

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 52: Revelation, *The Apocalypse*

Welcome to Week 52 of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and for one last time I've been here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

Yep, this is it, week 52. And what a way to end not just this trip that we've taken together, but what a way that God put His Word together to end the entire Bible with his amazing book, this astonishing book, this at times, very confusing book. But ultimately, this very hopeful book that we know is the book of Revelation. In this study, today, I want to walk you through how to get the most out of this book, by hopefully peeling away a lot of the confusion. And by simplifying it in ways that you never thought it might have been simplified before. After this, I encourage you to start the series again. But for today, let's take a look at this last astonishing book.

Let's get right to it. And I'm not going to walk through this book the way I've typically gone through the previous books by going through the entire thing section by section or chapter by chapter, Revelation is far too complicated. For that I actually did an entire video series on the book of Revelation, a 24 part video series, plus a couple of bonus episodes on YouTube. And at the end of this episode, I will tell you where to go to get that and the link to get to that as in the show notes. If you really, really want to go deep in Revelation, I've done a very, very thorough study on that, that I encourage you to follow up with. But for today, we're gonna give you the basic ideas that will help you demystify this book and help you simplify your approach to it and make it far less scary and far more hopeful when you do read it for yourself.

First of all, who wrote the book? Well, it was given to and written by the disciple John. And yes, it's the same John, that was one of the 12 disciples, the same John that took care of Mary after Jesus was crucified, the same John who wrote the Gospel of John, and who wrote the three letters of first, second and third, John. He was probably the only one of the 12 disciples still alive by the time he wrote the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is really unique in a lot of ways, but not the least of which is because it offers a blessing for those who read and hear it and who take its message to heart. It's the only book of the Bible that offers that. And you'll see that when you get to the third verse of chapter one.

But before we get to that, let's take a look right from the very beginning. The book opens by giving us its title. The first five words of the book are this, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ". Just like Genesis 1:1 sets the stage with, in the beginning, God, the last book of the Bible sets the stage with the revelation of Jesus Christ. That is really the title of the book, in a lot of translations. A lot of the books you might have on your shelf or on an app, it will be called Revelation, or the revelation, sometimes the Revelation of John, but that's not its title, its title is the first five words, it's the revelation of Jesus Christ. And I'm convinced that many of the Miss readings we've had of this book over the centuries, has been from not paying attention to this title.

So let's break down the title because it will really help you in your understanding of reading the book this week. First of all, it's "The Revelation". The word revelation in the original Greek is the word apocalypse. That's a word we've heard before, right? Today, when we think of something that's apocalyptic, or an apocalypse, we think of complete collapse, we think of the

zombie apocalypse, right? Where everything's ending, and everything's a total mess. That, in fact, is not what the word apocalypse means, at least not originally in the original Greek. apocalypse comes from two Greek words, apo, which means away from and collapses, which means the veil.

So Apocalypse means to remove the veil from something. we've redefined it as meaning the end of the world, but that's not what it meant here. What it's saying is, this is removing the veil from Jesus Christ. That's literally the title of the book, the removal of the veil from Jesus Christ. Okay. So that's what we're looking for. As we go through this. We're looking for how does this reveal Jesus to us? If you're in the middle of revelation at any point, and you get confused, and you don't know what's going on, and maybe it gets scary. pause for a moment and ask yourself, What does this show me about Jesus? That's the whole point of the book.

Now, if that's what it is, why is it so weird? I mean, it's a weird book. Okay, here's why. It was written in what's called the apocalyptic style. From about 100, and well, from about 400 BC to about 150 AD, a period of 5, 6, 700 years or so the apocalyptic style gained some popularity. And what it is, is this, the apocalyptic style of writing is actually a literary code. A couple of times as we've gone through these 52 weeks together, I've shared with you that we read different parts of the Bible in different ways: you read poetry differently than you read history, different than you read biography differently than you read a letter from one person to another.

We know that in our everyday reading of things, you don't read a novel the same way you read a textbook the same way you read a letter from a friend, and we automatically make those adjustments as an example, okay? In apocalyptic literature, because it's written as a code, everything in it is filled with symbols, it is intentionally symbolic.

So again, way back in the beginning, we talked about this, we do not approach the Bible, literally, nobody does. literally nobody approaches the Bible, literally. If we did, then every time it mentions the field, the trees of the fields will clap their hands, we'd have to look for hands on trees. That's what literal means. We take the Bible seriously. We take the miracles, literally, because they were written to be given literally, but we read the Bible contextually. That is, we read each book as the book was intended to be taken. We read the poetry as poetry, we read the history as history, okay. And we read this prophecy and apocalyptic prophecy in the way it was intended to be written. For instance, the phrase as bright as the sun means one thing if you're reading an astronomy book, but it means something completely different in a love letter. Right?

So take a look at Revelation. Revelation has a dragon. Now, if the dragon was in one of the Bible's history books, we would do well to look for dragon bones in some far east desert. But in Revelation, because it's filled with symbols, the dragon in Revelation is a coded metaphor, it's a symbol for something else. So when you read through Revelation, you're going to read about the moon made of blood, a beast with seven heads and 10 horns, right? You're going to, you're going to read about the sea of glass mixed with fire, don't let these things freak you out. The moon cannot literally turn to blood because it wouldn't hang in space if it was made out of blood. Okay? Don't worry about these things. They are symbols to point us to greater truths. Why do we do this to Revelation and not to Genesis, because Genesis is written as history and we read it as history. Revelation is written as prophecy and is written in an apocalyptic code. It's written symbolically. So we read it symbolically, you got to read each book in the way it was intended to be read.

So if revelation is in code, how do we crack the code? This has been something that teachers have talked about for 2000 years now, ever since it was written, people have come along and said, I've got the key to, you know, "I've got the decoder ring to Revelation." So once the decoder ring to Revelation, and if anybody gives you that "I've just discovered something that nobody's ever seen before. And I've got this way of counting the numbers backwards and inside out", walk away. The key to cracking revelation is really simple. It's this: know the rest of the Bible really well. That's the key. The book of Revelation was written with symbols, and the symbols are taken from the rest of the Bible. Why? Because the book of Revelation was written to Jewish people who were under the domination of the Roman Empire. The Jews knew the Old Testament, the Romans did not. So John uses symbols, and passages and ideas, and word pictures from the Old Testament, so that when the Jews read it, they would go, Oh, I know what that means, that's from Ezekiel. But the Roman would read it and just scratch their head and go, I don't know what that means at all, because they didn't know the Old Testament.

So the code that cracks the book of Revelation is not some weird computer code that somebody just figured out today are something that somebody wants to sell you in a book that only they've discovered, no, the code is what we just read the first 51 weeks. The rest of the Bible, Genesis through Jude, but especially Genesis through Malikai, is the code that will unlock the book of Revelation. This is one of the many reasons why it's important to know the Bible. The more you know the Bible, the more you can understand the Bible. The Bible decodes itself. Okay, and one last word on the word revelation before we move on to something else. Revelation is an unveiling, and not a veiling. It is not designed to cover Jesus, this is designed to remove the veil. So always look for Jesus. The purpose of Revelation is to reveal Jesus to us.

Actually, I said one last word on Revelation, and that's not the last word on Revelation. Here is the last word on the word revelation before we move on to something else, it's revelation, not revelations. It's a typical thing that people will do and talk about the Book of Revelations. There's no book of Revelations. There's never been a book of Revelations. It's a book of Revelation. And the reason that matters, it's not just simply, me being picky about one letter. If it's revelations, then it's revealing many things, many revelations about many things. It's not many revelations about many things. It is one revelation about one person, it is the revelation of Jesus Christ. And when we say revelations, or when we take it as revelations, and we're looking for multiple answers to multiple things, and multiple things being revealed, we will miss out on what it's about. It is a singular revelation of a singular individual. It is the singular revelation of the singular person of Jesus Christ. That's the point of it. Okay, so don't forget about that.

Now, why would they have to write this in a code? Well, we talked about already, it was written to the Jewish people who were under persecution, especially by the time the book of Revelation was written, they were undergoing severe persecution. John says that he wrote it on the island of Patmos, for the gospel of Christ. The island of Patmos was actually a prison island, where political prisoners were sent, including Christians, who were being exiled to Patmos because of their faith. So was John there as a prisoner, or was John there to minister to the prisoners, we don't know.

Whichever way it was, he was literally on a prison island. When he wrote this, the persecution was real, and it was severe. By the time John writes this, he's writing it not to confuse Christians, but to give us hope. The ultimate message of the book of Revelation is that

through Christ, all things will be made well, and all things will be reconciled to God. So don't get mired down in the details. Don't get afraid of the weird word pictures and the symbols don't get don't get freaked out by any of that. The symbols are there in order to confuse and scare Romans, and encourage Christians, Christians who knew the Bible are going to be more encouraged by revelation. Christians who don't know the Bible are going to be confused and frightened by the book of Revelation. Why? Because that's kind of how it was designed. It was designed to confuse and scare people who don't know Scripture. And it was designed to encourage people who do know scripture, so know what's happening in Scripture.

So what's it pointing to? Is it? Is it a book of the future? Is it a book of the past? What's it all about? Well, chapter one, verse one, after it says, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, it says this, which God gave him, to show his servants, what must soon take place. So we know this from the first verse, that we know that it was given from God the Father, we know that it was given to Jesus the Son, we know that it is a message through Jesus for us about Jesus. And it's about events that must soon take place, which means it's about future events. So it's from God, to Jesus, about Jesus for us about the future.

The question then that a lot of theologians have inappropriately, so is, is it about the future to the people who were reading it when it was originally written? And that future is now passed to us 2000 years later? Or is that future still the future to us? And my answer to that is, yes, both. And there are aspects of the book of Revelation that are about the overcoming of the Roman Empire. And there are aspects of it that are about the Second Coming of Jesus that have not happened yet. So while the Gospels show us Jesus in past history, Revelation, most of the pictures in Revelation are about Jesus and future history about when He comes again, to make all things right.

But yes, there are also aspects of Revelation, you can read and go, Well, that sounds like the overturning of the Roman Empire. And yes, that's true, too. Most prophecies in the Bible have a double meaning, one for the fairly immediate future of the people who wrote it, and one for things still yet to come and our future. Again, don't let that freak you out. That's the nature of biblical prophecy.

Now, who was this book originally sent to hear? We are reading it 2000 years later, but who were the original receivers of it? The book of Revelation was sent to seven specific churches in seven specific towns. Those towns are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. How do we know this? Because chapters two and three, tell us this. And there are seven prophecies, one to each of those cities in chapters two and three of revelation and The big question that one of the big questions that's often been debated throughout church history is what what's going on with the order of these towns? Why are they written in that particular order? And some people have said that it's different phases of church history, some have talked about it as phases of a spiritual growth that we walk through.

But here's the deal. Get out a map. If you get out a map, it's really easy to see why they were sent to these towns in this order. Patmos was just off the shore, from the town of Ephesus, the first book in the list, just north of Ephesus was the town of Smyrna. The second book, just north of Smyrna was Pergamos. A third book, just east of Pergamos was Thyatira, the fourth book, and then going south, you go to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Basically, it's an upside down V on the shore of what is today modern day Turkey.

So from Patmos, they sent it first of all, to the closest town, then they said, pass it on to the next closest town then pass to the next closest town until it gets to the last town on the list layer to see if it matches geography. Hey, that's probably the main reason. Are there other purposes we can discover in it? Sure, probably. But here's one of the rules that I always take, as I look, look at Revelation And the Bible in general, take the simplest explanation first, before you start looking for all kinds of crazy new ideas that somebody came up with, look at the map and go, Oh, okay, it just makes sense that it would travel that way. And that's the main, in fact, maybe the only reason that they're listed in that order. Anybody who tries to make other weird, mysterious things, the main reason or probably trying to sell you something is usually way more simple than we think. And if you're interested in a map of where to look at that, you can just Google that, you know, seven churches of Revelation. And I will put a link to a really good map that shows you that in the show notes as well.

Okay, so let's take a look quickly at the book and how it does break down. So you'll see it as you go through it. Again, we won't go through it chapter by chapter, or even section by section. But here's how it generally lays out. Revelation is presented as four visions given to John John has given four visions, the beginning of each vision starts with the phrase in the Spirit. So take a look as you're reading it. For the term in the Spirit, when you read in the Spirit, that means that's the start of a new vision, there are four of them. And John sees each vision from a different location.

So let me walk you through those locations. Chapters one through three is the first division, John is in Patmos, in the underwriting in the prison island. And the message is warning and comfort to the people. The second vision is in chapters four through 16. It's the bulk of the book. And it's John from heaven's throne. All right, and it's filled with these seals of the scroll, trumpets and bowls. And it tells us how much God is in control of everything. The third vision is from chapter 17, through 20. And John has taken to a wilderness to see that vision. And we see the defeat of Satan and the defeat of Babylon. And the basic message of that dream is that God wins in the end.

And then the fourth and final vision, or the last two chapters, chapters 21, and 22. John is taken to a mountain to see this last vision where he sees a vision of the New Jerusalem and eternity in heaven. And the message of that is Come Lord Jesus, and make this a reality for us. So four visions, all of which begin with the phrase in the spirit, from four different locations, with four major messages that each get more hopeful as we get closer to the end of the book.

So as we conclude, what do we do as we approach revelation? First of all, look for Jesus, it is the revelation of Jesus Christ, the unveiling of Jesus Christ. Secondly, don't try to understand this literally, don't worry about things like the moon turning to blood and stars falling from the heavens to earth. These are symbols. Thirdly, if you want to understand the symbols, take a look at the Old Testament, if you read it this out of a Bible that has a lot of notes in it, take a look not at the explanation that's given by the translators, but take a look at what's called the cross references. That is, every once in a while, you'll see a footnote marker and it will go to another passage, go back to that old Testament passage and read the reference that it's referring to. That's how we cracked the code. So it'll be a reference back to Ezekiel or back to Genesis or back to Deuteronomy, go back and read that and go, Oh, this is about that particular thing that was happening at that time. And the better you understand the original reference that is referring to, the better you'll understand what's happening in Revelation.

Now, as we do this, the final thing to remember is always this if you get confused if you're not sure if you get scared. You Ask yourself, what does this tell me about Jesus? It's a great approach to the entire Bible. Anytime you're confused, anytime you, you're frustrated, anytime you don't know what's going on, ask yourself. What does this tell me about Jesus, we have 52 weeks going through the Bible, you're going to read the last book this week. And it's all about Jesus. The Old Testament points towards Him as Messiah, the Gospels tell us about him and who he was when he walked on the earth. And then Acts through Revelation, tell us how people after Jesus resurrected and ascended into heaven, again, how these early Christians tried to live like Christ as best we could. It's all about Jesus, it starts with him, it ends with him, and it will always be about him.

So if you want more, I encourage you to do this again, just go back to Genesis chapter one again, and go through this entire series again, every time you do it, you're gonna get more out of it. As I mentioned earlier, if you want to get a little more, a whole lot more, in fact, out of Revelation, a 24-part series plus two bonus episodes, the YouTube series on the Cornerstonefv YouTube channel. So go to YouTube, put Cornerstonefv in there. And when you do then go to the revelation playlist Cornerstonefv, that's Cornerstone Fountain Valley is what it stands for. That's our church, go to the YouTube channel and the entire revelation playlist is there, all 26 episodes, we I walk through the book of Revelation very, very thoroughly.

Well, let's do this again. I encourage you when you're done with this, if you're actually listening to this the last week of December, or whenever you're listening to it, and you think you know what, I want to go through the Bible again to see if I can get even more out of it the second time, and you will do it again, send a link to a friend read it with a friend. It has really been my honor to do this with you this year, I have received so much positive response from so many people who have said thank you to so many who've asked questions that I've been able to answer in episodes as we've gone through it. It has been quite a long journey. It's hard to believe that it's over. I'm grateful for the opportunity. And I encourage you don't stop here. First of all, go through the Bible again. And then secondly, and even more importantly, let's live out what it says. We read that last week in the book of James didn't we don't just listen to the word and deceive ourselves. Let's do what it says. Thanks.

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