

An Introduction to The Revelation
Series: Between a Rock and a Hard Place
January 3, 2021

- I. Putting Revelation in Context
 - A. Immediate context
 - B. Context of the larger story of redemptive history
- II. **Messianic Expectations**
 - A. The Jews were looking for the Messiah
 - 1. And what a Messiah He would be
 - B. Jews were an oft-persecuted people; history of oppression
 - 1. God promised them a land through Abraham
 - a. Abraham had journeyed to the land, but never owned any of it except his own burial place
 - b. Certainly, he and his family never lost sight of the promise that God gave them of a land
 - c. Eventually, descendants of Abraham, Jacob's family, ended up, not in Canaan, but in Egypt
 - 2. Egypt – grew from a family to a nation
 - a. Increasingly oppressed by the Egyptians
 - b. Cried out for relief
 - c. God raised up **Moses**
 - (1) No Messiah, but certainly a type of Messiah
 - (2) Delivered them out of bondage and oppression
 - 3. Canaan
 - a. Enjoyed a couple of generations in which they had command over the land
 - b. Wasn't long before their own sin, unfaithfulness and disobedience, led to their further oppression by the remaining peoples in Canaan
 - c. Judges records about a dozen cycles which, according to God's warnings, the people engaged in sin, God gave them over to their enemies (Philistines, Moabites, etc.), the enemies oppressed them within the land God had given them, they cried out for help, and God raised up a judge to rescue them
 - (1) **Judges** were not Messiahs, but again, a certain type of Messiah
 - (2) Delivered the people out of oppression and bondage and reestablished them within the land God had given them
 - d. Unfortunately, the cycles of oppression recorded in Judges keep getting worse and worse
 - e. Israel comes to believe that in order to be established in the land they really need a **king**
 - (1) After all, all the other nations have kings
 - (2) Israel didn't; they were supposed to function as a theocracy;

God would be king

(3) It wasn't working out that way

(4) They cried out for a king

4. Period of the kings
 - a. God relented; if they want a king, give them a king
 - b. Under Samuel, the final judge, God arranges for a king
 - c. The first is Saul, who became the very image of the problems Israel would encounter by having human kings
 - d. Saul was replaced by **David**, a man after God's own heart
 - (1) Became the image, or type, of king that Israel would long for, and indeed still longs for
 - e. David was able to consolidate his power within Israel, defeating enemies within
 - f. Also able to defeat enemies without, establish the kingdom of Israel in Canaan
 - g. Came a point in time, when peace reigned under David, that David wanted to build a permanent Sanctuary for God
 - h. **2 Samuel 7.1-17**
 - (1) God tells David (through Nathan) that He doesn't want David to build Him a house; David's son would do the deed
 - (2) God makes extraordinary promises to David
 - (a) Some promises were to be fulfilled in the near future, in the lifetime of his son
 - (b) Others couldn't possibly be fulfilled in that time frame; much more absolute, universal, eternal character to them
 - (c) **Throne of the kingdom would be established forever**
 - (3) Such a glorious beginning with great promise for the future, as God would establish a king and kingdom in the land He had promised Israel
 - i. The promises didn't seem to last long
 - (1) After David's son, Solomon, died, the kingdom split into two
 - (a) Israel – northern 10 tribes, centered in Samaria
 - (b) Judah – southern 2 tribes, centered in Jerusalem
 - j. Many of the kings of this period were wicked
 - (1) Northern more than southern
 - (2) But enough wickedness for everyone
 - k. According to God's warnings, God judged their sin by removing, not just their kingdom from them, but even them from the land
 - (1) Northern kingdom fell in **722 B.C.**; overrun by the Assyrians, who deported much of the wealth and talent and repopulated Samaria with some of their own; ended up with a mixed race of people under obligation to a foreign power
 - (2) Southern kingdom fell in **586 B.C.**; better part of the nation

exiled to Babylon

1. The people, once again, oppressed, longed again for the land and for the kingdom
5. **Restoration** to the land
 - a. Cyrus, king of Persia, defeated Babylon; gave opportunity for the Jews to return to their land, rebuild the city and the temple
 - b. Returned under **Ezra and Nehemiah**
 - c. Engaged in extraordinary rebuilding project
 - d. Israel established a certain dominion over their land
 - (1) Not ever complete during that period
 - (2) Probably the result of incomplete revival
 - e. Eventually Palestine became controlled first by **Greece**, finally by the heavy hand of **Rome**
 - f. Roman control was the context for the 1st Century, the time when Jesus arrived on the scene
- C. Imagine, then, what the Jews were looking for in a Messiah during the 1st Century
 1. **Political, military leader** who would overthrow the yoke of the oppressive Roman government
 - a. Like Moses had done with the Egyptians
 - b. Like Joshua and the Judges had done to the Canaanites
 - c. Like David had done to various peoples inside and outside of Canaan
 2. Began to see Messianic Psalms only in terms of military success and power
 - a. Ex: **Psalm 2**
 - b. Psalm 2:8–9 (NASB95) — 8 ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession. 9 ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.’ ”
- D. **Jesus** comes onto the scene; He’s the Messiah, but not that kind of Messiah
 1. Generally downplays the title of Messiah
 - a. Not because He isn’t; because the word Messiah means different things to them compared to Him
 - b. His mission is far more significant than merely establishing a kingdom for the Jews in the land of Palestine
 - c. The land is nice, but Jesus came, not to redeem Palestine
 - (1) He came to redeem the world
 - d. Conquering earthly enemies is nice, but Jesus didn’t come to defeat the Romans
 - (1) His kingdom was not of this world
 - (2) He came to defeat the enemies of our souls
 - (a) World
 - (b) Flesh
 - (c) Devil
 - e. We see what theologians call **“the Messianic secret”**
 - (1) Jesus never denied His messiahship

- (2) But He usually described Himself very differently
2. Ex: **Matthew 16:13-23**
- a. Peter's confession is correct (Christ, the Son of the Living God): God has revealed it to him
 - b. But Jesus warns them not to tell anyone!
 - c. Then tells disciples he has to suffer
 - d. Doesn't sound like a political-military messiah to them
 - e. Peter rebukes Jesus
 - f. Jesus tells Peter, "Get behind me, Satan"
 - g. Satan had already tempted Jesus to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world
 - (1) Jesus would have none of it
 - (2) He had a different role to play
 - (3) He had come to suffer and die
3. Hard lesson for the disciples to learn
- a. Indeed, some of them never completely learned it
 - b. **Acts 1.6-8**
 - (1) Jesus was teaching them about the kingdom
 - (2) They wanted to know whether Jesus was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at this time
 - (3) Jesus said they had no right to know times or dates
 - c. **Acts 1.9-11**
 - (1) Angels: He's coming back
 - (a) Maybe then He will establish His kingdom!
- E. Gospel proclaimed, church expands
1. Christians in Jerusalem are persecuted; scattered all over Palestine
 - a. Preach the gospel there; many converted
 2. Church in Antioch (Syria) sends out missionaries
 - a. Paul and Barnabus
 - b. Go through Asia Minor, into Europe, all the way to Rome
 - c. Plant churches
 - (1) Usually mixed body, Jews and Gentiles
 - (2) Jews remember their history of oppression
 - (3) Gentiles begin to feel what that oppression is like; persecuted from time to time
 - (4) Extent of persecution varied from place to place
 3. Among the churches are seven in **Asia Minor** (Turkey)
 - a. Ephesus
 - b. Smyrna
 - c. Pergamum
 - d. Thyatira
 - e. Sardis
 - f. Philadelphia
 - g. Laodicea
 4. Taught these churches; wrote to these churches

- a. Messiah was coming back
- b. **1 Thessalonians 4:16–17** (NASB95) — 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.
- c. When Messiah comes it will involve judgment of the ungodly
- d. **1 Thessalonians 5:2–3** (NASB95) — 2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3 While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.
- e. **2 Thessalonians 1:6–10** (NASB95) — 6 For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.

III. These churches believed that

- A. They looked forward to that day
 - 1. They would be relieved of their suffering and affliction
 - 2. They would be vindicated
 - 3. The enemies of God would be destroyed
 - 4. The kingdom in its fullness would come
- B. There is every indication that they believed this would happen in their lifetimes
 - 1. **2 Thessalonians 1:6–8** (NASB95) — 6 For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted **and to us as well** when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.
 - 2. Paul fully expected to be included in this vindication when he wrote this letter in the mid ‘60’s
- C. But more than 30 years had gone by
 - 1. **Jesus hadn’t returned**
 - 2. Things didn’t seem to be going all that well
 - a. There was growth; but they were still small
 - (1) Always a minority
 - b. Some of the churches had internal problems

- c. Some of the churches were undergoing persecution
 - d. Seemed to most of them that wickedness and evil was proliferating
 - (1) Never seemed to be able to get a handle on it
 - (2) Usually seemed to be beyond anyone's control
 - 3. Frustrating
 - a. 30 years is a long time
 - (1) A lot of patience is required
 - b. A lot of people are starting to say that Jesus isn't coming back
 - c. Some people are saying He already has come back and you missed it!
 - 4. Plus, the churches aren't always helping themselves
 - a. Some have internal conflicts
 - b. Some have flirted with idolatry
 - c. Some have grown cold
 - d. Some are outright rebellious, even apostate
 - D. What is it that churches like that need?
 - 1. They need **The Book of Revelation**
 - a. The book of Revelation was written to churches just like that
 - (1) Small
 - (2) Struggling
 - (3) Persecuted
 - (4) Sometimes sinful
 - (5) In the midst of a culture that was headed for destruction
 - 2. It was written for them
 - a. Must never forget that
- IV. But it was also written for us
 - A. We are small
 - B. We are struggling
 - C. We are persecuted
 - 1. Many places in the world are desperately persecuted
 - 2. Not so much in this country
 - a. But increasingly so
 - D. In the midst of a culture that is headed for destruction
 - 1. What a great country we have!
 - a. Can't drive through a major city after dark without taking life into your hands
 - b. Afraid to travel overseas to various countries for fear of armed conflict or terrorism, but more young people kill each other in our cities every day than terrorists kill in a year
 - c. Have more lawyers per capita than any country in the world; our claim to fame is that we know how to sue each other
 - d. Technologically sophisticated, which means we can proliferate pornography and hate over the internet better than any other country in the world
 - e. Public schools have declined in practically every measure, from

violence to academic achievement to moral behavior; whatever the education establishment seeks to do seems to have little or no effect; indeed, the academic establishment seems bent on destroying the Judeo-Christian moral framework on which our nation was built

- f. Lately, academia has become a bastion of the suppression of speech
- E. That's where we are
 - 1. Many people in the church claim to know what the church needs
 - a. Many suggestions are good
 - 2. But the first thing we need is a word from God
 - a. Revelation is a word from God
 - b. Directed to churches like those in Asia Minor
 - (1) Small
 - (2) Struggling
 - (3) Persecuted
 - (4) Midst of culture that is declining
 - c. Directed to churches like ours
 - 3. Trust that you'll read this book as the word from God
 - a. For us
 - b. In this time
 - c. In this place
 - d. It's just what we need
- F. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches...