

**REVELATION- Introductory Matters      January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017**  
**St. Paul Lutheran, Caledonia      Sunday Adult Class**

**1. Principles of Biblical Interpretation:**

1. The Bible must be interpreted according to its own claims that it is the inspired Word of God, and therefore completely free of errors (inerrant).

2. Scripture interprets Scripture. The complete agreement of Scripture with itself, must be accepted by faith as a basis of interpretation.

3. The meaning of words in Scripture must be understood and explained in accordance with their use in the spoken and written language of their day. The explanation must be grammatico-historically correct.

4. The Holy Spirit is the writer and only safe interpreter of Scripture (see #2). The interpreter is merely to set forth the meaning of the Holy Spirit. The so-called "inner light" dare not be used as a rule for interpreting Scripture.

5. The interpretation of every word and passage of Holy Scripture must be in agreement with its context.

6. Every word in the Holy Scriptures can have only one intended meaning in any one place and in any one relation.

7. The explanation of a passage of Scripture must agree with the clearly revealed doctrines of the Bible.

8. An explanation of a passage of Scripture must agree with the purpose of the Bible, the salvation of sinful mankind: God's guide for Christian doctrine and life.

9. Neither tradition nor the authority of the Church Fathers can be a rule for interpretation.

10. Human reason may not be admitted as a norm of interpretation.

11. The words of Scripture are to be understood in their literal meaning unless the text plainly indicates a figure of speech, parable, or allegory.

12. In the interpretation of figurative language the interpreter seeks the point of comparison and does not go beyond it.

13. In interpreting types, the interpreter designates as typical those portions of Scripture which Scripture itself indicates as typical.

14. In interpreting prophecy, one seeks the interpretation in the fulfillment. The designated fulfillment must match the prophecy.

15. To the doctrine of Scripture belongs also the valid and the necessary deductions from Scripture; not all doctrines of Scripture are taught in expressed words, (for instance, the Trinity).

**2. The Message of Revelation**

Contrary to popular belief, the message of the book of Revelation is not scary or confusing. In utter contrast, the message is one of comfort and encouragement to beleaguered believers. Be strong in the faith! Take courage and persevere! Things are not as they seem! It may appear that the forces of evil are triumphant on every side, but that is not true. God remains in control of His universe and all that takes place within it. Past, present, and future are in His hands alone. Do not despair. With the eyes of faith, look behind the deceiving facade of things as they appear to be and see things as they truly are. With the din of desperate battle raging all around us, listen with the ears of faith to the "*distant triumph song*" already resounding in the halls of heaven and rejoice, for the evil foe has already been defeated. Christ has won the victory and, through faith in Him, that victory is yours!

### **3. The Importance of the OT for understanding the Book of Revelation**

Isaiah 6 is the foundational vision for later visionary revelation. Here we see YHWH enthroned; the visible representation of YHWH, namely Christ.

Ezekiel is foundational – written in 593 B.C., shortly before the destruction of the first Temple. Ch. 1 is the throne vision, which shows YHWH enthroned, etc. There is much in Ezekiel that is the basis for the imagery in Revelation. Ezekiel, like John, receives the call and is given several visions.

Daniel 7-12 – written in a time of crisis, like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Revelation – “One like a Son of Man.” Daniel has a heavy influence on the Jewish Apocalyptic literature that would be written in the first couple of centuries A.D. 1st century Jews read Daniel and Ezekiel a lot and were familiar with their contents. The “Son of Man” that is so prominent in Daniel is foundational for the Christology of Revelation. However, what is so amazing about Revelation is that we see the slain Lamb on the Throne. We would expect to see the mighty Son of Man depicted in Revelation 4 and 5, but we see, instead, the Lamb that had been slaughtered.

Zechariah 1-3 shows Satan as the accuser and is foundational for understanding how Satan is depicted in Revelation.

Because of these powerful OT visions, there was a great interest among Jews in the heavenly throne room, which we see in the Jewish Apocalyptic literature. When the earthly Temple is gone, the reality of the heavenly Temple is still there. In fact, the earthly Tabernacle/Temple is a copy of the heavenly reality.

### **4. Jewish Apocalyptic Literature**

Why were Jews writing this kind of material, following in the tradition of Daniel, Ezekiel, etc.? Because, as 1 Maccabees tells us, there was no prophetic voice in the land. This shows why the Jews were so excited when John the Baptist showed up. The fact that so much of this literature was written shows that there was great trauma going on in the land and the people needed hope. They were looking toward the heavenly reality, because things were so bad on earth, and to the End Times, when God would make all things right.

Some of the Jews who wrote these texts may have indeed had the experiences they wrote about. We know from psychology that people can work themselves up into such an emotional frenzy that they believe they are seeing visions, etc. However, most of the writers used OT books, such as Daniel, Ezekiel, etc., as a launching pad to write their stories and develop their own theology as to what the heavenly realm looks like and the End Times would be.

1 Enoch 37-71 is one of the most important texts for our understanding of the importance of Jewish Messianic expectations. The Jews were longing for the enthroned YHWH, the enthroned Son of Man, the Messiah, to come.

When we look at the Apocalyptic literature in the OT and the Jewish Apocalyptic literature of the 1st century A.D. and then read Revelation, we notice that Revelation is not just some sort of strange genre of literature that just pops out of the blue. 1st century Jews were at home with this kind of genre – Revelation was their kind of book. 1st century Jews were extremely interested in Ezekiel and Daniel.

Up until the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., this was the literature of the day. After the Temple is destroyed, we see the Jews redefining themselves and their literature is directed more towards laws to govern their earthly lives – how should they live day by day, etc. Their hopes had been dashed and they began to focus on what to do in this life, rather than on the heavenly reality and coming of the Messiah, etc. There is also a Jewish mysticism that arises.

## 5. Author of Revelation

The author of the Book of Revelation tells us four times that his name is “John” (Rev. 1:1,4,9; 22:8). The Greek name “*Ioannes*” is a form of the Hebrew name “*Yohanan*” which means “*Yahweh is gracious!*” The name was relatively common among the Jews of the first century. The fact that John considered it unnecessary to further identify himself indicates that he was a well known figure among the churches of Asia Minor who could safely assume that his audience would recognize him and acknowledge the authority of that which he wrote. It is the overwhelming testimony of the fathers of the early church that St. John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee and brother of James, the author of the fourth Gospel and three epistles in the New Testament bearing his name, was the author of the Book of Revelation.

This, of course, conforms with the testimony of the text itself, which indicates that at the time when the Revelation came to John he was “*on the island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus*” (Rev. 1:9).

Besides the overwhelming testimony of the early church fathers, the style of writing in Revelation is so similar to that of the fourth Gospel and three epistles bearing John’s name in the New Testament that there can be no doubt all were written by the same author.

## 6. Date of Revelation

Traditional dating is around 95 A.D., at the end of Emperor Domitian’s reign.

Some modern day scholars believe that an earlier date of 65 or 66 A.D. is more probable. Their main argument is the fact that John makes no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in Revelation. Therefore, they conclude, he must have written this book before these events took place in 70 A.D.

With the shift away from Apocalyptic literature after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, it would seem strange and out of place historically for God to divinely inspire that type of literature 30 years later.

The most intense and direct persecution of Christians took place under the reign of Emperor Nero 54-68 A.D. Saint Paul was martyred under the reign of Nero.

## 7. The Outline/Structure of Revelation

We should see the book of Revelation as one continuous vision (1:9-22:9) with a prologue (1:1-8) and an epilogue (22:6-21). There are numerous scenes within this one vision:

*The Vision of the Son of Man and the Seven Letters (1:9-3:22)*

*The Vision of the Throne (4:1-5:14) and the Sevenfold Pattern (6:1-16:21)*

*The Vision of Babylon the Harlot (17:1-19:10)*

*The Vision of Final Judgment (19:11-21:8)*

*The Vision of the New Jerusalem as the Bride (21:9-22:9)*

In any Apocalypse, the most important scene is the heavenly throne room. Revelation is no exception. Chapters 4 and 5 make up the central scene in the book that helps us interpret the rest of the scenes. If you miss this scene, you cannot understand the rest of the scenes! Chapters 4 and 5 are not just one scene among the many, but THE KEY SCENE! They depict the eternal, heavenly reality that we believers participate in. While the blood and guts are laid out in the rest of the visions, this heavenly reality continuously exists and provides Christians the assurance that theirs is the victory through Christ

amidst the suffering in the world. This is Christian politics, which shows that while all earthly political powers come and go, the heavenly reality, the true power, always exists.

### **8. Revelation is a Political Document**

Revelation asks the question, “Which polis (city) do you belong to? Babylon or the heavenly Jerusalem?” (ch. 17 and 21) Throughout the Apocalypse, we see that there are really two realities of people in the world: 1) those who belong to Babylon, the devil’s kingdom, i.e., non-believers; 2) Those who belong to the heavenly Jerusalem, Christ’s kingdom, i.e., believers. There is no middle ground.

Revelation is written to comfort and assure believers that they belong to the heavenly Jerusalem; that in the midst of the trouble, turmoil, and suffering in the world, theirs is a victorious reality, which the world cannot destroy.

### **9. Revelation shows the reality of sin and evil in the world**

Far from shying away from the sin and evil that will exist in this world until Christ returns, Revelation depicts this reality with vivid imagery (cf. chs. 12 and 13). The message throughout is clear: This world is fallen and Satan is thrusting his evil throughout, but Christians share in the victory of Christ over sin, the world, and the devil.

### **10. John is a Prophet**

The author of Revelation, John, is a prophet, in line with the OT prophets that came before him. A biblical prophet talks about all of reality – past, present, and future reality. Thus, Revelation is a message that addresses past, present, and future reality, not just the future as some believe.

### **11. The Nature of an Apocalypse**

An apocalypse is an unveiling of divine mystery, not just a prophecy of the future. Eschatology deals with the future alone. Revelation is an Apocalypse, not just an eschatological book.

An apocalypse employs figurative and symbolic language to convey its message. Apocalyptic literature is never to be read or interpreted literally. Instead, the symbolic and vivid imagery employed must be understood if one is to come to a literal understanding of the message. Anyone who claims otherwise clearly does not understand this genre of literature.

### **12. Interpretation**

Interpretation of Revelation is limited by two factors:

First- God has here told us more than we can understand. Most of the book can be understood and that which cannot be understood and believed should simply be believed, just as we believe the Trinity, though we cannot explain it.

Second- Trying to understand Revelation before you really know the rest of Scripture is like trying to understand the last chapter of an advanced chemistry book without ever having studied chemistry. For this reason the study of Revelation is really the study of the whole Bible.

THE KEY to understanding Revelation is: Jesus Christ is at the center of this book and it has been given to make us wise unto salvation (which is also the key to understanding all of the Bible)