



Big Idea:

Revelation exists to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. It challenges us to choose a side because no one is neutral.

Introduction:

The book of the Revelation of Jesus is one of the most confusing and difficult-to-understand books in all of the Christian Bible. It is the last book of the New Testament. This is a letter to seven churches but in a much different style than almost any other writings in the Bible. It is a type of literature known as apocalyptic which was a style popular at the time of the writing of this book. The apocalyptic style is almost completely unfamiliar to us today.

The book is most likely written by John the Apostle the same one that wrote the gospel of John. John assumes that his readers have a firm grasp of the Old Testament stories and the life and teachings of Jesus. Apocalyptic literature reveals God's perspective on current events with imagery familiar to the readers. This type of literature is helpful to remind the readers to view their current circumstances with the perspective of the outcome. The book also claims to be prophetic. Old Testament prophets serve to warn the people, remind them to remain

faithful to what God has said, and encourage them with God's ultimate victory in the end.

Before we go any further, we need an important warning. Apocalyptic literature is full of imagery and illusion, meaning it can be hard to understand. As an example, if you use the image of “thumbs up” people in America would assume you are talking about an image of approval, whereas in other parts of the world, the thumb is used to signal direction. That type of misunderstanding can leave you turned around if you do not have a proper understanding of what thumbs up means where you are. Another example could be that if we were showing an old western-style film and someone shows up wearing all black we can make some assumptions that he is going to be the bad guy in the movie. Now imagine if you had never seen a Western film before and someone said, “the man with the black hat”. You could be very confused or even make some wrong assumptions about the nature of the character that is being discussed.

Another big danger in this type of literature is that we often want it to answer specific questions for us. If we ask the wrong questions of the book of Revelation, then we will not get the right answers. Revelation is not intended to be a roadmap of the end of the world. It is written to seven churches that were each dealing with difficulty as they tried to follow Jesus.

Question: What assumptions do you have about what the book of Revelation tells us?

Read: Revelation 1

Questions: What promises do you see in verse 3?

What is difficult to understand in this chapter?

We often come to the book of Revelation looking for answers or ignore the book completely. When we do we miss out on the opportunity to obey it like the rest of scripture and receive the

blessing that God wants to give us by becoming the body of Christ. Because Revelation is confusing, we often argue about it, we try to make it fit a narrative, or make it explain the end of the world. Instead, we should come to Revelation and see it as another tool God is using to encourage his people to be faithful and remind them to trust that in the end, God is good and just and that we are called to be his hands and feet.

The author John tells us that he is exiled to the island of Patmos in the beginning of this letter, he also notes that he is writing to people who are also suffering.

Question: How does understanding the audience help you understand the message?

The next several chapters of the book are letters to seven churches. The seven churches that John is addressing have a number of issues, John spends time addressing and encouraging each of the churches in turn. During the time of this letter, the churches were suffering persecution from the local governments. He goes on through the book to warn them that things will get worse. The Christians at the time were being challenged by the local authorities to compromise their faith in order to be accepted by the culture.

Read: Revelation 2:1-7

Numbers mean a lot to John; you will see many numbers with significant meaning throughout the book. Seven in the Bible often refers to completion, God's working among men. An example would be the seven days of creation. Seven is repeated both explicitly through the book talking about, angles, trumpets, churches, and bowls. And implicitly when you start to see the patterns of sevens that John uses literary.

Chapters 4 and 5 give us a glimpse into the throne room of heaven and is a call back to a vision of the prophet Isaiah.

Read: Revelation 4 & Isaiah 6:1-5

Questions: What similarities do you see between the two passages?

Why do you think John draws this parallel?

Read: Revelation 5:1-10

There is an amazing vision here that is an important key for the rest of the book of Revelation. The angel calls out to the Lion of the tribe of Judah. What a powerful image, a lion an apex predator that is the king of its domain. When John turns he sees the lion, except it is a lamb looking as if it has been killed. This image reminds us that our king established his kingdom through self-sacrifice.

Question: How does this image of Jesus relate for you? What expectations does this scene upend?

An important key to understanding revelation is that we often want it to be a chronological series of events that helps us map out what the end times will look like. Again, we have to make sure we are not asking questions that Revelation never intended to answer. In chapter 6 we see the end of the world when the stars fall to the earth, in chapter 11 a seventh trumpet is blown and God comes to be with his people (the world ends again). In chapter 14 there is a harvest of the earth, another picture of the world ending. This continues throughout the book, which means either the world ends 7 or 8 times, or John is not trying to give us a chronological series of events as much as emphasize his point by using many different illustrations to be clear to his readers. Our problem today is it doesn't seem very clear. We need to make sure we allow the book of Revelation to speak for itself and understand what it is trying to say.

This wild imagery goes on as we see when the lamb breaks the seals which represents the day of the Lord. In chapters 8-11 are images of the plagues that God visited on Egypt, to release the Israelite slaves. These images look like rivers of blood, the sky becoming dark, sores and pestilence. These are scary scenes unless you are thinking with a Jewish mindset and remembering that these scenes look a lot like what God used to deliver you in the past. That is so much of the point of Revelation, it uses symbols that would have been familiar to Jewish readers to invoke memories of their story where God came through for them.

Read: Revelation 12:1-12

Chapters 12 through 14 contain a ton of symbols, you see all sorts of images that make you wonder if there was something in the food on John's island. You see women giving birth, dragons, multi-headed beasts coming out of the sea, talking beasts roaming the land, and doing lamb impersonations. One of the reasons that the book of Revelation is so frightening is that it takes people's suffering seriously, the images it uses are not sugar-coated. Revelation does not hold back on the fact that there is an enemy that is looking to do real harm.

Read: Revelation 19:1-9

In times of suffering the natural question we ask is... **why**? There is not always a good answer to that question, but the book of Revelation tells us very clearly **who** God is.

Question: What does this passage tell us about who God is?

Read: Revelation 21:1-8

Questions: How would this passage make you feel if you were dealing with painful suffering?

What does this tell us about what God desires?

What does this tell us about what God demands from his people?

So what is the book of Revelation trying to say? I believe that Revelation is written to a group of Christians who are overwhelmed with a world that looks like it is falling in around them. They see the pain, they see that the evil culture around them is winning, and they see all hell breaking loose. From their perspective it can seem like the only way to change is to become part of the system.

To that the book of Revelation challenges us to change our perspective. It invites us to see things from a different perspective, the eternal perspective. The book of Revelation is a reminder that God wins in the end. Revelation reminds us that God is sovereign and for those that know him there that is a great comfort.

Read: Revelation 22:7-21