

NUMBER 1 – Introduction

Revelation !!! – the very name turns people away. With all its imagery and numbers it is easy to cast it on one side and miss a precious gem. This is a book for Christians who are under pressure. It is written as a piece of apocalyptic literature which, because of its modern usage, tends to sound as if it’s out of this world. It sounds like impending doom but its original meaning was ‘revelatory’. This book reveals the glorious hope that we have as Christians. This world is not all there is – there is an eternal hope and that is in the person of Jesus. This reality was increasingly important in a day of growing persecution.

Take a look at verse 1

***‘The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place’***

1. The writer John puts Jesus front and centre from the start of his wonderful book.

Read chapter one and look for all the attributes of Jesus you can find there.

You may like to pray and thank God for sending Jesus and for all he has done for each of us.

The list of churches in v11 reminds us that Jesus is at the heart of his church. The fact that seven churches are mentioned does not mean there are only seven churches in Asia Minor (Turkey). ‘Seven’ means the whole church (apocalyptic imagery) but all seven are known to have existed. So, although the language contains imagery, the concept of Jesus at the heart of his church is real – it still is today.

1. Jesus (‘One like a son of man’ - Daniel 7:13) is seen among the lampstands

The golden sash (v13) – makes Jesus the great high priest (that’s what High Priests wore)

White like wool (v14) – suggests purity, wisdom and dignity

Eyes like blazing fire – penetrating insight

Sharp double-edged sword (v16) – symbol of divine judgement

These are just some of the images designed to give us a picture of Jesus’ character and role

Do any of the images surprise you?

Do they expand your understanding of Jesus?

But in amongst the grandeur, we see one who is to be worshipped (‘fall at his feet’ – v17) we see the Lord of compassion – ‘Do not be afraid’ (v17)

1. Look at the reasons Jesus gives as to why we should trust him. E.g., ‘the first and the last’

Is our image of Jesus too restricted?

Do we think of him as just ‘gentle Jesus meek and mild’?

Have we lost the glorious Jesus as expressed by John here?

What does it mean to ‘hold the keys of death and hell’ (v18)

How important is that he is ‘the first and last’ (v17)

Verses 19 and 20 are all about ‘7’

‘Seven stars in my right hand’ (v20) – the angels of the church

‘Seven golden lampstands’ – the seven churches

The ‘angels’ of the church can be interpreted as the leaders of the churches or as heavenly messengers to the church

1. Jesus acknowledges that churches need leaders. By this time leaders were experiencing persecution and cultural pressure. Leaders of churches still experience such things.

How can we help and support our ‘angels’?

What pressures are they under today?

You may like to stop and pray for our leaders.

For the rest of this study you need the accompanying sheet which is an analysis of the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. You should never assume that the letter to Ephesus is only written to that church. All churches should expect to read all the letters and see what applies to them.

The letters follow a pattern

1. They are all addressed to ‘the angel of the church in …’ This supports the idea that the ‘angels’ in 1:20 are the church leaders
2. John then describes an ‘attribute’ of the speaker (Jesus)
3. Then there is something which is commended (encouragement before criticism !!!)
4. But John is not afraid to bring an accusation where the church is failing
5. They then receive some advice
6. They all get told to listen to God’s word – if you’ve got ears, use them
7. The finish is always some assurance or encouragement to keep going

Some questions to help you through this

1. Does the order of each letter encourage us to talk to our sisters and brothers in a different way?
2. Look at the ‘Approval’ line and see what things would be commended in our group or in the whole church
3. What does it say about the two churches who have no approval?
4. Do any of the accusations fit our situation?
5. What does it say about the two churches with no accusation?
6. The ‘Advice’ line is well worth a look – be honest about the things you/we could learn from the advice given.
7. Read the ‘assurance’ line and enjoy the fact that this is what Jesus is saying to us
8. End with thanksgiving that this is what Jesus, by his Spirit, wants us to hear today

A POSSIBLE EXERCISE

Revelation has 22 chapters. Some of the imagery you may find difficult but we will be unpacking some of it in the coming weeks.

Try to read the WHOLE BOOK at one sitting – you probably won’t understand it all but you may begin to get the feel of what John is trying to say

Read it, in your imagination, as a believer in Ephesus waiting for a knock on the door to say that you’ve been arrested for being a Christian. Or maybe that you’ve lost your job because you go to that church up the road and not to the temple of Diana.

If you have a Study Bible you may find the footnotes help.

Write down the questions your read-through has raised and talk about them in your next group meeting

DON’T GIVE UP – once you get into it you will find Revelation such a blessing and in the end, you’ll get to the wonderful place where you’ll rest in Christ forever and all that is evil will be banished.