

# Explore: Jesus' revelation

July 6, 2015

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for July 19 focuses on Revelation 1:1-8.*

## **Introduction to Revelation**

The book of Revelation may be a daunting read for many people. Some may even shy away from the book due to the various interpretations among evangelicals. The book's cryptic nature seems to obscure our reading. While time and space do not permit this study to include every interpretation, there are common truths in Revelation on which we can agree. In other words, we don't need to be scared of Revelation. The book is indeed the inspired word of God and provides great encouragement to believers today.

It is necessary to offer some brief but highly important background information concerning our study in this great book. The book's title when transliterated from the original Greek is "Apocalypsis," or Apocalypse. An apocalyptic writing in the first century often included code words and symbolism used to express ideas. Sometimes apocalyptic writings even included pseudonymous names. Jewish writers began using the apocalyptic style around 200 B.C. to encourage the faithful during a period of social unrest. The style is intended both to conceal and to reveal certain aspects of historical significance in order for believers to stand firm in tough times.

Revelation also may be considered as a prophetic book. By "prophetic" we do not mean Revelation should be used as some sort of crystal ball. Biblical prophecy is "telling forth" the word of God. Such prophecy always will be consistent with other Scripture. Biblical prophecy also will indicate how believers ought to act when certain events come to pass. Certain visions and symbols will represent orthodox principles, ideas and ethical virtues in

true biblical prophecy.

A number of varying interpretations of the apocalyptic and prophetic elements in Revelation have risen to prominence over the past few hundred years. One approach advocates for a thoroughly figurative interpretation of John's symbolism and prophecy. Another approach views John's writing through a more literal lens. Some suggest every number, name and symbol has a unique corollary both in John's day and in ours. A third approach struggles with the idea of the book's historical setting. Was John writing just for people in his day, or was he writing about events that have not yet occurred? If the events have yet to happen, when will they occur?

The Baptist doctrine of the priesthood of the believer becomes highly valuable at this point. In other words, we must utilize all of the biblical interpretative tools at our disposal, carefully study God's Word both individually and collectively with other believers, and make an informed decision regarding interpreting Revelation for ourselves, based on the power and illumination of the Holy Spirit. We will use this type of approach in the following study.

### **Jesus is revealed (1:1-3)**

Chapter 1 seems to be the most straightforward portion of the entire book. The first three verses either reveal John's thesis or offer a summation of the book. Notice God himself gave this prophecy through Jesus Christ by using an angel as the instrument for delivering the message to John. Notice the book concerns things that "must soon take place." There seems to be urgency about God's revelation to John. Jesus is coming back soon, and there will be a decisive conflict between evil and good. Will God win? Of course God wins, but believers must endure to the end as well as get the word about the gospel out to the masses quickly. Time is short, and God has a great plan for bringing the created order to its consummation.

Some may scoff at the urgency perceived in the phrases that point to Jesus' imminent return. This kind of skepticism, however, cannot be founded in the biblical message at this point. In verse 3, we find the first of seven beatitudes in Revelation that indicate the urgency and the brevity of our time to be ambassadors for Christ in the world. Believers will be blessed when they hear, consider and do God's truth as contained in Revelation. God is revealing his plan to us in order for us to step up not only our missional efforts, but also our boldness in living for Christ.

### **Revered and returning (1:4-8)**

Verses 4-8 involve a direct address to John concerning seven churches in the Asian portion of the Roman Empire—churches with whom John would have been quite familiar. The number seven in ancient apocalyptic writings often indicates wholeness or completion. The number is the most widely used in Revelation. We can safely say John's writing is not only for the historical churches in Asia, but also for the Christian church as a whole that exists today.

The verses read much like a doxology. Jesus is worthy of reverence because of who he is and what he has done for the believer through his death and resurrection. The Bible promises Jesus' timely return. All people, even those who are not believers, will see this return of Christ. This does not mean, however, all people eventually will be saved. When Christ comes again, it will be too late for those who denied him.

Verse 8 concludes the passage with the truth Jesus is the everlasting God. The Greek term for "Almighty God" is transliterated "pantokrator." This was a military term in the first century and described the most powerful, sovereign and divine status for a ruler of the day. In other words, God is more powerful than any other ruler or kingdom. Caesar is not the Lord. Jesus is. God will have the final word.