

The Book of Revelation

The Gospel from Patmos

Lesson #1 for January 5, 2019

Scriptures: Revelation 1:1-8; John 14:1-3,29; Deuteronomy 29:29; Romans 1:7; Philipians 3:20; Daniel 7:13-14.

1. The study of Revelation must open with an acknowledgment of the fact that someone would have to stand up and read John's letter in front of the members of each church group. Most of them could not read; they could only hear what was read. (Revelation 1:3) How much of the book of Revelation do you think you would understand if you heard it read to you, out loud, once? Did they stop and discuss what they had read and heard? Did they hear it multiple times? In order to understand the book of Revelation in our day, one must read it multiple times, see how each part relates to all the other parts, and see how it relates to the Old Testament symbolism.
2. The book of Revelation was written by the apostle John while on the Isle of Patmos following a number of mysterious revelations given to him. It is unlikely that John had any assistance in writing this book; it seems clear that he was thinking in Aramaic or Hebrew while writing in Greek. He made a number of fairly insignificant grammatical errors in Greek because Greek was not his first language. Does that bother you? What did he write on?
Of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 contain material directly from the Old Testament. There are 600 words or phrases adapted directly from the Old Testament; some believe that number goes up to 1000. (See C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 2, Pacific Press Publishing Association, Boise, Idaho, p. 69)
3. John quoted from a number of the books of the Old Testament. His favorites were, in order: Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Psalms, Exodus, Jeremiah, and Zechariah. He was also very familiar with the apocalyptic books written between the times of the Old Testament and the New Testament. For more information see *The Revelation of John*, vol. 1, pp. 11-12 by William Barclay.
4. John lived at a very difficult time for Christians. Before being exiled to the Isle of Patmos as a political and religious prisoner, he was thrown into a pot of boiling oil but was protected by God and had to be removed by the very soldiers who threw him into that pot. (AA 570.1; *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume III*, Chapter XXXVI [Early Church Fathers, 1.3.1.11.0.36]) Then, he was exiled to the Isle of Patmos as an attempt to stop his influence on others. Did Caesar and the Romans manage to silence John?
5. How do we date the book of Revelation? First of all, we look at the internal evidence and the testimony of early church leaders. Those testimonies almost universally identified John the writer of this book as being John the apostle of Jesus Christ.
6. But, there is a second line of evidence revealed in a completely new attitude toward Rome and the Roman Empire.
7. In the book of Acts, Paul was repeatedly protected by the fact that he was a Roman citizen. But, when we come to the book of Revelation, things were very different. Consider this:

In the Revelation there is nothing but blazing hatred for Rome. Rome is a Babylon, the mother of harlots, drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs (Revelation 17:5, 6). John hopes for nothing but her total destruction.

The explanation of this change in attitude lies in the wide development of Caesar worship which, with its accompanying persecution, is the background of the Revelation.—Barclay, W. (Ed.). (1976). *The Revelation of John** (vol. 1, p. 15). Philadelphia: The Westminster John Knox Press.

8. By the time John was writing the book of Revelation, there had been a huge change in the attitude of the Roman government toward other religions. It was not their intent to do away with other religions, but instead, to superimpose the worship of Rome and the caesars on top of those other religions. Originally, the idea was to worship Rome. But, before long, that worship began to focus on the caesars. In its earliest stages, this worship was promoted by the citizens themselves. They chose to worship not only Rome, but also Julius Caesar, the first caesar to be worshiped.
9. Caesar Augustus who died in A.D. 14 allowed that. Tiberius Caesar who ruled from A.D. 14 to 37 could not halt the caesar worship; but, he forbade temples or priest to be appointed to worship him.
10. Caligula who ruled from A.D. 37 to 41 was an epileptic, a madman, and a megalomaniac. He insisted that he, personally, be worshiped. Prior to his day, the Jews had always been exempted from worshiping Rome or the caesars. However, Caligula tried to force it on the Jews as well as other subjugated peoples. Fortunately, he died before he could enforce that ruling. Caligula was succeeded by Claudius who ruled from A.D. 41 to 54 and who completely reversed those insane policies of his predecessor.
11. Nero ruled from A.D. 54 to 68. While he persecuted Christians, he never took his own “divinity” seriously and did nothing to insist on caesar worship. He was only looking for scapegoats because of the great fire in Rome which he himself had started.
12. After Nero died, there were three emperors in 18 months: Galba, Otto, and Vitellius. There was no time during those brief reigns to talk about caesar worship.
13. The next two emperors, Vespasian who ruled from A.D. 69 to 79 and his son Titus who ruled from A.D. 79 to 81, were wise rulers and made no insistence on caesar worship. These were the caesars who first surrounded and, then later, destroyed Jerusalem. Then came Domitian who ruled from A.D. 81 to 96. He brought a complete change. He was a devil. He was a cold-blooded persecutor and demanded caesar worship. Whereas Caligula was an insane devil, Domitian was a sane devil. He insisted on the worship of Titus and Vespasian. And he insisted in many different ways that he be recognized as a *god*. So, what were Christians to do? Christians were regarded as outlaws to be hunted down and killed. For more details see William Barclay’s (1976) *The Revelation of John* (vol. 1, p. 14-20). Philadelphia: The Westminster John Knox Press.
14. The book of Revelation is end-oriented. By that, we mean that the emphasis was always on the end of each vision—the second coming of Jesus Christ and beyond.
15. Read Revelation 1:1-2. While written in very apocalyptic language which would have been unintelligible to the Roman soldiers on Patmos, it is all about how God wins the great controversy by revealing the truth about His character and His government through Jesus Christ. *Apokalupsis*, the Greek title of Revelation, means an “unveiling” or “uncovering” and it is an uncovering of Jesus Christ. It is both *from* Jesus and *about* Him. It is His Self-revelation to His people down through the generations from the time of His ascension until His second coming. He is the central Figure of the entire book. The book begins with Him (Revelation 1:5-8) and ends with Him. (Revelation 22:12-16)

16. Virtually all Christians recognize that the Gospels are the story of Jesus's time on this earth. The books of Acts and Revelation pick up that story and extend it to the third coming of Jesus. The millennium and the third coming are mentioned only in the book of Revelation. The books of Revelation and Hebrews further enlighten us by talking about the ministry of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary.
17. While this point is disputed by some, we firmly believe that Revelation was written by the apostle John, the same one who wrote the Gospel of John and the three short letters: 1,2,3 John. There is good evidence for that. As we discussed earlier, the leaders of the early Christian church had that same understanding.
18. It is unfortunate that many of us have not had the opportunity to study, in depth, the biblical languages. Very early in the book of Revelation, it ties itself, in the Greek, to the book of Daniel. Together, these two books have become key books for Seventh-day Adventists.
19. Many critical scholars—even though they call themselves Christians—do not believe that even God is able to predict the future. This means that the book of Revelation poses a very serious interpretive problem for them. Already in chapter 1, Revelation says several times that it is talking about future events. Even in our day, many of the events pictured in the book of Revelation—the second coming, the millennium, and the third coming—are still future! Thus, since many critical scholars do not think God can predict the future, they have had to find other explanations for much of Revelation.
20. Read Deuteronomy 29:29 and Revelation 22:7. The book of Revelation is clearly intended to warn us and to encourage us by pointing out that very difficult times will take place before the final victory of God's people and our eternal reward in heaven. God tells us only as much as He realizes we need to know. This is not an attempt to scare us into a particular behavior.

The shortness of time is urged as an incentive for us to seek righteousness and to make Christ our friend. This is not the great motive. It savors of selfishness. Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God be held before us to compel us through fear to right action? This ought not to be. Jesus is attractive. He is full of love, mercy, and compassion. He proposes to be our friend, to walk with us through all the rough pathways of life.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* August 2, 1881, par. 6; *TMK** 320.3.

21. By looking at history, we know that many people have tried to predict the time of the second coming; all have failed. The prophecies in the Bible were not written so that we can spell out future events in detail; they were written so that when things do happen, we can recognize that God knew in advance, and we can know that He is still in control. (See John 13:19; 14:29; 16:4.) Compare Jesus's statements to the Jewish leaders about who He was. (John 8:24,28,58)
22. The book of Revelation is full of language which seems strange to us. This language is called *symbolic language* or *apocalyptic language*. But, Revelation is not the first book to use such language. See Revelation 13:1; Daniel 7:1-3; and Ezekiel 1:1-14. So, why all this strange talk about weird beasts, horns, creatures, animals, etc.?
23. Revelation 1:1 has some very interesting words in the original language. "And He sent and *signified* it by His angel to His servant John." (*NKJV*,* italic type is added). The word *signified* comes from a Greek word *semaino* meaning "to show by symbolic signs." The same expression is used in Daniel 2:45. God *signifies* to the King "what will take place in

the future.” So, John was doing his best to describe in human language and through the use of symbols what he had seen in vision.

Thus, for the most part, the language used to describe Revelation’s prophecies must not be interpreted literally. As a rule, the reading of the Bible, in general, presupposes a literal understanding of the text (unless the text points to intended symbolism). But when we read Revelation—unless the text points to a literal meaning—we need to interpret it symbolically. While the scenes and events predicted are real, they usually were expressed in symbolic language.

Keeping in mind the largely symbolic character of Revelation will safeguard us against distorting the prophetic message. **In trying to determine the meaning of the symbols used in the book, we must be careful not to impose on the text a meaning that comes out of human imagination or the current meanings of those symbols in our culture. Instead, we must go to the Bible and to the symbols found in its pages in order to understand the symbols in the book of Revelation.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, January 1. [Bold type is added.]

24. In fact, as suggested earlier, a careful reading of the Old Testament and comparing it with the book of Revelation will reveal that almost all of the symbols used in Revelation were previously used somewhere in the Old Testament. This is a strong hint to us that God has a panoramic view of the great controversy from beginning to end.
25. John’s greeting in Revelation 1:11 pointed out the churches to whom he initially addressed this letter. His greeting was similar in form to a greeting given by Paul in Romans 1:7. (Compare Revelation 1:4-5 and Romans 1:7.) The word *charis* translated as *grace* is a Christian Greek greeting; the word translated *peace* or *well-being* comes from the Hebrew greeting *Shalom*.
26. John went on to specifically mention the three Members of the Godhead as sending greetings. Revelation 1:8 and Revelation 4:8 speak of “the Lord God Almighty, who *is*, who *was*, and who *is to come*.”—*Good News Bible*.* [Italic type is added.] It is important to notice that the expression *is to come* means a literal coming, not just a future event.
27. The Holy Spirit is referred to as the “seven Spirits of God.” (Compare Revelation 4:5 and Revelation 5:6.) As students of Scripture will recognize, the number seven is a number implying completeness. In this case, it was talking about the Holy Spirit’s witness to all seven churches. The seven Spirits are also called “the seven lamps,” (Revelation 4:5) and “the seven eyes of the Lamb.” (Revelation 5:6)
28. Jesus Himself is identified by three different titles: (1) The faithful Witness, (2) the First-born from the dead, and (3) the Ruler over the kings of the earth. (Revelation 1:5, *NKJV*) These titles clearly refer to His death on the cross, His resurrection, and His reign in heaven.
29. Read Revelation 1:5-6. The expression *He loves us* in Revelation 1:5 is in a Greek form which has no beginning or ending. God’s love for us is past, present, and future. More than that, He has released us from our sins. Again, the Greek form of the verb suggests that is a completed act. It is God’s plan to take us to heaven and seat us on thrones as citizens of heaven beside Jesus Christ Himself. (Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:20)

30. Read Revelation 1:7-8; 22:7,12,20. Compare Daniel 7:13-14; Zechariah 12:10; and Matthew 24:30. Clearly, Revelation 1:7-8 is intended to be a summary of what Daniel, Zechariah, and Matthew had already said. Jesus Christ will come back as a literal, visible, personal Jesus. All through the book of Revelation, we will see clear indications that the future God plans for us comes when He returns to this earth as the King of the universe.

More than eighteen hundred years have passed since the Saviour gave the promise of his coming. Throughout the centuries his words have filled with courage the hearts of his faithful ones. The promise has not yet been fulfilled; the Life-giver's voice has not yet called the sleeping saints from their graves; but none the less sure is the word that has been spoken. In his own time God will fulfill his word. Shall any become weary now? Shall we lose our hold on faith when we are so near the eternal world? Shall any say, The city is a great way off?--No, no. A little longer, and we shall see the King in his beauty. A little longer, and he will wipe all tears from our eyes. A little longer, and he will present us "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*,* November 13, 1913, par. 18.

31. We recognize that a promise is only as valid as the one who made the promise. Could a promise be any more secure than one given by God Himself?
32. We have just briefly touched on the book of Revelation. Ellen White had some very strong words to say about the importance of studying the books of Daniel and Revelation.

When the books of Daniel and Revelation are better understood, believers will have an entirely different religious experience. They will be given such glimpses of the open gates of heaven that heart and mind will be impressed with the character that all must develop in order to realize the blessedness which is to be the reward of the pure in heart.—Ellen G. White, written January 27, 1900, from "Sunnyside," Cooranbong, NSW, Australia to F. E. Belden, *Review and Herald*, Battle Creek, Michigan; *18MR** 24.2; *Testimonies to Ministers** 114.3; *FLB** 345.3. [Bold type is added.]

33. This revelation was given for the guidance and comfort of the church throughout the Christian dispensation.... A revelation is something revealed. The Lord Himself revealed to His servant the mysteries contained in this book, and He designs that they shall be open to the study of all. Its truths are addressed to those living in the last days of this earth's history, as well as to those living in the days of John. Some of the scenes depicted in this prophecy are in the past, some are now taking place; some bring to view the close of the great conflict between the powers of darkness and the Prince of heaven, and some reveal the triumphs and joys of the redeemed in the earth made new.

Let none think, because they cannot explain the meaning of every symbol in the Revelation, that it is useless for them to search this book in an effort to know the meaning of the truth it contains. The One who revealed these mysteries to John will give to the diligent searcher for truth a foretaste of heavenly things. Those whose hearts are open to the reception of truth will be enabled to understand its teachings, and will be granted the blessing

promised to those who “hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 583.1-585.0.

34. Why do many Christians today avoid reading and studying the book of Revelation? Many people have tried to base future predictions of their own on the book of Revelation. They have utterly failed in their attempts at predicting the timing of the second coming.
35. In this lesson we have studied the first eight verses of the book of Revelation. We have had no terrifying beasts, no heavenly journeys, and no sevenfold sequences. We have learned that Jesus is the central Figure of the book of Revelation. The book concerns future events which are pictured in symbolic language and which must be carefully interpreted. In this symbolic language, we have numerous links to Old Testament books, particularly the book of Daniel.
36. We are told that all three Members of the Godhead are involved in this revelation.
37. The entire book of Revelation is end-oriented. In other words, each section focuses on what happens at the end, including events happening in our day and on into the future. We say that we are using the **historicist method of interpretation**. Many of our Christian friends do not believe that even God Himself can predict the future. And, thus, they reject the historicist method. Look at what the Bible says about the judgment: John 3:17-21; 5:22; 12:47-48.
38. Do you have a problem in recognizing that God can predict the future? Read Revelation 1:1. Does it seem right to you that the predictions in the book of Revelation are “soon to take place”? Does 2000 years seem like *soon*? Remember that to God, 1000 years is like a day. (2 Peter 3:8) But, to us the second coming of Christ is never further away than our own death. Things cannot come to an end until the issues in the great controversy have been clearly settled.
39. In this introductory chapter of the book of Revelation, we are pointed to the fact that the ultimate outcome of Jesus’s love expressed in His death and resurrection is to raise His people to the highest possible status: Kings and priests of God in heaven.
40. Read again Revelation 1:7. Notice that John’s ideas which were, no doubt, based on direct revelations from God are a reflection of Daniel 7:13-14 and Zechariah 12.

The allusion to Zechariah is particularly interesting. Notice the parallels between Zechariah 12 and the book of Revelation. In Zechariah 12:7, 8, it is Yahweh who comes. In Revelation, it is Jesus who comes. In Zechariah 12:10, it is Yahweh who is pierced; in Revelation, it is Jesus who is pierced. In Zechariah, it is the inhabitants of Jerusalem who see God come (*Zech. 12:8-10*); in Revelation, it is the whole earth that sees Jesus come. In Zechariah 12:11, 12, it is the clans of Jerusalem that mourn; in Revelation, it is the tribes of the whole earth that mourn.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 16.

41. Notice that in Revelation there is a shift in emphasis from *Yahweh* to Jesus. There is also a shift from literal local things regarding Israel to the spiritual, worldwide impact of the gospel and the church.

© 2018, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged. *Electronic version. Info@theox.org

Last Modified: November 24, 2018

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSTG-Hart\Revelation\SS-1-Revelation-2019_01_05-Fin+.wpd