

PDF version of the lesson notes.

I. Big Picture

- *What is the point or purpose of the book of Revelation? What are its major themes?*
- *Is there a "correct way" to read the book of Revelation? Are there "wrong ways" to read the book of Revelation? If so what do the wrong ways have in common?*
 - ◆ Well, right and wrong are probably way too strong in this context so let me rephrase a little.
 - ◆ *Are there "more Productive" and "less productive" ways to approach the book of Revelation? What do the "more productive" approaches have in common? What do the "less productive" approaches have in common?*
 - ◆ *Is there a danger in reading the book of Revelation through an empirical lens or reading it as an empirical exercise? Why or why not?*
- *How can the book be both relevant to its original audience and to Christian readers today?*
- *Why has the book captured the attention of so many: poets, prophets, religious leaders, philosophers, etc?*
- *Do you find the book of Revelation very relevant in your life? Does it resonant? Why or why not?*
- *What other books of scripture is the the book of Revelation most like?*
- *How does John use the Old Testament?*

II. Beatitudes Again

- Read Revelation 1:1–3:
 - (1) The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: (2) Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. (3) Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this

prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

- The opening verses seem to emphasize the timeliness of the message. The revelation reveals things that "must shortly come to pass" or "to keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." *Does this affect how we should understand the revelation? Does this suggest that we should keep the original audience in mind when we read the revelation? How is the revelation timely for the original audience?*
- Verse 3 is a beatitude and it is not the only beatitude in the book. In fact, unsurprisingly there are seven beatitudes sprinkled throughout the book:

(13) And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them. --- Revelation 14:3 [Beatitude #2]

(15) Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. --- Revelation 16:15 [Beatitude #3]

(9) And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. --- Revelation 19:9 [Beatitude #4]

(6) Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. --- Revelation 20:6 [Beatitude #5]

(7) Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. --- Revelation 22:7 [Beatitude #6]

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. --- Revelation 22:14 [Beatitude #7]

- ◆ *Do you see any commonality across these beatitudes? Do you see a progression?*
- ◆ *Do you see commonality with the beatitudes in Matthew? Is there any reason to believe they were influenced by the beatitudes in Matthew? Does the text by itself suggest an awareness?*
- ◆ *Do these beatitudes underscore or emphasize an important part of the book of Revelation? Do they serve to remind the reader of a major theme? Could it be that the beatitudes are meant to bring the readers or listeners attention back to*

what's most important?

- ◆ *Is it important that there are seven beatitudes?*
- ◆ *How does sprinkling the beatitudes throughout the text affect us, the reader?*
- *Why does John mentioned both those who read and hear the prophecy? Why does he make this distinction?*

III The Epistles Opening

- Read Revelation 1:4–8:

(4) John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; (5) And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, (6) And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (7) Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. (8) I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

- *Why doesn't John identify himself more fully? Why doesn't he emphasize his authority (or does he actually emphasize his authority?)? What does the lack of detail suggest about his relationship with the seven churches?*
- *What is the phrase, "from him which is, and which was, and which is to come" meant to emphasize?*
- *"The phrase 'from him who is and who was and who is to come' ... alludes to the Septuagint ... version of Exod. 3:14, in which the divine name 'Yahweh' is interpreted to mean 'the one who is.'"[1]*
- *What is John referring to when he mentions, "and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne?"*
- *What imagery does John invoke in verses 5–6? Is this important? Does it give us a clue potentially in terms of the source of some of John's imagery?*
- *What themes do verse 4–8 emphasize? Are the themes emphasized in the prologue different than what most people usually emphasize or talk about with respect to the book of Revelation?*

- *Could the message of the book of Revelation be summarized as the following (see verses 5–6)? "[H]e has loved us, freed us from our sins, and made us a kingdom, priests." [2] In what ways would such a summary be incomplete? Is it just missing the message of verses 7–8?*
- *Verse 8 is one of the times where God speaks directly. What does verse 8 emphasize? Why would the declaration in verse 8 be important to John's original audience? Why is the declaration important to us today?*
- *Do you think verse 8 is an allusion to Isaiah 44:6?*

(6) Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

or Isaiah 48:12

(12) Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last.

If it is an allusion, is it significant?

IV. Sharing

- Read Revelation 1:9–11:

(9) I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. (10) I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, (11) Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

- *What does John mean by tribulation? Do chapters 2–3 give us insight into the kind of tribulation or persecution is John talking about? Is there any evidence in those chapters of widespread systematic persecution of Christians by the government?*
- *Why does John mention his location when he never mentions his office (note: there is no evidence that Patmos was a Roman penal colony[3])?*
- *What does the specific naming of the seven churches indicate? Does it work counter to the fact that it is addressed to seven churches?*

V. Like unto the Son of Man

- Read Revelation 1:12–16:

(12) And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; (13) And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. (14) His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; (15) And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. (16) And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

- What does the imagery as a group or whole convey? What point or message in John trying to convey through this set of images?
- In verse 17–20 we find out what the seven stars and seven golden candlesticks represent:

(17) And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: (18) I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. (19) Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; (20) The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

- *Is it an important detail that Christ reveals the meaning of some of the symbols? Does this tell us something about understanding the revelation more generally?*
- *What does the golden candlestick imagery connect the churches with?*
- *Is there an implicit comparison between the golden candlesticks and the stars?*
- *What does the image of a sharp two edged sword convey? Why is it appropriate here? How does it add to the overall imagery?*

Endnotes

1. Mays, James L. (editor), 2000, *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, HarperCollins, 1189.
2. Mays, James L. (editor), 2000, *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, HarperCollins, 1189.