for
- And the things that will take place after this – this is chapters 4 to the end of the book –
 - And these are future prophecies – things that are not what John has seen, nor what things are,
 - but what will come in the future
- It's very simple and you and I have the key – letting scripture interpret scripture
 - And using the Bible as it's own primer
 - The books is clearly laid out in three section
 - Things that John sees, things that are, and the things coming in the future
 - We will get more into this as we teach through verse by verse

There are other secondary themes such as

- The judgments of God; the seals and trumpets and the bowls
 - We see the antichrist, the false prophet, the devil – making up its own evil trinity
 - There's death, and calamity on earth
 - There's Mystery Babylon
- There's pictures of God in heaven like no other book
 - And of course, there is a picture of the New Jerusalem, the new earth
 - The Book of life and so on
 - There is SO much

There are also keywords throughout that are interesting as well.

- Let me ask you a question – actually before I do, let me tell what I find very fascinating
 - I find it interesting that the scenes of the book shift from earth to heaven and back and forth a total of 13 times.
 - We see a scene in heaven, then earth, and so on -13x
- But let me get back to my question -
 - what do you think the most used word in Revelation is. The most common word used? (see what people say!)
 - Let me show you a list
 - Earth – 79: what's going to happen on the earth

- Angel(s) – 74: We will see God uses His angels to do much on the earth and in heaven
- Seven – 55: It's the number of God; it's the number of perfection and completion
- Throne(s) – 46:
- So this is a book about God doing something with the earth
 - Using His angles, His messengers
 - And it's a complete message; it's a finished work
 - And we'll see God on His throne; and there are many other thrones
 - Beast – 37
 - Lamb – 31
 - And of course it's interesting to note that the word church is mentioned 19 times throughout the book
 - More notable, is that it's mentioned 19 times in chapters 1-3; and then not again until chapter 21 (although it's alluded to in heaven in chpt. 19)
 - We'll expand on that concept more when we get there.
- All of this give us a picture of what the book is all about
 - But really, when it boils down, it's the revealing of Jesus Christ as He judges the earth and brings an end to the curse of sin
 - Chapter 22:1 "**22** And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. **2** In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. **3** ***And there shall be no more curse,*** but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. **4** They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads. **5** There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

Now...to the last question. When?!?! How close are we to the events of Revelation from happening?

- Here's my answer – I don't know.
 - There is only ONE that knows – and I am not HE (nor are you)
 - So there it's fair to say that no one knows!

- That aside, there is one thing I want to say a fairly good measure of certainty and then something I'll say with the utmost of certainty

First – with the fulfillment of Ezekiel 37 which describes the gathering of the Jews into their land again

- This prophecy was fulfilled on May 18, 1948
 - Combined with Jesus' words that the generation that sees this come to fruition will not pass away until the coming of the Son of Man
 - My personal opinion, is that we are close
 - Of course, the questions still remains...what is a generation. How long is a biblical generation...
 - But really....I don't want to find out. I want to just be ready!

Secondly, for a statement of utmost certainty- We are closer today than we have ever been to the return of Jesus.

- For 2000+ years that has been truth, and every day we can say the same
 - For believers, this gives us tremendous hope and fortitude and confidence in our mission to tell as many people as we can about Jesus
- For the unbeliever, I suggest they read Revelation and look at what is coming upon those that dwell on the earth and refuse to surrender to Jesus
 - For the believer, "while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed." –Titus 2:13 NLT
 - But for the unbeliever, it will be too late then,

But you know, it doesn't have to be too late now.

- No one has to live in fear of the judgment we see in this book – every person can have hope and anticipation
 - In Christ's return
 - And that can be settled now. Today.
 - If you don't know Jesus.....