

Bible Study # 93
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Introduction to Revelation

This evening we are **going to be getting into the book of Revelation. I want to give you some background in regards to the book of Revelation, as well as an overview of the book and the material that is coming.**

The Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation. He was the last surviving of the original 12 apostles. He lived about 25-30 years beyond the other original apostles. The Apostle John, the last surviving of the Twelve, wrote the book of Revelation while he was in exile on the Isle of Patmos. This was during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian. From secular historical sources, we are able to date the couple of years that John was in exile. He was banished to Patmos, a tiny, little rocky island off the coast of ancient Asia Minor. John was exiled and banished from the mainland to a tiny island in the Mediterranean off the coast of modern-day Turkey.

We date the book of Revelation about 96 A.D. Conceivably, the date could vary a year, one way or the other. John was on Patmos for about two and one-half years or something like that, so we pick the middle date.

The first question we might look at has to do with the matter of John's authorship. Depending on which commentary you use and which sources you look at, you will find that many of the commentators, particularly the modern commentaries, will question that John wrote the book of Revelation. Let's look and understand why I say that he wrote the book of Revelation. There are several reasons for not questioning John's authorship.

To begin with, the fact that John was the author of the book of Revelation was never called into question until about 200 A.D. There's no record that there was a dispute. The book of Revelation itself clearly states that John wrote it. It starts out clearly stating that John wrote it. No one questioned until 200 A.D. that the John who wrote the book of Revelation was the John who was one of the Twelve. The questioning of John's authorship was never an issue or question in the area of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) at the time of the first century and for quite a number of centuries afterward.

This was primarily an area of Greek settlement. There were other areas, but this was a Greek-

speaking area. There was a very large Greek population that had colonized in that area.

If you remember, the book of Revelation was addressed to the seven Churches in cities in Asia Minor. Churches were located in cities that were on an ancient Roman mail route. The cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea were the ones that were specifically enumerated in Revelation. The Churches in those seven cities were the recipients of this book.

John had lived in Ephesus. It appears from the historical record that the city of Ephesus was where he lived during the latter years of his life.

The Apostle Paul raised up the Church in the area of Ephesus on his first evangelistic journey back in the late 40s A.D. It was the same area to which Timothy was later assigned responsibility. We find Timothy residing in Ephesus in the latter epistles of the Apostle Paul. Ephesus was an area that Paul visited on several occasions and had spent quite a bit of time there. It is the area where we find the Apostle John living in the 80s and 90s A.D. He was exiled from there by the emperor Domitian. About 98 A.D., he was allowed to return from exile on Patmos. He died within a relatively short period of time in or near Ephesus.

There's no record that any of the Churches in ancient Asia Minor or any of the Christian writers in that area ever disputed John's authorship. In those cities, it was taken for granted that John wrote the book of Revelation. The question of John's authorship was primarily raised after 200 A.D.

The original focus of that rejection was in the area of Alexandria, Egypt. The only reason they questioned John's authorship was to undermine the authority of the book or to remove it from the canon of Scripture. Of course, there were those in the area of Alexandria (and in Rome a little later) that certainly had incentive to do this.

There are various reasons why the book of Revelation was viewed as an undesirable book by the professing Christian church. What you find developing and what Revelation and other parts of the New Testament certainly make plain is that there is a clear dichotomy between two churches. One Church really was the Church Jesus Christ built—the Church of which He Himself was the living head, the Church that remained faithful to Jesus Christ and what He taught. A second church was a professing Christian church—a church that professed or acknowledged, on the one hand, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah (they acknowledged

that; they said that), but they didn't teach what He taught.

The professing Christian church substituted a message of their own devising. They substituted various heresies that were rampant in the Jewish world in the early first and second century A.D., along with the ideas of the Samaritans and some of the concepts that were extant in the pagan Greek and Roman world. All these heresies were brought into this other church.

There were two churches: one was a church that was certainly increasingly visible and powerful; the other was God's Church that was increasingly disappearing from public view.

2 Thessalonians 2:7, Paul wrote, "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work;" The mystery religion that deals with lawlessness and is based on lawlessness was already at work.

Jude 3, about 15 years after Paul wrote those words in 2 Thessalonians, Jude wrote and told the Christians, "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

This shows there was an increasing danger of the faith once delivered being lost and obscured because something else was increasingly dominant and visible.

In the last Bible study where we concluded the Old Testament period, we focused on the role of the Samaritans. We went forward to the New Testament and saw that there was a man by the name of Simon the Sorcerer or Simon the Magician. In secular history he is called Simon Magus. "Magus" is simply the Greek word for "magician" or "sorcerer." It's where we get our word "magician."

In Acts 8:9-13, we are simply told that this Simon was the religious leader of the Samaritan community. He was one to whom all of the Samaritans gave heed, from the greatest to the least. He was considered by them to be the great power of God. He was an individual who practiced sorcery and witchcraft and accomplished various false miracles. We are told that he bewitched the people of Samaria with sorceries. He was an individual of great renown. He was an individual who was impressed by the preaching of Philip, and he accepted (at least outwardly or seemingly) the message that Philip preached. When many of the Samaritans were baptized, Simon was baptized.

Verses 18-21, he sought to buy for himself a position of leadership. He sought to buy an

apostleship from the Apostle Peter. Peter told him, 'You have neither part nor lot with us.' "Part nor lot" was a phrase that specifically had reference to an apostleship, a membership in the group of the Twelve. The only other place that phrase is used in the New Testament is in Acts 1:24-26 where it refers to Matthias being chosen by *lot* to fill the *part* of Judas and be part of the Twelve.

Acts 8:21, so when Peter said, "You have neither part nor portion [KJV, "lot"] in this matter," that was the reference.

Verse 23, he told Simon, "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity [lawlessness]."

We looked at the Samaritans and the Samaritan religion at the last Bible study. This plays an important role because when you go through the book of Acts, you find that the core, the center, of the congregations that were raised up in the New Testament were in the Jewish community in various cities. Whether in Ephesus, Colosse, Rome or wherever—it might be throughout the Gentile world—the starting point still was in the synagogue.

As the Church expanded out of Judea and the immediate areas, still, the starting point was in the synagogue and the core of believers were Jews and Gentiles who attended the synagogue and listened to the law. There were many Gentiles who were sort of "hangers-on." They had not formally converted to Judaism and been circumcised, but they would regularly attend the Sabbath services and hear the law read. The original Christian community in any of these areas centered among the Jews who were converted and Gentiles, conversant with Judaism, who were converted. Then from there, other Gentiles were added in. You had a central core of people that were familiar with the law and the Scriptures.

That was possible because there was a Jewish Diaspora—in other words, a dispersion, a scattering of the Jewish community throughout the known world. It had happened because of the various captivities. God is able to take something that looks like a catastrophe and make something good and positive out of it. The captivities and the scattering of the Jewish community must have looked catastrophic to many and, yet, God took it and made something positive out of it. This scattering of the Jewish community throughout the Roman world meant that there was a nucleus in virtually any city of size. There were people who were conversant with the law and had access to the Scriptures.

You have to realize that access to the Scriptures was a key point. In many of these cities and locales, there was only one copy in the whole community, and that was in the synagogue. A lot of synagogues did not even have a complete copy of all the books of the Scriptures. They may have only had copies of the book of the Law (the five books of Moses) and perhaps portions of some of the others.

You have to realize it was a very expensive proposition. If you had to hire a scholar to sit down and copy out by hand a manuscript of the Bible, how expensive do you think an entire copy would be? How long would it take someone to sit down and copy out the whole thing by hand? You are probably looking at the equivalent of a year's wages. That would be at a professional level because the scribes of the law were some of the most educated people in the community. Otherwise, you would wound up with all sorts of errors creeping in. You are looking at something that was very expensive.

For an individual to have his own copy of the entire Bible would have cost a fortune. As a result, there would have been only a very, very few people who could have ever had such a thing. An individual would have to be very wealthy. In most cases, there were copies in the synagogue and people came in and studied there. They came in and had access to it there, and it was read on the Sabbath. They could come in through the week and have access to portions of it. It was important. That was the nucleus.

The point I am getting to is that while the Jewish community was the core and nucleus for the spreading of the Gospel and for the expansion of the true Church of God, there was another Diaspora that had taken place in the days of Alexander the Great. There was a Samaritan Diaspora, or dispersion; there was a scattering from the Samaritan community. The two centers of the Samaritan community outside of Samaria were in Alexandria, Egypt and Rome.

In Acts 8:10, we read that Simon was the religious leader of the Samaritans. He was the one to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, as being the great power of God. What we have to understand is that here is a man who had influence and was recognized wherever there was a Samaritan community. We went into a little bit of the background of the Samaritans in the last Bible study and in previous Bible studies. We must realize that while they outwardly acknowledged the name of God and identified with many things relating to the God of Israel and to the Scriptures, they, in reality,

practiced the customs and the traditions of the old Babylonian pagan religion. There were various Greek thoughts that had come in and even other ideas and philosophies added in. So, just as there was the true Church, there was also a "mystery of iniquity" that was already at work in the early days that ultimately became the great visible church that was dominant.

In the book of Revelation, the seat of apostasy is clearly identified as being Rome. That's one of the reasons why some of the early church fathers objected to the book of Revelation. They did not like it because the seat of apostasy is clear.

In Revelation 17, it talks about the great whore, a great fallen woman, a great prostitute.

Revelation 17:1, we are told, "...the great harlot who sits on many waters..." What is that?

Verse 15, "...The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues." Here is a great whore that is dominant over many different people, languages and nations.

Verse 3, it is pictured as riding the beast.

Verse 5, this is identified further, "And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

The true Church of God is pictured under the guise of a woman. The true Church is pictured as the virgin bride of Christ awaiting Jesus Christ. Here we have another woman who is pictured, but this time it is someone that would be typical of or a type of Jezebel, as opposed to Sarah.

Why do I say Rome is identified?

Verse 9, as we come down a little further, "Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits."

Verse 18, "And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."

Now which great city reigns over the kings of the earth and sits on seven literal mountains? Even in the first century you could figure that out. The great city that was predominant was Rome. Traditionally, Rome was called "the city of seven hills." Rome was built on seven hills. It was the city of seven hills. It was a city that reigned over the kings of the earth. It was the world capital. Really, it was the capital of the known world—of the Roman Empire.

In Revelation 17, we have a woman (a false church) who is identified with Rome. How many great cities reign over the kings of the earth and sit on seven hills? How many of those are you aware of? Certainly, with that description, it fits

into the first and second centuries. The identification of Rome as the seat of apostasy was clear enough that even early church commentators realized where it was, what was being addressed and who was being addressed. Therefore, you might realize that the book of Revelation was not particularly popular in Rome. It was not popular there because it pointed out Rome as the seat of apostasy.

Another factor is that by about 250 A.D., they began to get away from the understanding of the literal thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth. The book of Revelation teaches the literal thousand-year reign of Christ and the saints.

Revelation 5:10, “and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.” That’s pretty clear; it’s pretty plain. We will go through that in a couple of Bible studies.

Revelation 20:4, “...And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” It talks about the fact of the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ.

Verse 6, “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. ..., but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

As the false church (that ultimately developed into the Roman Catholic Church) grew in terms of influence in the Roman world, the teaching of the literal thousand-year rule of Christ and the saints was discarded. Certainly, by the time of the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, the teaching was discarded. It ultimately came to be viewed that the Kingdom of God was already here. The church was viewed as the Kingdom of God on earth.

Augustine, one of the early Catholic Church fathers in the fifth century A.D., wrote the book for which he is perhaps most well known entitled, *The City of God*. He makes the point that the church is the Kingdom of God on earth. Rome becomes the city of God and the Roman Empire is transformed. The book of Revelation clearly teaches the fact that the kingdoms of this world will collapse and be replaced by the government of God.

As the professing Christian church moved further and further in that direction and into political accommodation with the Roman Empire, the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth became increasingly an unpopular teaching. The literal proof of the Millennium began to be considered as simply an opinion or as one possible interpretation. Then, within a matter of years, it began to be regarded as sort of a curiosity or something that was a doubtful idea

and opinion. Within a matter of years after that, it was treated as absolute heresy and something that was contrary to teaching.

We have to realize that those who gave heed to Simon Magus and those in the areas of the Samaritan community accepted these fundamental errors. Fundamentally, their problem revolved around the authority of the law of God. The Samaritans had a tendency toward absorbing popular religious teachings and a melding of things together. They picked what was viewed as the best out of all of it and melded it together. That was the Babylonian approach and an approach the Samaritans had evidenced.

The fundamental problem was a problem with the law of God and with the necessity for literal obedience to the law of God. They got off track with that. The fundamental error was a misunderstanding of grace and a false teaching regarding the necessity to keep the commandments. Other heresies and other ideas came in. There were a variety of heresies and some of these various sects persecuted one another. They didn’t agree individually. There was one standard brand that sort of came out and became predominant.

During the time Constantine was emperor, there were various heresies in various parts. Constantine saw the potential of having one religion to unite the empire. The old Roman mythology was pretty well bankrupt. Nobody took it seriously. Many approaches to Christian teaching had spread. He saw there was a need for standardization and picked, as his brand, that which was promulgated by the bishop of Rome. He called the Council of Nicaea and basically presided over it. What came to be considered the Catholic Church derived much of the standardization from there. Various heresies that were extant in the pagan world were increasingly accepted and the heresies grew. They got further and further away from the truth. We, perhaps at some future time, will go through a Bible study on that. It’s very interesting as to how, once they began to get off track, they literally moved further and further away.

Revelation clearly teaches the literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. By the second century A.D., that was an unpopular doctrine. The book of Revelation is very Old Testament in flavor. There are at least 285 specific Old Testament references given in the book of Revelation. The Old Testament had fallen out of favor. Revelation certainly teaches obedience to the law of God.

Revelation 12:17, the true people of God are those identified as those, "...who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." The true people of God are clearly identified as commandment keepers. That wasn't a very popular teaching at the time the authority of the book of Revelation came to be questioned. There's no reason to question the authorship of the book of Revelation apart from trying to undermine the authority of the book. There was a clear agreement in the areas to which Revelation is addressed. There was never a dispute as to who wrote it. The dispute arose elsewhere at a later point in time.

The book of Revelation plays a very important part in the canon of the Bible. The canon is a set of books that are accepted as authoritative. There have been many books that have been written. There have been many books that have been written by servants of God, but everything that has been written was not chosen as a part of the canon of Scripture.

You can read in 1 Kings 4:32 about how many songs and proverbs Solomon wrote. You can look in the Bible and you don't find all of those. Solomon wrote a portion of the Bible, but everything he wrote isn't in the Bible. You find various prophets mentioned in the Old Testament for whom there's no book in the Old Testament. That's not to say that they didn't write letters or certain things, but God didn't preserve everything that any servant of His ever wrote.

There were specific things that God inspired to be preserved for His people for all times. Some things only had relevance to those people at that time. Elijah was a great prophet of God, but there's no book of Elijah preserved in the Scriptures. Elijah's message was, for the most part, a message that had relevance to his time, his age and his people. The portion of it that has relevance to us is preserved in 1 & 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. We have a little summary of Elijah's ministry and some examples but very little of what he preached. That was not primarily relevant for us, and God didn't see fit to preserve it.

Much of what Isaiah wrote is clearly preserved for us because it has relevance for us today that is far more relevant than the relevance it had at the time it was delivered. Certain books were chosen as a part of the canon of Scripture.

The book of Revelation clearly finishes up the canon of Scripture. Revelation clearly is the logical conclusion of the Bible. Just as Genesis begins the Bible, Revelation ends it. The book of

Revelation perfectly corresponds to the book of Genesis. The Bible starts in a logical place.

Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Where would you start with a book like the Bible? Well, you start in the beginning; that's a logical place to start. You could start it in a number of places, but that's where God chose to start and tell the story in a logical way.

We conclude with the book of Revelation. How does the book of Revelation perfectly correspond to the book of Genesis? Here are two books written in two different languages in completed form. Moses wrote the book of Genesis and completed it prior to 1400 B.C. The book of Revelation was completed just prior to 100 A.D. You are looking at 1,500 years. Fifteen hundred years is a long time.

Fifteen hundred years ago was just after the fall of the Roman Empire. I tell you what—there's a lot of "water under the bridge" in 1,500 years. How much do any of us know about what was going on 1,500 years ago? Here was a book that was written 1,500 years later than another book. It was written in a different language, in a different culture and different societal setting. Yet, **they perfectly correspond as the beginning and the end.**

Let's notice **one contrast**. The book of Genesis starts where?

Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The book of Genesis starts with the creation of the heavens and the earth. What does the book of Revelation end with?

Revelation 21:1, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea." Genesis starts with the fact that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; Revelation ends with the fact that the old heavens and earth pass away and a new heaven and a new earth come to be.

There is a **second contrast**. The book of Genesis, Genesis 2:9, opens with a tree in the midst of the garden, a tree that was called the tree of life. Genesis 3:22-24, we find man excluded from the garden. Why?

Genesis 3:22, "...lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever..." Man is excluded from the Garden of Eden. Man is excluded and cut off from access to the tree of life. Genesis begins with man's exile from access to the presence of the tree of life.

Revelation 22:2, we find, "In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree

of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” We have a description of a time when access is given to the tree of life. The book of Genesis opens with man being excluded from the tree of life; Revelation concludes with man being given access to the tree of life. The tree of life is made available. Again, we have this description.

Verse 14, “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.” We conclude the book of Revelation with access to the tree of life.

There is a **third contrast**. In Genesis, we find death introduced.

Genesis 2:17, “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Death is introduced in the book of Genesis. Death is abolished in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 21:4, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” We are told there will be no more death. Genesis opens with death being introduced; Revelation ends with death being abolished.

There is a **fourth contrast**. Genesis 3 introduces Satan’s deception of man.

Genesis 3:1-4, “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.”’ And the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die.’”

We open the book of Genesis with lies and deceptions promulgated by Satan the devil. We end the book of Revelation with the story of what’s going to happen to conclude Satan’s deception.

Revelation 20:1-3, “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.”

As we go through Revelation 20 and 21, we find that the consequences of Satan’s deception are concluded. Satan and his influence on mankind are ultimately and finally removed. Genesis opens with Satan’s deception; Revelation concludes with the final consequence and result of that deception.

Verses 14-15, ultimately, “Then Death and Hades [hell, the grave] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

There is a **fifth contrast** with Revelation and Genesis. The book of Genesis gives us the story of the removal of God’s government from the earth; Revelation concludes with the restoration of God’s government and the presence of God. Mankind elects to build his own society, his own culture, his own civilization cut off from God and under the sway of Satan’s deception. The book of Revelation concludes with the collapse and destruction of the civilization that man built.

In Genesis, we read of a city that had its beginnings with a tower—the Tower of Babel. If you look at Genesis 11 and 12, you have a story in contrast between two men who each had a vision of a city. In Genesis 11, you read of a man by the name of Nimrod who was looked to by others. We find that the beginning of his kingdom was Babel. He built the beginnings of Babylon. The story of the rest of the Bible—the story of mankind’s civilization, society and culture—is the story of Babylon.

Revelation 18:2, we read, “And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, ‘Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, is fallen, !...’” –The destruction of Babylon.

In Genesis 12, we read of a man who came from the area of Babylon, a man by the name of Abraham or Abram as he was known originally.

Genesis 12:1, “Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.’”

Verse 4, we are told, “So Abraham departed....” He left Babylon. He went to another place where he dwelt as a stranger, a pilgrim and a sojourner.

Hebrews 11:10 tells us, “for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

Verse 13, he died in faith, not having received the promises that he believed, and lived his life in anticipation of. The book of Revelation concludes with the destruction of Babylon, that final continuation of what Nimrod had begun.

In Revelation 21, we find New Jerusalem.

Revelation 21:2, “Then, I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,” –A city whose maker and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10), a city that has 12 foundations of the wall (Revelation 21:19-20). That is the city Abraham looked for throughout the period of his life and died in faith without ever having seen it.

We have a clear contrast. Genesis shows the beginning of man’s civilization and society cut off from the government of God; Revelation shows the collapse of that system and the restoration of the government of God to this earth. Genesis shows God’s government removed from the earth, and Revelation shows God’s government restored to the earth.

The **sixth contrast** has to do with the final fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham. In Genesis 12, Abraham was told to go out of his country.

Hebrews 11:8, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive for an inheritance.”

Verses 9-10, 13, we are told that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob dwelt as pilgrims and sojourners and they died in faith, not having received the promises. They looked for a city.

Verses 15-16, “And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country.” They sought a city whose maker and builder was God. The book of Revelation shows the final fulfillment and accomplishment of the promises of God. In Revelation, we finally see the fulfillment of the promises God made to Abraham beginning in Genesis 12. Genesis shows the promises made; Revelation shows the promises fulfilled.

The **seventh contrast**, we will note, is that the book of Genesis introduces curses; the book of Revelation abolishes curses. There are several curses that are mentioned in the book of Genesis. We will notice three. In Genesis 3, we have the deception and the sin of Adam and Eve. We have a curse pronounced. The first curse is pronounced.

Genesis 3:17-19, “Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, “You shall not eat of it”: Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the

sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground,”

The ground was cursed because of mankind’s sin.

In Genesis 4, we read of yet another curse. We find Cain murdering Abel.

Genesis 4:11-12, “So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.”

As we come forward, a little bit further in Genesis, we find the story of Noah. The sin of Canaan is described in Genesis 9. We find Canaan cursed.

Genesis 9:25, “Then he said: ‘Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren.’”

Genesis starts out with the introduction of curses on the human family. There are various curses. There were curses that were introduced on the very ground and its productivity and curses that were introduced upon branches of the human family because of sin. Curses are ultimately there because of sin.

When the book of Revelation concludes, we find that there will be no more curses. God removed the curses that were there.

Revelation 22:3, “And there shall be no more curse,”

If you go through, there are various curses that you can read. I just mentioned three. It might be interesting to go through the book of Genesis sometimes and look at the curses that were introduced. We are to realize that those curses will not be completely removed until the time of the new heavens and the new earth because curses are ultimately the consequences of sin.

Revelation tells us the end of the matter, just as Genesis tells us the beginning. Genesis tells us the beginning of sin and the curses that originated from sin; Revelation tells us the conclusion of God’s plan and the removal of those curses.

There are **four basic ways of interpreting the book of Revelation**. The **first approach** of those is called a **spiritual interpretation**. That may sound like the best because, after all, we do want to be spiritual, but that is not the case. The spiritual interpretation means spiritual as opposed to literal. It is an interpretation that originated in Alexandria. It is based on the concept of allegory. The Greeks had developed a practice of treating their earlier writings in mythologies as allegories. If you’ve read Greek mythology, you realize it’s the stuff of which

modern soap operas are made. The moral tone and character of it are sort of like “As the Stomach Turns” or whatever it is. “As the World Turns”—that’s what they call it. The point is that most of Greek and Roman mythology is about every sort of thing from rape, incest, murder, intrigue and lying. Just read the stories that Homer wrote, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, that Virgil, the Roman writer, wrote of the story, *The Enid* or when you read what Hesiod, another of the early Greek contemporaries of Homer, wrote of the basic myths of the Greek and Roman world.

In later centuries, they were a little bit embarrassed by this, so they developed a method of interpretation and treated it all as allegory. They said it was not meant to be taken as a literal story about people or about God. They said it was allegory and the names of the individuals were symbolic of various vices and virtues. That was the way they held on to the tradition of their mythology and, yet, got away from the embarrassment that was attached to the fact that such trash would be the best religious literature they could come up with. This was their approach. It became an approach toward interpretation and of treating things as an allegory.

That proved to be a very convenient method for some of the early writers, even in the Jewish and Samaritan communities in the early so-called Christian community because it was a convenient way of getting around the literal statements of the Bible. If you treat the Bible as an allegory, then you don’t have to literally take what it says. If you come across something that’s inconvenient to do or to believe, just treat it as an allegory.

The spiritual interpretation of Revelation originated in Alexandria. Alexandria was a seat of this sort of thing and this approach based on allegory. In other words, this approach overlooked the fact that Revelation claimed to be a prophecy. The primary Catholic approach to the interpretation of Revelation is that it is an allegory of the struggle between good and evil. If you were to consult a Catholic commentary, they would tell you that Revelation should primarily be understood as an allegory of the struggle between good and evil. If you treat it all as an allegory, then when it says there is going to be a thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth, that’s not saying He’s really going to reign a thousand years—that’s just an allegorical way of saying that good will eventually triumph over evil. They treat it as an allegory and get around having to

really examine what the text says. That was the approach that came to be introduced when they couldn’t actually get rid of it. It was too clearly attested to as a part of Scripture, so the approach was to treat it as an allegory. That was one way of interpreting it. You will find that mentioned in some of the commentaries.

There is a **second approach** that is commonly used by a lot of modern commentaries. I will give you the term. It is a technical term, but you may run across it if you read a commentary that deals with Revelation. It’s called “Praetorism”; that means the whole book of Revelation has already been fulfilled, that it was fulfilled at the persecution of Nero. They say, ‘When it talks about these seven heads and all of this, this is just talking about Roman emperors way back in the first century. It is saying that John was simply writing about this time and all the symbolism refers to what was going on in the Roman Empire—the problems the church was having in the first century, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and all this sort of thing. That’s all it is talking about.’

If you throw God out of the picture or if you don’t believe that God was inspiring something, you say, ‘Well, look, these people were simply writing about what was going on around them. They were writing about the events they were living through and John describes with hyperbole and with exaggeration. He describes in symbolic language specific things that were happening in the Roman Empire at the time. It’s not prophetic and there are all sorts of interpretations.’

Revelation 17:10, where it talks about the seven kings, it says, “...Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come.” Certain commentaries will even tell you this is talking about Roman emperors and that Nero is the ‘one that is,’ that there were five before him and then the next one after him. They say, ‘It’s just that things were so bad at the time of Nero that John thought that the world was going to come to an end at the time of Nero.’

Well, that’s silly and there are several reasons. It ignores all of the evidence that the true date of the book is about 30 years after Nero died. It would be sort of stupid for me to sit down and write a book about how World War II was the end of the world. It wouldn’t make a whole lot of sense. It’s a little bit late to come up with something like that now.

There’s plenty of evidence that clearly dates the fact that Revelation was written in the late 90s A.D. It was written at the time that John was in

exile on the isle of Patmos. There are even secular records that attest to the date that John was in exile on Patmos and the specific persecution in the reign of Domitian. There are even secular historical records of the reign of Domitian that specifically date the period of the exile of Christian leadership—the time John was exiled.

The book of Revelation claims a time setting as ‘the day of the Lord’ (Revelation 1:10). They cannot accept the book for what it claims to be. The book of Revelation clearly claims to be something far beyond merely the historical record of what was happening in Rome at the time. The Praetorist approach is primarily used by many of the modern and more secular commentators that really want to distance themselves from God and any specific revelation from God.

There is a **third approach** of interpreting the book of Revelation that is called the continuous historical approach. This claims that the book covers the whole period of church history from John until the present. What they try to do is to correlate the events that are described in Revelation with various historical events. The “abomination of desolation,” for instance, is often connected to the days that the Moslems built the Dome of the Rock on the site of the original temple. That is one point that is often made. It uses the historical approach. There is a tiny historical element in this approach, but there’s far too much emphasis on the historical. It’s the wrong thrust because the book of Revelation clearly says that its primary setting is the Day of the Lord (Revelation 1:10); the prophecies of Revelation center around the Day of the Lord.

A **fourth approach** of interpreting the book of Revelation is what’s called the futurist approach. This claims that the book is future and centered around the time of Christ’s return. This approach is the nearest to being correct. We will see more specifics on this as we go through the next Bible study. It will give you an idea.

Let’s look a little bit at what Revelation is.

Revelation 1:1, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John...”

Here is the “specific purpose statement” of the book. Everybody who’s been in Spokesman’s Club knows the importance of having an SPS (specific purpose statement). Here is John’s SPS. It clearly tells you exactly what Revelation is;

it is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. A lot of people say you can’t understand anything about Revelation. The word is “revelation.” It’s not the *concealing* of Jesus Christ; it’s the *revealing* of Jesus Christ. The word in Greek is “apocalypse.” It is where we get our term “apocalyptic.” “Apocalypse” is a Greek word for “revealing.” This is a revealing of information. You remember when Jesus ascended to heaven? The disciples asked Him, “How long?”

Acts 1:6-7, “Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.’” There were things that God had simply not revealed before.

Daniel concluded with a desire to know what his prophecies meant.

Daniel 12:8-9, “Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, ‘My lord, what shall be the end of these things?’ And he said, ‘Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.’”

Revelation provides the information that is necessary. It is the revelation. It is the revelation by the living resurrected Jesus Christ of information that God gave Him.

Revelation 1:1, God the Father allowed this to be revealed by Jesus Christ for the purpose of “...[showing] His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John...”

The book of Revelation records three things. That’s mentioned in verse 2. What did John bear witness (KJV, “record”) of?

Verse 2, “who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to all things that he saw.”

Three things: 1) “the word of God,” which is direct statements of God, the law of God which is the revelation of God, 2) “the testimony of Jesus Christ,” which is the things of which Jesus Christ bore witness to John, and 3) “to things that John saw,” which is John’s dream or vision.

In much of the book of Revelation, John wrote a description of what he saw. He had to describe it in a language of his day. If you or I were to see a movie and in that movie there were all sorts of things that we had never seen before, if we were describing it to somebody else, we would have to use terminology that had significance to us. We would say we saw something. ‘It was like this, yet, it was a little bit like that. It was sort of similar to something else and I saw it.’ We would have to use the vocabulary we have.

As new inventions have come along, of course, new words have had to be created for the language. If you were to go back 150 years and mention the word “automobile,” nobody would know what you meant. Certain words in the English language had origins in Latin. The term “auto” and “mobile” had their origin in the Latin language. “Auto” meant “self” and “mobile” had to do with “something that moved.” So, a new word was created out of words that already existed. Here was something that moved by itself, as opposed to being pulled by an animal. But if you were to use that word at an earlier time, they wouldn’t have known what you meant. That’s why when the automobile was first invented, many people referred to it as a horseless carriage.

Mr. Armstrong used to tell the story of when he was a little boy about six years old. One day his father said, ‘Quick, quick, come here and look. There’s a horseless carriage.’ That was something they had heard of but had never seen. He came running to the window to look out and here was a carriage that was hitched up to mules instead of horses. His father had a big laugh, ‘See, it’s a horseless carriage.’

The point is that John, with his vocabulary, had trouble describing what he saw. He had to describe what you read in Revelation in the vocabulary that he had, just as you and I would have to describe something we saw in the vocabulary we have. Many of the things he saw in vision were things that, at the time he lived, didn’t yet exist. He was transported in vision about 2,000 years into the future.

Revelation includes “the word of God,” what God said. It includes “the testimony that Jesus Christ bore,” the statements that He made to John. And it includes “the things that John saw.”

Revelation 1:10, the theme of the book of Revelation is given, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet...”

This expression “in the Spirit” has to do with receiving a vision or a revelation of God. The word that is translated “on” in verse 10 is from a Greek word that would be spelled “en.” Most times when that word is used in Greek, it is rendered by the English word “in.” This little word in Greek is pronounced “in,” only it is spelled “e-n.” Our word “in” is spelled “i-n.” The Greek word “en” is most commonly rendered by the English word “in” and it means “in” in the sense of “during the time of”—“in” in the sense of time, as opposed to “in” as inside

something. Our word “in” can have a variety of meanings. John says, ‘I was in the Spirit in (or during) the time of the Lord’s Day.’

Now, what is the Lord’s Day? Many of the Protestants like to quote Revelation 1:10 and say they don’t keep the Sabbath; they keep the Lord’s Day just like God does. Show me here anything that gives any indication whatsoever that it is talking about Sunday. There’s no place in the Bible that says Sunday or the first day of the week is the Lord’s Day. The point is that he is not talking about Sunday or Saturday. He’s not talking about either one. If you want to know what he is talking about, just turn back to the book of Joel.

Joel 1:15, “Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand; ...” Joel talks about the “day of the Lord.” Revelation talks about the “Lord’s Day.”

That is a distinction we make in English; it wouldn’t be an issue in French. If you were saying “the Lord’s Day” in French, it would literally translate as “the Day of the Lord.” We use the “s” for possessive in English. We use two different possessives in English. You can say either “Day of the Lord” or “Lord’s Day.” We have two ways of making the possession. You can say “John’s house” or “the house of John.” In the French language, as in many other languages, you don’t have that double type of possessive. A number of you speak French. The only way you translate it would be “Day of the Lord.”

Revelation 1:10, by the way, that’s the way a French Bible translates, “I was in the Spirit in the Day of the Lord,” which is exactly the way the Greek is, too. The Greek does not have “s.” The problem with Revelation 1:10 is a problem that only exists in English translations. If you were reading it in a French translation or in original Greek, it wouldn’t create the same problem.

It only creates a problem in English because some have tried to say that “Lord’s Day” means something totally different from “Day of the Lord.” They say it’s talking about Sunday. Where does it say anything about Sunday? It doesn’t mention first day, seventh day or any other day. John was in the Spirit; he was transported in the Spirit (in vision) forward to the time of the Day of the Lord. That’s the point of the book of Revelation. The theme of the book of Revelation is centering around the Day of the Lord. The book of Revelation isn’t centering around the Sabbath; it’s not centering around Sunday. It’s centering around that period in time of God’s intervention, the period when God steps

into history and intervenes in the affairs of man. It's called in Scripture by the general broad term "the Day of the Lord."

This is man's day—a time when God is pretty well keeping hands off except in specific cases where He might choose to intervene because He is working out a plan and a purpose. But, basically, this is the day of man. This is the time when man is pursuing his own way. The time is going to come when God will step into history.

Revelation centers on that Day of the Lord. Revelation 1:10 makes it very clear that the primary setting of the book of Revelation is prophetic. It is for a time in the future, centering around the time of Christ's intervention and return to the earth.

Revelation 1:1 shows that some of what is revealed consisted of things that were going to shortly take place. We are going to get into some of that next time. We are going to go into Revelation 2 and 3 that deal with the specific messages to the seven Churches. You will find there are story-flow chapters and inset chapters.

The first five chapters are sort of inset chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction.

Chapters 2 and 3 deal with a summary of the history of the Church from the time of the New Testament period all the way down to ahead of us.

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with a vision of heaven.

Chapter 6, we get into the story flow. Chapter 6 deals with the opening of the first six of the seven seals.

Chapter 7 is another inset which gives the story of the sealing of the 144,000.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 continue the story flow down through the events connected with the seventh seal.

Chapters 11, 12, 13 and 14 again are inset information.

Chapter 11 deals with the two witnesses.

Chapter 12, the true Church is protected in the wilderness.

Chapter 13 gives a description of the Beast.

Chapter 14 focuses on the 144,000 again.

Chapters 15 and 16 continue the story flow of the seven last plagues.

Chapters 17 and 18 again are insets.

Chapter 17 is about the Beast and the great whore.

Chapter 18 is the fall of Babylon the Great (or Rome).

Then the story flow is continued in chapters 19, 20 and 21.

Chapter 19 gives the marriage supper. It tells us about the marriage supper of the lamb.

Chapter 20 is about the Millennium and the Great White Throne.

Chapter 21 describes the new heavens and the new earth.

Chapter 22 is another inset with sort of concluding remarks.

If you follow the story down through, chapter 6 has the first six seals. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 have the description of the seventh seal (the seven trumpets). Chapters 15 and 16 have more description of the seven last plagues, which are a part of the seventh seal or the seventh trumpet of the seventh seal. Then chapter 19 tells what happens after that—the marriage supper. Chapter 20 is about the Millennium and the Great White Throne. Chapter 21 is about the new heavens and the new earth.

It just runs down in story flow with continual insets that sort of break into the story flow to give you information and details about something. We will go through that in detail in the following Bible studies.

The next Bible study we will cover the first three chapters of Revelation, primarily focusing on the message to each of the seven Churches.