

(S) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. Today, we will study the book of REVELATION - INTRODUCTION - part 3. We will learn about the writer and recipients of the book, the date and place it was written, the division of the book and its main messages.

POINT 1. THE WRITER OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

First. Internal evidence.

One. The author and the writer. Revelation chapter 1:1-2 directly introduces the author of the book of Revelation as God himself. It is therefore not a human invention, but a divine revelation. Jesus Christ caused John to see and hear this revelation by means of an angel. According to chapter 1:17 and 2:1 etc., Christ himself spoke to John and according to chapter 5:2, 17:1 etc., angels spoke God's words to him and showed visions from God to him. And John was given the ability to hear and see God's revelation and to record it faithfully. According to chapter 1:1,4,9 (22:8) the writer or rather recorder of this revelation calls himself John. The only person named John in the New Testament that did not need any further introduction in the first century A.D., was the apostle John, who also wrote the Gospel of John and the three letters of John.

Two. A comparison between the book of Revelation and the Gospel of John. The book of Revelation has much in common with the Gospel of John. Although the style of the book of Revelation differs from that of the Gospel of John, the two books have much in common. Both speak of *the water of life for the thirsty* (22:17; Jn 7:37) and *the manna* for the hungry (2:17; Jn 6:49-51). Both speak of *the authority Jesus received from the Father* (2:27; Jn 10:18). Both speak of Christ as *the Word of God* (19:13; Jn 1:1), *the light of the world* (22:5; Jn 8:12) and *the Bridegroom* (19:7; Jn 3:29). Both speak of Christ as *the Lamb of God* (5:6; Jn 1:29) and that he *redeemed us with his blood* (5:9; Jn 6:35-56). And both speak of the Church as *the bride* of Jesus (21:9; Jn 3:29). Both the book of Revelation and the Gospel of John may be divided into two parts of three and four sections respectively.

Second. External evidence.

One. The earliest testimonies. The earliest Christian writers after the apostolic period unanimously ascribe the book of Revelation to the apostle John. They are Justin Martyr (A.D. 140), Irenaeus, who was a disciple of the disciple of John (A.D. 170), the Muratorian Canon (A.D. 170), Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 190), Tertullian of Carthage (A.D. 190), Origen of Alexandria (A.D. 225) and Hippolytus (A.D. 240).

Two. A period of doubt. During the first centuries, the ancient Christian Church unanimously accepted the book of Revelation as written by the apostle John. However, for one period many in the Christian Church did not regard the book of Revelation as a part of the New Testament, not because of historical reasons, but because of dogmatic reasons. The main dogmatic problem was the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10 concerning the thousand years. However, besides this period, the Christian Church throughout the world has regarded the book of Revelation as a part of the New Testament.

POINT 2. THE RECIPIENTS OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

First. The immediate recipients.

The immediate recipients were the seven churches in Asia Minor, among whom the apostle John lived and worked before and after his exile to the isle of Patmos.

Second. The intended recipients.

The perfect number 'seven' represents all Christian churches in the world. In chapter 2 and 3, Jesus Christ commands all the churches in the whole world to read the book of Revelation. He says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to *the churches* (plural)(2:7)." Jesus Christ intended all seven letters with its warnings and encouragements in chapter 2 and 3 as well as the whole book of Revelation for all the Christian churches in the world. *These seven churches represent the entire Church throughout the New Testament period.*

The persecution and sufferings to which the Christian Church in the days of John were subjected, are typical of the persecution and sufferings of Christian churches throughout the New Testament time (2 Tim 3:12) and especially just before the second coming of Christ (Mt 24:29-30).

The predictions in the book of Revelation concern principles and events that are so broad in their scope that they cannot be confined to one definite year or time period or century. These principles operate and these events occur throughout all centuries between the first coming and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Finally, the beginning and the end of this book (1:3 and 22:18) make it clear that Jesus Christ addresses himself not merely to one group of people living in one decade in the first century, but to “every one who reads and hears the words of this prophecy of this book.” All people of all churches in the world who read and listen to this book in any age are called blessed!

POINT 3. DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

First. Internal evidence.

When the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, the seven churches mentioned in chapter 2 and 3 really existed. However, from the contents of the seven letters, which Jesus Christ wrote to them, it is clear that these churches were not newly founded churches, but well-established churches, which struggled against the surrounding world around them and struggled against sin in her midst. The church of Ephesus had already gone through a struggle against false teachers, but also had forsaken her first love for Christ. In the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira deplorable conditions existed. The churches of Sardis and Laodicea were spiritually in a poor state. These facts point to a considerable time after the description of the founding of these churches in the book of Acts (Act 19:10). Also according to chapter 1:9, the apostle John says that he had been banned to the isle of Patmos, because of his preaching the word of God and his testimony of Jesus Christ. Both the deplorable conditions as well as the persecution of the Christian churches point to the reign of the Roman emperor, Caesar Domitian, who reigned from A.D. 81-95.

Second. External evidence.

After the death of the apostles Paul and Peter in about A.D. 64-67, the Lord provided the apostle John as leader for the churches in Asia Minor. Probably shortly after the beginning of the Jewish War against Rome in A.D. 66, when the Christians in Jerusalem moved to Pella, the apostle John and other people who had seen and heard Jesus moved to Ephesus in Asia Minor.

The church father Irenaeus, who lived about A.D. 170, wrote that the apostle John lived and worked permanently in Ephesus until the times of the Roman emperor, Caesar Trajan, who ruled from A.D. 98-117. Thus the apostle John lived and worked in Ephesus from about A.D. 66 to 98. The church father Clement of Alexandria, who lived in A.D. 190, wrote that even after his return from Patmos, the apostle John carried on a very active ministry as chief administrator of the churches located in the Ephesus district.

We do not know when exactly the apostle John wrote the Gospel of John, the letters of John or the book of Revelation. We also do not know whether the Gospel of John and the letters of John were written before or after his banishment to Patmos and we also do not know whether they were written before or after the book of Revelation was written. We conclude that the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation to the whole Christian Church between A.D. 81- 98.

POINT 4. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

The theme of the book of Revelation is “**The victory of Jesus Christ and his Church over Satan and his helpers**” (17:14).

The book of Revelation may be divided into two major sections of 3 and 4 parts each:

Major section 1: chapter 1-11.

The Christian Church persecuted by the godless and wicked world. Nevertheless, the Christian Church is protected and finally victorious.

This major section may be sub-divided into 3 parts:

Part 1: chapters 1-3. The Christ-indwelt Church in the world.

Part 2: chapters 4-7. The Church suffering persecution and trials.

Part 3: chapters 8-11. The Church avenged, protected and victorious.

Major section 2: chapter 12-22.

Christ completely victorious in his conflict with Satan. This major section reveals the deeper spiritual background of the struggle between the Christian Church and the world. It is namely a conflict between Christ and the dragon, in which Christ is completely victorious!

This major section may be sub-divided into 4 parts:

Part 4: chapters 12-14. Christ opposed by the dragon and his helpers.

Part 5: chapters 15-16. God's final wrath on the impenitent.

Part 6: chapters 17-19. The fall of Babylon, the beast and the false prophet.

Part 7: chapters 20-22. The doom of the dragon and the complete victory of Christ and his Church.

POINT 5. THE VISION OF THE THRONE IN THE CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE.

Chapter 4 and 5 teaches one main lesson, expressed in Psalm 99:1, "The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake." The vision is of the whole universe governed by the throne. All human affairs rest in the hands, not of men but of the Almighty God. Amidst the trials and persecutions Christians face on earth, God is in complete control. Nothing is excluded from God's dominion. John is "in the Spirit" and sees a vision (4:2). In this state John no longer sees with his physical eyes or hears with his physical ears, but his soul is drawn away from his physical surroundings and fixed on the spiritual reality God wants him to see and hear. The various objects that John sees, do not exist in physical, material form, yet express spiritual realities and truths. What he sees is the heavenly tabernacle or temple, with the throne in the temple, all described in biblical symbolism (4:1; Isa 6:1; Ez 43:1-7).

First. God's throne in the centre of the universe.

God sits on the throne in indescribable majesty and glory. John does not describe God, because he cannot be described (Ex 20:4). John only sees God's radiance. He describes God's radiance in terms of shining precious stones and the rainbow (4:3).

John sees the Lamb standing in the midst of the throne (5:6-7). "He looked as if he had been slain", and *represents* the Lord Jesus Christ who had been resurrected from the dead. The Lamb had "seven horns" *representing* his power and authority (1 Sam 2:10), and "seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" *representing* the fact that the Spirit of Christ is active in every country of the world.

John also sees "seven blazing lamps" immediately before the throne (Ex 37:17-23), which *represent* the sevenfold Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is full of sanctifying power for the Christians and full of punishing fire for the godless and wicked people (Mt 3:12; 13:30).

Only Christ is worthy to open "the scroll with seven seals". Its contents *represents* God's plan or purpose with respect to the entire universe throughout history, and God's purpose with respect to all creatures in all ages and unto all eternity. The scroll is "sealed with seven seals" *symbolising* that God's plan or purpose had not yet been revealed and had not yet been executed at the time it was revealed to John. Thus this vision refers to the enthronement of Christ just after his resurrection and ascension. The opening of the seals *indicate* not only *the revelation*, but also *the execution* of God's plan and purpose.

From the throne come "flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder" to *indicate* the awesome holiness of God that expresses itself in judgements of all wickedness on earth. The "sea of glass, clear as crystal" refers to the basin for the washing of hands and feet in Exodus 30:17-21, but is here regarded as symbolically filled with blood to wash the clothes of Christians so that they become white (7:14). Or it refers to the Red Sea in which God judged and destroyed the Egyptians (Ex 15), but is here regarded as crystal clear symbolising that all God's judgements are just and transparent (15:1-4).

Second. The four circles around the throne in heaven.

One. The first circle around the throne consists of the four living creatures (Ezek ch. 1 and 10). They symbolise a very high order of angels that guards the holy things of God (Gen 3:24; Ex 25:20). Their task is to enhance the glory of God in his reign over the whole universe. They are "covered with eyes", thus *symbolising* that they see everything happening in the universe. They are described as having the nobility of a lion, the strength of an ox, the intelligence of a man and the swiftness of an eagle. These are not characteristics of God, but of the cherubim (Ps 103:20-21; Heb 1:14; Dan 9:21; Lk 12:8; 15:10). They dwell in the immediate presence of God and therefore take notice of all God's attributes like his holiness, power and wisdom. They see better than people dwelling in this sinful world that world-history is the realisation of God's sovereign will. Therefore they constantly praise God (4:6-9; Isa 6:3).

Two. The second circle around the throne consists of the 24 elders on their thrones. Because they cannot be identified with God's people (7:9-11), they are another high order of angels that represent God's people on earth. The fact that they are called "elders" (Num 11:16-17; Act 20:17,28) and that their number is 24 (Lev 24-25) shows that they are representatives. Their task is to enhance the glory of God in his salvation of his people.

Three. The third circle around the throne consists of the multitude of angels (5:11).

Four. The fourth circle around the throne consists of all other creatures in the universe (5:13). Thus, the vision is of God's throne in the centre of the whole universe and of God governing the whole universe through Jesus Christ as Mediator, through the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier and through all the orders of angels as God's servants on behalf of God's

people (Heb 1:14). The book of Revelation gives the right perspective of the universe and the only philosophy of world-history, namely, that everything that exists is governed by the sovereign God of the Bible!

OINT 6. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

First. The book of Revelation teaches the main principles that operate in world-history.

The book reveals the course and significance of human history from God's point of view. By means of visions, signs, symbols and numbers, the book of Revelation maps out the major principles operating within the course of the history of the Christian Church in the non-Christian world. It shows the significance of God's history in man's world. The visions in the book are concerned with world-history from the time of the apostle John right up to the second coming of Christ.

The main principles that operate in world-history are:

1st principle: The Christian Church is the bearer of God's light in this dark world.

2nd principle: The godless and wicked world is full of trials and persecutes the Christian Church.

3rd principle: God's trumpets of judgements constantly warn the godless and wicked people to repent.

4th principle: The real struggle is between Christ and Satan.

5th principle: The godless and wicked people who refuse to repent will be destroyed by God's bowls of wrath.

6th principle: Although it may seem as if the godless and wicked people are victorious, they are in reality defeated.

7th principle: Christ and the Christian Church will be victorious and inherit the new heaven and new earth! The book of Revelation gives Christians the real philosophy of life as well as the real interpretation of world-history.

Second. The book of Revelation reveals the sovereignty of God in all the affairs of man.

God is sovereign over the Christian Church everywhere in the world, sovereign over all the empires and their emperors, sovereign over all the false religions and enemies of God, sovereign over all events and at all times in history right up to the second coming of Jesus Christ! God sits on his throne in majesty and glory. He gives to Jesus Christ all the power to control all humans and their history on earth. He gives him the power to bring human history to its appointed goal! Whatever the threat against Christians may be, God's purpose cannot be thwarted (Isa 14:24,27)! The reason why certain governments today forbid the preaching from the books of Daniel and Revelation is that these books undermine confidence in human governments in general and undermine support to proud tyrants in particular!

Third. The book of Revelation teaches that Christ is the Conqueror and Christians are conquerors together with him.

Revelation 17:14 says, "They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers." Throughout the period from the first to the second coming of Christ, Christians will preach the gospel in the whole world, but they will also be opposed and persecuted in the whole world. In the book of Revelation they will be opposed and persecuted by the dragon, by the beast out of the sea, by the beast out of the earth, by the great prostitute Babylon and by the people who have the mark of the beast. All these will make war against the Lamb as his followers. In the end it will be very clear that Christ is the Conqueror and his people share in his victory. This is exactly the same message as in Romans 8:37-39. Christians may face trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword. But "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." The apostle is convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Special note: This ends the introduction to the New Testament books. During the next two weeks, listen every weekday to "Discipleship training on the air". We will introduce the book of Revelation more completely. Therefore, read through the book of Revelation once more.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".