

The Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation, as all New Testament books, was written for churches in the first century to describe and deal with the problems they faced. Revelation differs in that it is written in visions and symbols, but the message was still a contemporary one.

The writer, John, tells us, for example, that the events described in the book were "shortly to come to pass" and that the "time is at hand." He makes this point to his readers at the beginning (1:1, 3) and at the end of the book (22:6, 10).

The apostle then addresses the book and its message to "seven churches that are of Asia" (1:4). The Spirit told him: "What thou seest, write in a book and send it to the seven churches: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea" (1:11).

After penning a letter to each of the seven churches, he begins in visions and pictorial language to write about how these churches were suffering persecution, being imprisoned, and even put to death "for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." In the fifth seal he describes the blood of these martyred brethren, which was under the altar of sacrifice crying out to God to avenge their cause with wrath against their adversary (1:9; 6:9-11).

He describes their enemy as a beast come out of the sea who had received his power and authority from Satan. This enemy is helped by a beast coming up out of the earth - a beast with horns of a lamb but the voice of the dragon. These represent an evil power in the first century that was persecuting and putting to death all who would not receive its mark and bow before it (Chapter 13).

Some would identify this as the persecuting power of the Jews and others say it is the evil opposition of Rome. Regardless of its identity, it was a wicked enemy that the churches of the first century faced. The book ends with the defeat of this adversary and the victory of the martyred saints who reign with Christ (Chapters 19-20).

The point of the book is clear: God's faithful children will find victory in Jesus - even if they die for their faith at the hands of ungodly men who serve Satan in an effort to destroy the church of the Lord.

The message of the book is likewise simple: the glorified Jesus, pictured among the seven lampstands, declares to the saints in tribulation, "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades" (1:17-18). Jesus suffered and died but was victorious over death, and has the keys of victory for those in him.

Revelation does not describe modern nations and events, but struggles brethren of the first century endured and overcame through Christ.

- by L. A. Stauffer

"Hard To Understand"

". . . our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." - 2 Peter 3:15-16

Does this passage say that Bible study and true understanding is out of reach for most of us? Not at all! We should reread the verses carefully and think about the matter.

What the passage does not say:

- That some of Paul's writings are impossible to understand
- That all of Paul's writings are hard to understand
- That Paul's writings are unclear or uncertain
- That all Scripture is hard to understand

What the passage does say:

- Paul's writings are part of the Scriptures

- Paul wrote according to the wisdom given him
- Some of what Paul wrote was hard to understand
- All Scripture can be twisted by the untaught and unstable
- The result can be our destruction, fall, being led away with error

The problem is not with Scripture. It is often with us! It may be our level of spiritual maturity. It may be our reluctance to accept the truth. It may be our surrender to the views of others. It may be our tendency to read too much in a passage. It may be our failure to search the other Scriptures to have an overall grasp of God's will. That some Bible matters are more difficult than others calls for our more careful attention, not for our surrender. That is how we "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior" (2 Peter 3:18).

- by Robert Hines

How Does The Spirit "Bear Witness?"

Romans 8:16 says, "*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*" The big question is, of course, how does He do this?

There are many that would suggest that the Spirit "bears witness" by means of some better-felt-than-told experience. Usually we are given an account of some episode that left the person with an overwhelming emotional feeling. Because of this experience the person claims salvation and is certain that it was the work of the Spirit that caused it all to happen.

There are some problems with this approach. First, as we study cases of conversion in the New Testament, we find not a single case of an individual who was saved through such an experience. In cases where individuals actually had supernatural "experiences," they still had to hear the Word and obey its commands. (Saul - Acts 9; Cornelius - Acts 10; the Jailer - Acts 16, etc.)

Also, we are puzzled by the fact that various individuals who claim to have experienced this confirmation of the Spirit have differing views on fundamental doctrinal issues. We wonder how that could be if they are truly receiving some action directly from the Holy Spirit. Do you see the problem?

So, how does the Spirit "bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God?" How can we have this confidence and confirmation of the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit through inspiration produced the written word of God. When we compare our lives with that perfect revelation, we are able to see if we have done those things that are commanded in order to be a child of God. Have you believed (Heb. 11:6), repented of sins (Lk. 13:3), confessed faith in Christ (Rom. 10:10), and been baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)? Do you continue to faithfully serve the Lord (Rev. 2:10)? If so, the Spirit "bears witness" through the Scriptures that you are a child of God.

- by Greg Gwin