

## New Testament Foundations: Session Twenty-Three

# Revelation: The Book of Last Things

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Kenneth Gentry

*The future is an intrinsically moral concern because expectations regarding the future impact on the priorities and values one holds in the present.* (Before Jerusalem Fell, p.5)

### Authorship

1. John wrote Revelation from the island of Patmos during a time of persecution. (1:9)
2. Revelation was addressed to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor.

Revelation 1:11

*"Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."*

3. Revelation is apocalyptic literature, the only example of it in the New Testament. Apocalypses are works concerning the end of the world and the salvation of the righteous. They are filled with symbols, visions and prophesy.

### Background

1. No book in the New Testament poses as many expository challenges as Revelation. The exposition centers around two problems: how you interpret the prophesy of Revelation, and what is the meaning of the Millennium.

Leon Morris

*"The Revelation ... is by common consent one of the most difficult of all the books of the Bible."* (The Revelation of St. John, p.15)

Milton Terry

*"No portion of the Holy Scriptures has been the subject of so much controversy and of so many varying interpretations as the Apocalypse of John."* (Biblical Hermeneutics, p.466)

Isbon Beckwith

*"No other book has so perplexed biblical students throughout the Christian centuries down to our own time."* (The Apocalypse of John, p.1)

2. There are four primary schemata for interpreting the prophesy of Revelation.
  - The Preterist Approach (from the Latin word meaning past) says that everything predicted in Revelation was fulfilled in the first century, specifically in the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.
  - The Historical Approach says that Revelation is a survey of church and world history from the apostolic age until the end of time. People who hold to this view see history unfolding in its entirety through the various symbols in the book.
  - The Futurist Approach says that Revelation is a prophesy of the last days and, with the exception of the first three chapters, is yet to be fulfilled.

- The Spiritual Approach (sometimes called the Idealist Approach) says that Revelation is not prophesy at all but rather a metaphorical representation of the struggle between good and evil that is relevant to all people in every culture at any time.

### 3. There are four primary interpretations for the Millennium.

#### Revelation 20:1-7

*And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison.*

- The Amillennial view says the Millennium is symbolic and there will not be a literal, future Millennium. This view does not deny the literal return of Christ, but does reject a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth. They expect an intensified form of tribulation, apostasy, and the appearance of a personal anti-Christ before the second coming.
- The Historic Premillennial view says that Christ will return before the Millennium to establish a literal earthly reign of one thousand years. He will descend to the earth with the glorified saints, fight the battle of Armageddon, bind Satan, and establish a worldwide political kingdom personally administered by Him for a thousand years from Jerusalem. At the end of the Millennial reign, Satan will be loosed and a massive rebellion against Christ and the saints will occur. However, God will rescue the saints, then the Judgment will occur and the eternal order will begin.
- The Dispensational Premillennial view accepts everything from the above position and then adds several other ideas. God has a separate plan for ethnic Israel and the Church. Christ will return secretly in the sky to rapture living saints and to resurrect the bodies of dead saints. Then the seven-year tribulation will begin. At the end of the tribulation Christ will come back to establish a Jewish political kingdom for a thousand years.
- The Postmillennial view says that the Millennium is not a literal one thousand period, but the gradual extension of the Kingdom of God transforming society and culture in every area of life. Postmillennialists confidently await a time in history in which the great commission will be fulfilled and Christianity will be triumphant over all the earth. The fundamental nature of this kingdom is redemptive and spiritual, not political. Christ will triumph in history through His glorious church.

## **Purpose**

- I. Revelation was written to encourage the seven churches of Asia Minor to endure the persecution and opposition they were experiencing. The encouragement came in the form of a vision of the glorious church and her victorious Lord.

#### Kenneth Gentry

*Revelation was designed to steel the first century Church against the gathering storm of persecution, which was reaching an unnerving crescendo of theretofore unknown proportions and intensity. (Before Jerusalem Fell, p.15)*

#### Revelation 19:6-9

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

#### Revelation 21:1-2

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

#### Revelation 21:23-24

And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it.

#### Revelation 22:1-5

And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.

2. The most prominent theme in the book is the glory and majesty of Jesus Christ.

#### Revelation 1:12-18

And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle. And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

#### Revelation 4:2-6

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.

#### Revelation 5:11-14

And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."

#### Revelation 19:11-16

And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself. And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and

*His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."*