

APPROACHES TO THE BOOK

1. **Preterist.** All the events in the book are now in the past. Foy E. Wallace (destruction of Jerusalem).
2. **Historical background.** Most of the events in the book are now in the past. Homer Hailey (Roman persecution).
3. **Continuous historical.** The events in the book describe the history of mankind from the first century until the end of time. B. W. Johnson (People's NT), John T. Hinds (Gospel Advocate commentary).
4. **Philosophy of history.** The events in the book describe in principle the nature of the ongoing conflict between good and evil. Hendriksen (More Than Conquerors).
5. **Futurist.** Except for the first three chapters, none of the events in the book have been fulfilled. This is the premillennial approach to the book of Revelation. (LeHaye & Jenkins).

Discussion: The first three approaches, especially the first two, have merit. The last has none. I favor the fourth. I think it captures the intent of the book. Nothing in the book of Revelation has to be interpreted literally. Even if there are direct historical references, whenever we apply the book today, we end up adopting the philosophy of history approach. It seems to me, therefore, that we might as well start there and not spend a great deal of time arguing about whether Revelation specifically applies to Jerusalem or Rome. Regardless of whether it specifically applies to either, the issue for us today is, "What does this book mean to me?" I believe the philosophy of history approach well captures the meaning of Revelation for Christians regardless of the specific time in which we live.

KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK

1. Get comfortable with the style of writing.

- A. Revelation is a book of visions, images, pictures, or signs that symbolically or figuratively convey literal truths. The visions are not meant to be taken literally. The underlying truths are to be taken literally. Revelation 1:1-2. "Signified it" (NKJV, NASB footnote).
- B. This style of writing is called apocalyptic literature. The Jews were very familiar and comfortable with it. It is frequently used elsewhere in both the Old and New Testaments.
- C. We have trouble with apocalyptic literature because we simply do not communicate this way.
 - 1) When we read a passage like Isaiah 34:3B-4 we think literally. "Be drenched" is "dissolve" in KJV, NKJV, ASV, and NASB footnote.
 - 2) However, when the Jews read Isaiah 34:3B-4 they thought figuratively. They did not take the image literally. Rather, they understood that God was using the image to figuratively convey an underlying literal truth. Namely, that when God judged the nations, it was going to be a very bad day for the nations. Isaiah 34:1-3A.
- D. A helpful parallel. Artists often paint pictures to express an underlying message. The picture is not the message. Rather, the picture is the means of communicating the underlying message. I think this is a good way of viewing Revelation. The book contains a series of vivid pictures painted by God to express underlying truths. The pictures themselves are not the truths. Rather, they are the means of communicating these truths.

2. Find the OT parallel.

- A. Almost every vision or image in the book of Revelation has an OT counterpart.
- B. The book of Revelation is difficult because it gives us a vision or image without an interpretation of its literal meaning.
- C. This, however, is usually not the case with its OT counterpart. The Holy Spirit usually gives us an interpretation of its literal meaning.
- D. I have found that a vision or image in the book of Revelation usually means whatever its OT counterpart means, that the meaning of a vision or image in the book of Revelation usually becomes very clear when we find and study its OT counterpart.
- E. A helpful parallel. The OT is like a guidebook you buy at an art museum so you can learn what the artists were trying to communicate with their paintings.

3. It means what it meant to its original recipients.

- A. Revelation was written in the first century during a time of persecution for the benefit of two types of Christians.
 - 1) The faithful. Revelation 2:9-10.
 - 2) The backsliding. Revelation 2:4-5, 14-16; 3:15-16, 19.
- B. Any interpretation that would have been meaningless or valueless to its original recipients cannot be valid. This is one reason why the premillennial view has no merit and must be rejected.

4. **The events in Revelation were for the most part going to soon take place.** Revelation 1:1-3; 22:7, 10, 12, 20.

5. **There is more than one kind of judgment.**

- A. Without question, there is only one final spiritual judgment. However, God has and I believe continues to come in temporal judgment against nations and individuals before the one final spiritual judgment.
- B. This is clear from a study of the OT where God came in judgment against Israel, Judah, Assyria, Babylon, Edom, etc. and from a study of the NT where God promised to come in judgment against Jerusalem, something He did exactly as He said He would do.
- C. Therefore, the judgment of Revelation, except likely for the one described in chapters 20-22, is one that occurred in the first century or shortly thereafter and one that happens any time Satan and his allies presume to fight against the Lord of Lords and His saints.

6. The message of Revelation is, “Glorious Victory In Christ, Horrible And Utter Defeat In Satan.”

7. Numbers have symbolic value.

- A. Seven stands for perfection. Therefore, six, falling short of seven, stands for imperfection. Thus, as holy, holy, holy (777) is an apt description of the Lord God Almighty, so 666 (“Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six” Revelation 13:18) is an apt description of Satan.
- B. Ten stands for fullness. Revelation 2:10; 6:9-11. Thus, 1000 years (Revelation 20:1-2), i.e. 10 X 10 X 10, is not a literal period of time, but an apt way of describing Satan’s defeat in any conflict he has with God. However, just because Satan has been fully defeated in a particular battle, doesn’t mean that He has given up fighting the war. Revelation 20:2-3; Luke 4:13.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

- Chapter 1. The glory of Christ.
- Chapters 2-3. The state of the church.
- Chapter 4. The glory of the Father.
- Chapter 5. The worthiness of Christ.
- Chapters 6-7. An overview of the conflict between good and evil from an earthly perspective.
- Chapters 8-11. The same conflict viewed with particular emphasis on God’s warnings of judgment to come.
- Chapters 12-14. An overview of the same conflict from a heavenly perspective.
- Chapters 15-16. The same conflict viewed with particular emphasis on God’s wrath in judgment.
- Chapters 17-19. The same conflict viewed with particular emphasis on Satan’s allies in the conflict.
- Chapters 20-22. The final conflict between good and evil.

Discussion: I have watched countless hours of films on World War 2. Although they are all about the same conflict, they hold my interest because they view it from different perspectives, i.e. from the view of the enlisted men, the officers, our enemies, the ground, the air, the sea, etc. It is my opinion that this is what we have in the book of Revelation. Five visions of the same conflict between good and evil viewed from several different points of view so we understand it as fully as we ought.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

- 1. **In every generation, there is a fierce battle going on between good and evil.** Revelation 12:17; 1 Peter 5:8.
- 2. **Satan is a formidable foe.** We can defeat Satan, but we must not underestimate our enemy.

- A. He is highly motivated. Revelation 12:12B.
- B. He has strong allies in government (sea beast—Rev 13:1-9; Dan 7:1-7, 15-17) and religion (land beast—Rev 13:11-17).
- C. He will cause the righteous to suffer. Revelation 2:10; 3:10. The latter is either a promise of deliverance from the hour of trial, or it is a promise of deliverance in the hour of trial (1 Corinthians 10:13). The latter is more likely. Jesus keeps us from succumbing to temptation if we keep His commands. Divine protection and human exertion go hand in hand.
- D. Deceit is his strongest weapon. Therefore, we must love truth above all else. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

- 3. **God is going to win the battle and the war.** Jesus is worthy.

- A. He can win. Revelation 5:1-10.
- B. He will win. Jesus will bless the faithful and punish the unfaithful. Revelation 7:13-17; 14:9-11.
- C. This should comfort us if we are giving our best to God and suffering for it. He knows us and will take care of us.
- D. However, this should frighten us if we are giving anything less than our best to the Master.

- 4. **God warns before He punishes.** Revelation 14:6-7. We are without excuse.

- 5. **Man is incredibly stubborn.** Revelation 9:20-21; 16:8-11.

6. A great way to study the book of Revelation.

- A. Find time when you have a couple of hours and sit down and read Revelation all the way through without stopping.
- B. When you are finished, you won’t have understood everything you’ve read, but you will come away with the clear message of the book.
- C. Namely, if you are on God’s side, you are going to win big. If you are on Satan’s side, you are going to lose big.
- D. The question for us all, therefore, is simple. Whose side are we on?