

THE PURPOSE OF THE REVELATION

Verse 1 begins, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ..." The Greek word translated "revelation" is "apocalypse". In our culture, "apocalypse" speaks of cataclysmic destruction. But to the Greeks it meant simply "an unveiling, or uncovering".

Imagine walking into an art gallery and seeing a sculpture covered with a canvas. At the appropriate moment the canvas is ripped away—revealing the beauty and glory of the artist's creation. This is the book of Revelation...

Jesus is alive and well, but we don't see His beauty and excellence, for He's hidden

behind the heavy canvas that separates the spiritual from the tangible. Yet in this book, John rips away the veil, and reveals Jesus in all His glory.

The book of Revelation deals with divine judgments, political alignments, military movements, demonic activities, and spiritual awakenings that occur prior to the Lord's return. It spotlights the heaven's archenemy, the Antichrist – and the number of the beast - 6-6-6 is just one of his *tricks-tricks-tricks*. But the point Revelation is not the *unleashing of judgment*, it's the *unveiling of the Lord!*

UNDERSTANDING THE REVELATION

"He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw."

Notice, Jesus "*sent and signified*" the message. The word "*signified*" means "*to give a sign or signal*". When John received this prophecy he was a prisoner of Rome, and to avoid censorship, his book was encoded with signs or symbols.

And what better code to use than Old

Testament symbols...

The key to interpreting Revelation is to familiarize yourself with Old Testament idioms and symbols. Of the 404 verses in Revelation 278 contain Old Testament references – almost 70% of the book. 360 Old Testament inferences are found in Revelation. It's been said, "The best commentary on the Bible is always the Bible itself" - and this is especially true with the Revelation.

HOW TO INTERPRET THE REVELATION

Verse 3, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near." John calls the Revelation a "*prophecy*" – or a fore-telling of future events.

When it comes to Revelation there are generally four schools of interpretation...

The "*Preterist*" school (the word "*preter*" is Latin for *past*) teaches Revelation has already been fulfilled. The events all occurred in first century Rome.

The "*Historical*" school teaches Revelation is being played out as we speak – it supposedly charts the struggles and growth of the Church through the ages.

The "*Allegorical*" school believes the book is a metaphor for the battle between good and evil throughout history. It assures that good will

ultimately triumph.

I reject each of these schools of interpretation because they violate the most basic law of biblical hermeneutics. The golden rule of Bible interpretation is to take the Bible literally unless the text itself suggests another interpretation. "When the clear sense of Scripture makes good sense, then seek no other sense."

I hold to a fourth school of interpretation - the "*Futurist*" school. Read through Revelation, and you find the author records exactly what he sees – actual people, places, events. And at no time since John's writing have 100 pound hailstones pummeled the earth - or continents split apart - or a third of the earth been scorched with fire. All these events are still future – waiting to be fulfilled.

Devotion Box - Alpha And Omega

Jesus speaks in 1:8, "I am the Alpha and the Omega." Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. Jesus is saying that He is life's A to Z. Life begins and ends with Him. He's our source and our purpose! All of life originates and culminates in our Lord Jesus.

JESUS IN HEAVEN

John says he “was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day...” when he saw an incredible vision. First, a voice spoke, “I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last.”

He saw Jesus “in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet..”. Commoners wore knee-length robes. Only royalty wore robes that touched their feet. Jesus was “girded about the chest with a golden band.” It was the uniform of a priest – the gold breastplate.

Verse 14, “His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.” Once I saw an album cover that tried to replicate this portrait of Jesus. The result was grotesque. I thought, almost sacrilegious. Remember, Revelation was encoded with Old Testament idioms.

Jesus' white hair is not a bleach job, or gray hair and old age. It speaks of purity. His eyes aren't bloodshot. The fire is a searing scrutiny and searching ability. They penetrate through the veneer, and reveal a person's heart. His brass feet don't mean he had a lead foot. In the Old Testament brass was symbolic of judgment. And when Jesus returns, He'll put His foot down in judgment.

The voice of Jesus is like a waterfall. The roar from a tall waterfall drowns out all other sounds – *and so does the voice of Jesus*. When Jesus speaks His voice drowns out all other influences. When Jesus speaks people will listen... Finally, a two-edged sword goes out of His mouth - an idiom for God's Word.

John says in verse 17, “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.” John was overwhelmed. All he could do before Jesus was fall on His face and worship.

PATMOS

In verse 9 John tells us he received the Revelation on the island of “Patmos”.

Around 90 AD the Roman emperor, Domitian, arrested John and sentenced him to death. He was boiled in oil, but God miraculously delivered him. And since Domitian couldn't kill him he banished John to Patmos - a desolate rock 10 miles long by 6 miles wide - 15 miles off the coast of Ephesus, in the Aegean Sea. Imagine-at the age of 90, John went to work in the rock mines on Patmos.

OUTLINE OF THE REVELATION

In 1:19, “Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.” Here's an outline for the book:

Chapter 1 is “the things which you have seen.” John's vision of the risen Lord. Chapters 2-3 are “the things which are”. The Church age. Chapters 4-22 are “the things which will take place after this.” *After what?*

After the Church. When the Church is raptured, then God will judge the world, Jesus will triumph over evil, and come to establish His kingdom on the earth.

WHY SEVEN LETTERS AND WHY THESE CHURCHES ?

In 1:20 Jesus says the “seven lampstands” are seven churches. Earlier in 1:7, Jesus had told John to send his record of the Revelation to “the seven churches of Asia” – and he lists them: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. But why these 7 churches?

There were hundreds of churches in John's day so “*why did he choose just 7 churches? – and why these 7? – and why did he list them in this order?*”

There are 340,000 Christian churches in the United States – 300 different denominations. And each of these denominations, if not each church itself, has a different flavor and focus. Christianity in America seems extremely diverse...

Which reminds me, “*How many Southern Baptists does it take to change a light bulb?* Only one, but 15,738,283 have to vote on it. *How many Roman Catholics does it take to change a light bulb?* Nine; one to change it, and eight to raffle off the old one. *How many Charismatics does it take to change a light bulb?* Three; one to cast it out, and two to catch it when it falls. *How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb?* Change? What's change? *How many Amish does it take to change a light bulb?* A light bulb? What's a light bulb? *How many Church of Christ members does it take to change a light bulb?* Only one, but if anyone else tries to do it, the light

won't come on. *And how many Calvary guys does it take to change a light bulb?* One, but he's never on time.

We assume churches come in thousand of varieties. But not so... There're really only 7 types of churches and 7 types of church members. Jesus wrote to 7 churches, and each of those churches represents an attitude that exists among believers today. Each one of us is a member of one of these 7 churches...

But there's more to this list... In the Bible the number “7” speaks of completion. And I also believe John chose these 7 churches as a representative sample of the complete church both at that time, and throughout the ages.

You can trace church history by looking at each of these churches in order of their mention. They were actual churches, but they also represent church ages.

Amos 3:7 tells us, “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.” In the Old Testament God recorded history from creation to Christ. In Acts He records the first 30 years of church history. But what about the 1900 years since – the Christian era? *Has God not commented?* I believe He critiqued it in advance - in 7 letters to the 7 churches.

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS TO HIS CHURCH

EPHESUS

Ephesus describes the apostolic church. In 2:2 Jesus commends her, "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil." Here's a church that had it together outwardly... They were serving the Lord, sacrificing for the Lord, remaining steadfast in the Lord, sniffing out false doctrine contrary to the Lord.

But Jesus finds one fatal fault in this church. Verse 4, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love." Here was a church that was going through the motions without the emotion - having piety, but no passion.

The cure Jesus prescribes is three-fold. 2:5, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works." He gives 3 Rs: **recall, repent, repeat.**

Recall your conversion. The initial love, and excitement, and hunger you had for God and the things of God! *Repent* of getting sidetracked, and growing cold. Then *repeat* the things you did that cultivated that first love.

Spend some bulk time in Bible study and prayer...serve God in a tangible way...witness to a stranger...give a generous offering...follow your heart, not just your head...love the Lord extravagantly. "It's easier to act yourself into a feeling than to feel yourself into an action." Do the first works and you'll regain your first love.

SMYRNA

The church of Smyrna was the persecuted church of the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Between the years of 65 and 312 AD the Roman Emperors martyred 5 million believers in Jesus.

In verse 9 Jesus says, "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)..." On earth Smyrna lived in poverty. Their property and possessions were confiscated, but in God's eyes her faithfulness made her rich.

In 10 Jesus says to all persecuted saints, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." There is great reward for those who suffer for Jesus' sake.

PERGAMOS

Historically speaking, Pergamos was the church that merged with paganism. In 312 AD, the Emperor Constantine, converted to Christianity, and to spread his new faith he tried to Christianize many of the pagan symbols and traditions of Rome. He tried to reinterpret pagan practices with Christian meaning. In the end he did more harm than good. Instead of spreading the faith, he polluted it.

This is why we give little credence to much of church tradition. Our model needs to be the book of Acts, not church history. Many traditions are just not biblical.

These believers lived near Satan's headquarters, yet they didn't deny their faith. They did though, make serious compromises. In verse 15, "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."

The church of Pergamos was the first church to foster a distinction between *the preacher in the pulpit* and *the people in the pew*. "Nicolaitan" means "to conquer the people".

The Nicolaitans were religious leaders who ruled over the common people. Prior to Pergamos pastors of the church were servant leaders, but after Constantine a professional clergy developed that used the people.

THYATIRA

The church of Thyatira was the church of the Middle Ages. Thyatira was the result of Pergamos' compromise.

In verse 19 Jesus mentions her "works, love, service, faith, and your patience..." but He rebukes her because she "allow(ed) that woman Jezebel... to teach and seduce..." The name Jezebel is synonymous with idolatry. Jezebel brought Baal worship into Israel. The church at Thyatira was a benevolent church, but an idolatrous church.

This is what happened to the church in the Middle Ages. All kinds of idolatrous practices arose.

Roman Catholicism's veneration of Mary and its heretical understanding of communion are examples. "Thyatira" means "*continual sacrifice*" - and this is what Catholicism does to the bread and wine. It turns it into the literal body and blood of Jesus and sacrifices Jesus every Sunday.

Jesus says of Thyatira in 2:22, "I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds." An element of this church will survive to the last days... for those who don't repent will be thrown into the Great Tribulation.

SARDIS

"Sardis" means "*escaping ones*" and this church is identified with the Reformers. *Protestants* protested the idolatry in the church of Thyatira. The cry of the Reformation was *faith alone, grace alone, Scripture alone.*

The church of Sardis represents mainline Protestantism.

And in 3:1 Jesus says, "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." The Reformation restored biblical authority to the church, but it also created a dead orthodoxy. The Reformers were alive to God, but now the churches they founded are spiritually dead. They carry their name, but lack their power.

In other words, being a Lutheran doesn't guarantee you the devotion and fire of a Martin Luther. When a church holds to tradition it's often because it's lost its fire!

PHILADELPHIA

The next church is "the church of Philadelphia" - which means "*brotherly love*". Philadelphia represents the evangelicalism of the last two centuries.

God opened a door for this church that no one could shut. And though the church had little strength - it used what strength it had, kept God's Word, and went through the door. *I believe all churches need an opportunistic faith.* God is always opening doors - are we entering?

LAODICEA

Sadly, the 7th church looks a lot like the church of today. Neither spiritually frozen or on fire - she's room temperature. Laodicea takes her *cues* from the world. She's like a warm drink on a hot day - God *spews* her out.

The problem with the church of Laodicea is she's lost all objectivity. She says, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing..." But the Lord says of her "you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked..."

Verse 20 provides a sad picture... God stands outside the door of this church and knocks. The Laodiceans have locked God out of His own Church. But here's the Lord's promise, "If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

If you've locked Jesus out of your heart - and you want Him back in - all it takes is to open the door! Let's rise out of the spiritual complacency of our day and be overcomers. Beginning in our hearts, let's give Jesus back His Church!

Bible Scan - Revelation 1-5

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
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"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" - Revelation 5:12

Bible Scan
Memory Verse

PRE-TRIB

Chapter 4, "After these things..." *What things?* For the last 2 chapters John discussed the Church. What John sees from here on in Revelation takes place after the church age.

Which leads to another question, *what happens to the Church?* Well, John is a member of the church, and look what happens to him here... "behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." A door to heaven opens, and he's invited to come up. John is in heaven when he sees the events of the Great Tribulation described in chapters 6-19.

This is another reason I'm convinced God will rapture His Church *prior* to the venting of His judgment. The Church is raptured pre-tribulation.

In ancient times deeds were written on double-sided scrolls. On the outside was a legal description of the property. On the inside were the covenants and terms for taking possession. The scroll was bound with seven waxed seals. In a real estate transaction after the price was paid, the seals were broken. The property now belonged to a new owner and the breaking of the seals revealed the steps needed take to take possession.

The scroll John sees in God's hand is the title deed to planet earth. After God created the earth He gave dominion over it to mankind - but man lost the deed to Satan. Today Satan has the run of planet earth. The mess the world is in today is not God's fault. Blame it on satanic management.

Under God's law it was the right of a family member to buy back an ancestral tract if he could pay the redemption price. The family had a limited time to muster the payment or the property would fall permanently to the usurper.

This is why in verse 4 John's worry turns to weeping. When he sees no one in heaven or earth is worthy to reclaim the title deed to planet earth, he fears that the Earth will fall permanently into Satan's hands.

THE PRIORITY OF HEAVEN

For the rest of chapter 4 John gives us a rare glimpse of the heavenly scene. Perhaps in the past, you've thought of heaven as a series of cumulus clouds - or halls of hospital white. God appears in sterile scrubs. Discard those notions as myths. Heaven is adorned with a kaleidoscope of color, and occupied by an interesting cast of characters.

In verses 6-7 John sees angelic creatures hovering around God's throne. These living creatures are witnesses to the nature of our Lord. Jesus is a lion (*or King*) - a calf (or a servant) - a man (or an intercessor who understands us) - and an eagle (or Sovereign). John makes a heavenly sighting no one else in the Old Testament saw. It's possible the 24 elders represent the Church - a people group nonexistent in Old Testament times. It took a New Testament witness to see them.

One thing is sure. All the parties in heaven have one preoccupation. Heaven's priority is worship! Everyone in heaven is busy worshipping God. Everyone chimes in with the living creatures who "do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" Guys, when you learn to worship you're preparing for heaven.

THE LAMB IS A LION

That's when the elder points to "the Lion of the tribe of Judah... (He) has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose the seven seals". Jesus is the lion, and He alone is worthy to take back the earth. He joined the human family to earn the right to redeem what we lost. His cross paid the price.

John turned to see the lion, but what he saw looked like a butchered lamb. After the resurrection Jesus still bore the scars of crucifixion in his hands and feet. He invited Thomas to touch His scars. I believe Jesus still bears those scars. The only man-made thing in heaven are Jesus' scars. But one look at those scars will erase any doubt that Jesus really loves you.

Jesus looks like a lamb, but He acts like a lion. Since the cross, Jesus now owns the earth - but Satan doesn't like giving up what he's possessed for centuries. He's holding on, but John sees the day when Jesus will enforce His claim. He'll break the 7 seals on the deed and incredible plagues will rock the planet. It's Jesus' way of evicting Satan and his cronies. The next 14 chapters describe the consequences of breaking these seals.

Devotion Box: Down With The Crowns

Throughout the New Testament we're rewarded for our labors on earth with crowns in heaven. But there's a special reason for those crowns. Notice what the elders do with their crowns? 4:10, they "cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."

Our crowns are given to us so we'll have gifts to give to God. The wonders of heaven will so swell your heart with love for God, you'll be glad to have something to give to God in return. It'll be an awkward moment, if at the point of your deepest gratitude you have nothing with which you can show your thanks.