

JESUS AT THE CENTER

Disciples in a Dangerous Time

October 6, 2024

*The revelation of Jesus Christ,
which God gave him to show his servant what must soon take place.
He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,
who testifies to everything he saw –
that is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.
Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy,
and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart
what is written in it, because the time is near.*

Revelation 1:1-3

When you're lovers in a dangerous time
Sometimes you're made to feel as if your love's a crime
Nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight
Got to kick at the darkness 'til it bleeds daylight
Bruce Cockburn, "Lovers in a Dangerous Time" (1984)

How we will read Revelation

1. In addition to our normal historical-grammatical method, we will apply the rules for interpreting apocalyptic literature:
 - 1) John's apocalyptic uses the images of Old Testament and New Testament apocalyptic
 - 2) Apocalyptic often interprets itself (see Revelation 1:20)
 - 3) The "sevens" and "Then I saw" define the visions John recounts for the benefit of the church
2. We will read Revelation from the idealism perspective (as opposed to futuristic, historicism, or preterism perspectives). More on this on Wednesday night! See the attached paragraph from Kim Riddlebarger's introductory sermon.
3. Simply put: Revelation is a letter to the church revealing Jesus Christ's victory over Satan and his allies, as John describes the redemptive drama on earth from a heavenly perspective.

John's second story of Jesus

⁴ *John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia:*

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

⁷ *Look, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him;
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.
So shall it be! Amen.*

⁸ *“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

⁹ *I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹ which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.”*

¹² *I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and among the lampstands was someone “like a son of man,” dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.*

¹⁷ *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*

¹⁹ *“Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. ²⁰ The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

Revelation 1

1. Doug's observations:
 - 1) Jesus is both the subject and the object of revelation
 - 2) The “Son of Man” of Daniel 7:13 is given “everlasting dominion”
 - 3) The “lampstand” has always been a picture of God's presence (Exodus 25:31; 2 Chronicles 4)
2. Angels matter! (See Voddie Baucham's videos, especially on Revelation 1:1-3)
3. The key message from John's introduction: Jesus is at the center. He is at the center of geopolitical history; he is at the center of God's redemption; he is standing now at the center of the church. One thing apocalyptic literature does is to “reveal” what has been true all the time, even if we can't see it.

What Jesus reveals about himself and his work

1. Jesus is the center of God's redemption work plan

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Revelation 1

2. Jesus can be recognized through his advents

*⁷Look, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.
So shall it be! Amen.*

Revelation 1

3. Jesus' character is revealed through his names

¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Revelation 1 (See how this reflects the "Son of Man" in Daniel 7 and 10.)

4. Jesus reveals his presence in his church even between his advents

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:20

5. By choosing the "Son of Man" imagery, Jesus reveals himself as the one present to sustain his people and coming to establish his eternal kingdom

¹³"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Daniel 7 (See also Daniel 10:1-11:1, especially 10:18-19)

Facing Babylon's furnace (with help from Rob Dreher)

1. By invoking the images from Daniel, John is telling his readers that they are living as exiles, like the exiles in Babylon. "The time" will be difficult, but we know how to live as exiles.

¹⁵ While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. ¹⁶ Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I am helpless. ¹⁷ How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe."

¹⁸ Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. ¹⁹ "Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong."

Daniel 10

⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

Jeremiah 29:7 (See also 29:10-11.)

2. Revelation is a beatitude, especially to those who "take to heart" its message

³ Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Revelation 1

THE REVELATION OF JESUS

1a-1b OPENING
 APOCALYPSE (GREEK: ἀποκαλύψις) = SYMBOLIC VISIONS THAT REVEAL A HIDDEN TRUTH OR ASPECT OF THE UNIVERSE OR OF ITS CREATOR'S MIND.
 JOHN THE BELIEVED DISCIPLE? ANOTHER JOHN?
 MEANINGFUL IMAGES DRAWN FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT
 PROPHECY (1-3) = GOD'S WORDS THROUGH A PROPHET
 BORN IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY TO ITS CLIMAX

1b-3 MESSAGE TO THE 7 CHURCHES
 THE SEVEN CHURCHES (SEE ZECHARIAH 1)
 EPHESUS, SMYRNA, PERSIS, THYATIRA, SARDIS, PHILADELPHIA, LAODICEA
 PERSECUTION, APOATHY, IMMORALITY, COMPROMISE, FAITHFULNESS, THE CONQUERORS ARE REWARDED, THE NEW CREATION (24-25)

4-5 THE THRONE OF GOD & THE LAMB
 HOLY! HOLY! HOLY!
 MESSAGE OF THE PROPHECY (26-28)
 WHO CAN OPEN THE SCROLL?
 THE LAMB OF JUDAH (29)
 THE ROOT OF DAVID (30)
 THE SACRIFICED LAMB (31)
 GOD'S KINGDOM HAS INaugURATED THROUGH THE CRUCIFIED MESSIAH (LAMB) WHO DIED FOR HIS ENEMIES
 HIS DEATH WAS ESSENTIAL OVER EVIL

6-8a SEVEN SEALS
 LITERAL SEQUENCE OF EVENTS
 FAST, PRESENT, OR FUTURE
 BUT NOISE!
 THE DAY OF THE LORD! (ISAIAH 2: SOUL 2)
 WHO CAN STAND?
 REST A LITTLE LONGER.
 (SEE ZECHARIAH 4-5)
 THE LAMB'S ARMY (14:1)
 MARK GOD'S SERVANTS: THE 144,000 MILITARY GENESIS 1:22 TRIBES (SEE NUMBERS 1)
 THE MESSIANIC ARMY OF GOD'S KINGDOM FROM ALL NATIONS

8b-11 SEVEN TRUMPETS
 THE EXODUS PLAGUES (SEE EXODUS 10-13)
 THE NATIONS DON'T REPENT (13:1-2)
 THE LAMB'S SCROLL (13:1)
 1) LITERAL DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM (13:1-2)
 2) NEW TEMPLE = SYMBOL OF GOD'S PEOPLE (1 CORINTHIANS 3:16)
 3) LAMPSTANDS = CHURCHES (1 CORINTHIANS 10:18)
 4) LITERAL SEQUENCE OF THE CHURCHES PROPHECY (1 CORINTHIANS 10:18)
 5) ARE KILLED... BUT THEN VINDICATED...
 THE SCROLL REVEALS THE CHURCH'S PUNISHMENT
 BUT THEN VINDICATED...
 6) THE NATIONS DON'T REPENT
 GOD'S PERFECT REFERENCE (11:18)

12-14 SEVEN SIGNS (SYMBOLS)
 THE COSMIC BATTLE (12:1-3)
 THEY CONQUER THE DRAGON THROUGH THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB (12:11)
 THE EARLY BATTLE (12:12-17)
 THE NEW JERUSALEM (21:2-3)
 THE LAMB'S ARMY (14:1)
 THE ETERNAL GOSPEL (14:6)
 THE GRAPES HARVEST = GOD'S PEOPLE
 THE CHOICE: RESET BABYLON TO FOLLOW THE LAMB OR FOLLOW THE BEAST & SUFFER ITS DEFEAT

15-16 SEVEN BOWLS
 THE EXODUS PLAGUES (AGAIN!)
 ARMAGEDDON: LOCATION OF MANY ESCHATOLOGICAL BATTLES (JUDGES 5:1-5, 2 SAMUEL 21:22)
 SYMBOL OF REBELLIOUS NATIONS (ZECHARIAH 38-39)
 16:17-21

17-19a THE FALL OF BABYLON
 A SYMBOLIC VISION FOR EVERY GENERATION OF THE CHURCH THAT REVEALS GOD'S PROMISE
 HISTORY'S PATTERN: ALL HUMAN KINGDOMS BECOME BABYLON & MUST BE RESISTED
 GOD'S PROMISE: JESUS WILL RETURN TO REMOVE EVIL FROM HIS WORLD
 BABYLON = ARCHETYPE OF HUMANITY'S REBELLION AGAINST GOD
 BLENDED OF OLD TESTAMENT IMAGES: BECKONING BABYLON, TITUS & DORN (2 SAMUEL 18:18-19, 2 SAMUEL 18:20-21)

19b-20 THE FINAL BATTLE
 THE FINAL BATTLE I (19:11-16)
 THE FINAL BATTLE II (20:7-9)
 THE PARTIES VINDICATED: THE SAINTS VINDICATED FOR 1,000 YEARS
 THE DRAGON, BABYLON, ALL WHO OPOSE FROM THE ETERNAL CREATION

21-22 THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN & EARTH
 I AM MAKING ALL THINGS NEW (21:5)
 ALL CREATION TEMPLE = GOD'S BRIDE (21:9-10)
 HUMANITY PROLES AS GOD'S BRIDE (21:9-10)
 THE BRIDE OF THE LAMB
 VALEIDSCOPE: NEW HEAVEN & EARTH (ISAIAH 65:17)
 NEW GARDEN = EDEN (GENESIS 2, EZEKIEL 47)
 NEW JERUSALEM (ISAIAH 2, ZECHARIAH 1)

SECRET PROJECT CODE!

created by the Bible Project

Resources for further study

The Bible Project's Leviticus poster is available at <https://bibleproject.com/downloads/posters/>

I turned to these commentaries:

William Hendricksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Baker, 1939)

Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (Harper, 1988)

Simon Kistemaker, *Revelation* (Baker, 2001)

G. K. Beale. *Revelation in the NIGTC* (Eerdmans, 1999)

Darrell W. Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge* (Regent College Publishing, 2004)

Kim Riddlebarger has a wonderful series on Revelation at <https://www.christreformed.org/kim-riddlebarger/#revelation> . His very helpful introduction first sermon on Revelation 1:1-3 is at <http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/downloadable-sermons-on-the-bo/The%20Time%20Is%20Near%201%20revised.pdf>

Kim Riddlebarger has a good into to Revelation at <https://www.kimriddlebarger.com/the-riddleblog/the-book-of-revelation-a-surprisingly-practical-book> (attached below)

Vern Poythress has a very good e-book on Revelation at <https://frame-poythress.org/ebooks/the-returning-king/>

Sam Storms has a good summary of our hermeneutic at <https://www.samstorms.org/enjoying-god-blog/post/how-should-we-interpret-the-book-of-revelation>

Cornelius Venema has a short analysis of different interpretations of Revelation at <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2012/01/interpreting-revelation/>

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889, who wrote "Fill Thou My Life") has a good Revelation study at https://gracegems.org/19/Bonar_revelation.htm

Voddie Baucham has a wonderful Revelation video sermon series at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLHQcI0hmbk92P3DyXE4MAWlpfHRSPMC-t>

Once again, I recommend [Rob Dreher's "Babylon's Furnace" from Touchstone](#)

The Book of Revelation – A Surprisingly Practical Book

Kim Riddlebarger, March 2021

at <https://www.kimriddlebarger.com/the-riddleblog/the-book-of-revelation-a-surprisingly-practical-book>

The Book of Revelation is the last book in the Bible and completes the New Testament canon. This easily overlooked fact directs us to view the Book of Revelation as one of the most practical and important of all the New Testament epistles. John's apocalyptic vision is Jesus Christ's final word to his church until he returns.

Likely written near the end of the first century, Revelation comes in the form of a circular letter addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor (chapter 2-3). The order of Jesus's prophetic word of encouragement and rebuke to each of these seven churches mentioned follows the postal route from Ephesus to Laodicea reminding us of both the letter's purpose and its original audience.

The Christians in these churches lived in an empire that was openly hostile to all who proclaimed that Jesus is Lord, not Caesar. This guaranteed a wary eye from Roman officials who often, but mistakenly, saw Christians as insurrectionists. These Christians lived in the midst of a pagan culture which worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator. It was an age of bizarre rituals, magic, and sacrifices. Christians also faced the ire of those Jews living in the area who saw Christians as a threat because so many of their fellow Jews had become followers of Jesus. This book is written to them, surely, but also to the people of God across the ages. There is no book quite like it in all the Bible.

Yet, Revelation is much more than a mere letter of comfort to persecuted Christians, although it is certainly that. This book is prophetic in content (describing the course of human history in highly symbolic terms) and apocalyptic in style. Typical of apocalyptic literature, Revelation is filled with images of mysterious creatures, dramatic symbols, and uses numbers to make important theological points. On one level the book deals with the persecution these Christians faced, while on another, the images in Revelation describe the conflict between the people of God and Satan, their arch-enemy, playing out across the centuries before the Lord's return at the end of the age.

Because the Book of Revelation is symbolic in nature and contains apocalyptic themes and images, many have been tempted to use this remarkable book as a springboard for all kinds of fanciful interpretations. A book of comfort has become an odd and esoteric book requiring prophetic sages to interpret it for God's people. Although John cautions his readers that he is writing to the seven churches mentioned in the opening verses of the first chapter to reveal to them that which God "gave [to John] to show to his servants the things that must soon take place" ([Revelation 1:1](#)) and then immediately states that the "time is near" ([Revelation 1:3](#)), sadly, Christians often overlook this vital context.

Throughout the history of the church it has been common for Christians to assume that John wrote this letter to reveal the hidden meaning of those wars and tragedies which, in the providence of God, occur throughout the course of history (cf. Jesus' warning in [Matthew 24:3-14](#)). This sincere, but misguided approach to reading this book, has led many to approach the Book of Revelation through the lens of current events and geo-political upheaval, rather than seeing the Book as a divinely given commentary on those themes left open-ended in the Old Testament, and as interpreted by Jesus and the Apostles.

Revelation is not a handy guide to explain the events which fill the daily news cycle. Rather, it is a divinely given commentary on the Old Testament in light of the person and work of Jesus Christ, Revelation's central figure. We know this to be true because symbols and numbers used throughout are taken from the Old Testament and set out by John against the backdrop of first century circumstances then facing the seven churches. My guess is that those first hearing this letter read aloud in the seven churches to which it is addressed, would have the immediate realization that, "oh, that image is drawn from the Old Testament." As far removed from that world as we are, we often do not see the connection.

Because many of our own contemporaries believe that Revelation primarily speaks to those living at the time of the end, they understand the book as essentially prophetic. Revelation supposedly predicts the rise of modern military technologies of which first century people could not possibly conceive (i.e., the locusts mentioned in Revelation 9 are prophetic images of helicopters). Many believe that John describes a revival of the Roman empire (i.e., Nicolea Carpathia of the *Left Behind* novels). It is believed John predicts specific earthquakes, plagues, famines, and the rise of various dictators and empires. This is why the Book of Revelation has acquired a reputation for being spooky and difficult to interpret and understand. Only those skilled in tying the apocalyptic images found throughout the book to current events, are thought to properly understand it.

But John himself tells us this is not the case. Context is everything. As mentioned, this remarkable vision is given at some point before the end of the first century to the seven churches of Asia Minor which are identified by name. At times, the members of these churches faced horrible persecution and even death from Roman authorities because Christians honored Jesus as Lord and refused to ascribe the same title to the Caesars. Christians worshiped the true and living God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ, not the false gods worshiped in the temples throughout virtually every city in the first-century Mediterranean world. This book was written to give hope and comfort to a suffering and persecuted people.

Yet, like Paul's letters to the first century churches in Rome or Corinthians, the Book of Revelation also speaks to God's people throughout the entire period of time between Christ's first advent and his second coming. The issues facing the seven churches of Asia Minor are issues which God's people must face until Jesus Christ comes again. While the book has prophetic elements and uses apocalyptic imagery, it is not a book which predicts the future with the kind of specificity which we seek in times of uncertainty. Revelation tells us that God's people will face the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet—a mock trinity composed of the satanically powered state and its self-deified leader. Yet despite all the hardship this unholy trinity inflicts upon the people of God across time, Jesus Christ will deliver his people in the end.

Although Revelation is not often thought of as a “practical” book, surely it is one of the most practical books in all the New Testament. Because it is the last book of the canon, Revelation serves as the capstone of all previous biblical revelation. Those who knew the Old Testament knew where to find the explanation of its images and symbols. This book is God's final word to his people and it serves to tie-up all the loose ends in redemptive history. In fact, a great blessing is promised to those “who keep the words of the prophecy of this book” (Revelation 22:7), while those who add to or take away from it are threatened with covenant curses (Revelation 22:18-19).

When understood in this light, Revelation is very practical—not because the vision given to John by the angel maps out the course of human history in great detail, but because the Book of Revelation makes it abundantly clear to God's people that despite the ebb and flow of human history, Jesus Christ and his church triumph in the end. Jesus Christ will destroy Satan and all his minions. Jesus will establish a new heaven and earth, and the Lamb and his people will reign for ever and ever. Knowing the final outcome of redemptive history is intended to give God's people great comfort in times of trial, as well as motivate us to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. But we will only secure these blessings if we read this book in the right way and for the right reasons. We must keep Jesus Christ—not speculation about current events—as its central theme.

Revelation is a very practical book, intended to remind us that Jesus wins in the end.

Kim Riddlebarger summary of the idealism perspective:

at <http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/downloadable-sermons-on-the-bo/The%20Time%20Is%20Near%201%20revised.pdf>

A fourth view is called idealism, a modified form of which I will be presenting throughout this series. This view emphasizes the apocalyptic nature of the book and understands the various visions throughout Revelation as depictions of the struggle which takes place during the entire period of time between the first and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Each vision is describing the same period of time but from a different perspective or vantage point, each vision with a different theological theme or emphasis. As Dennis Johnson from Westminster Seminary California puts it, each of these visions is like looking at the same scene from a different camera angle.⁶ This means that we must not see Revelation as depicting strictly future or historical events. Nor does Revelation exhaustively map out the history of the church age. Instead, we must see the visions and symbols in them as pictures of the on-going struggle between Christ and Satan and his agents, the beast and the dragon, a struggle which Christ will inevitably win on behalf of his people. This is the way apocalyptic literature works.