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## WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOD DOING: REVELATION, INTRO

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People have always had a fascination with prophecy. Books that claim to have predicted world events. Prophets like Nostradamus who say there are codes that can tell the future. Movies that show hidden secrets. Why: We like to think that history has some meaning. We live in such uncertain times. Think of some of the things that have happened in the last 23 years, since 2000.

Natural Disasters: Hurricane Katrina., Kashmir Earthquake, Boxing Day Tsunami to name a few. In the last few years in NZ had Christchurch Earthquake White Island eruption, Christchurch mosque attack, bush fires here, also Australia, flooding, climate change. War now in Ukraine. Lots of talk of war with China over Taiwan. And then there is Covid. Just under 7 million in world died. There was Y2K, and the 9/11 as well as financial collapses. All these things lead to books and speculation about the end of the world.

But if you have been around awhile, you will know that this has been happening for years. In the 80' end time speculation was very strong with much written. None of it proved true. But it led to fear and disillusionment about such things. Many Christians now just avoid the book, because it is too hard, or because some have such fixed views on it. For first 20 year of preaching I avoided Rev. because I did not know what I believed.

Over the last few years, I have come to revisit this book. It is book that can bring great hope and encouragement in times of uncertainty. It is only Biblical book that promises at the beginning and the end a blessing to those who read and are obedient to it. Rev 1:3 Rev 22:7

Side bar. Often hear words thrown around about Rev. Pre millennial, Post Millennial, Amillennial which can be very confusing. Millennial refers to the 1000 years mentioned in Rev 20. Here is a very simple explanation of the 3 views

Most Christian leaders throughout history have been Amillennial. That is they have interpreted the 1000 years as being symbolic, not literal. The 1000 years represents the time from the cross to Jesus return, judgement, new heaven, new earth. This time will be both a time of great victory and great suffering.

The Post millennial. Has been popular interpretation in times of revival and social renewal. This says that in the age before Christ returns, more and more people will become Christian, Christians will have more and more influence. The millennium is the Golden age before Christ returns and judgment.

The Pre millennial view has only become popular in the last 100 years or so. John Darby, in 1800s made this view prominent esp. in Brethren circles. It is very popular in America particularly because of Hal Lindsay's best seller, "The Late great planet earth. "

The pre millennial view says things will get worse and worse, but before things got really bad, Christians will be raptured out of earth, then there would be a terrible time called the tribulation, and then Christ would return, then he would rule earth for 1000 years before the final judgement.

I would suggest that most here have been influenced to some extent or another by the pre millennial view. As will become obvious soon, I am coming from an amillennial view.

### Faulty Ways to Interpret Revelation

1. To Identify particular passages with specific world events and people. This is very popular but always proves wrong. People claimed that the Aussie bankcard bore the mark of the beast because of its stylized logo. The Anti Christ has been supposedly identified by using the letters in his name and has been Lenin, Stalin, Hitler and Pol Pot to name a few. The problem is they are all dead, and while they caused terrible suffering they make no sense now. The formation of the EEC was linked to Revelation but now makes no sense because more countries have joined.

All of this leads to disillusionment with Revelation. Or it leads to passivity, thinking there is nothing we can do. It can lead to fear that the world is out of control.

This is the opposite message of the OT prophets who predicted terrible things were going to happen on the world stage. But they not say. World is going worse and we just have to wait and see what happens. They called on people to respond, to get on God's side, and get involved in the struggle against evil and oppression and injustice.

Revelation is not a book calling us to speculate and plot and wait for destruction of world. It is a call to get involved in the world, be agents of healing and reconciliation.

2. To see the book as a countdown to the last days. Some see the book as like a countdown of history with Ch 1, being year 1 and Chapter 22 being year 2100 or whatever date you think world is going to end. History is littered with people predicting the last days. They have all been wrong. Mark 13. Beware of people who say know when Jesus return. Only the father knows Not even Jesus.

3. To see it as of no relevance to today. Some see the book as All related to stuff in past with no relevance for today. Marten Luther tried to get rid of the book as he didn't like it and thought it was obscure.

### 4 Keys to Understanding Revelation

1. **Context:** First rule in any book in the Bible. What did it mean to the original readers? In this case it was a church in Asia Minor (Turkey) prob. around AD 90- 100. It is thought to be written to a church being persecuted.



Depending on when one dates the book, this was probably by Emperor Domitian, who demanded that he be worshipped.

It was written by apostle John (we think but there is serious debate about this), later in life when he moved from Jerusalem to Ephesus where he was bishop. In Ch 1v 8 we read he is exiled to Patmos, an island off the coast used by Romans as a prison labor camp. Prisoners worked in harsh condition in the mines but John was probably able to have messengers at times.

John wrote it to encourage a church which was under immense attack, persecution. If the book was all about stuff in the future, it would have been of no help to those it was written to. Any interpretation we make of the book must be one that would have made sense to the original readers.

**2. The Structure.** This is a key to helping understand the book. There are 7 visions all describing the same events, but from a different perspective, each deepening in significance. It is not strictly chronological and doesn't have to fit everything into a sequence. If you try to do this, you have to do huge distortions to try to make it work,

The 7 visions tell the same thing in different ways. Through history, from Jesus first coming to his second (end times) certain things will happen. Then Jesus will return and wind up history. Everyone will know that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Vision 1 Ch 4 to 7 The Coronation in Heaven

Vision 2 Ch 8-11 The seven trumpets of judgment

Vision 3 Ch 12 -14 The woman, the child, the dragon, the beast, the harlot

Vision 4 Ch 15, 16 The seven bowls of wrath

Vision 5 Ch 17-19:10 The woman on the beast, the fall of the harlot and beast

Vision 6 Ch 19-20:11 The white horse, 1000 year reign, final judgment, death of the dragon

Vision 7 Ch 21-22 New heaven and earth, new Jerusalem

**3. The Language** The pictures used in the visions are symbolic. We live in era of facts, and science. This book is written in language of art. Visions use symbolic language. The beautiful woman, the whore, the horsemen are not necessarily actual people. They represent events, situations, movements within history.

Each vision begins with life after Jesus ascension and ends with judgment coming to the earth – or a scene of triumph in heaven. The visions increase in intensity until we reach the final judgment.

This form of literature apocalyptic was common at the time. There are many other writings in this genre. The symbols have common meaning that was understood by the people of the time. Just like political cartoons today use symbols that we understand (i.e. a kiwi)

The symbols John uses would have been understood by his readers. Some common symbols used:

Sealed scroll/book = God's unfinished plan for the age  
Eyes = intellectual penetrations

Lion = strength  
Man = intelligence  
Ox = service  
Eagle = swiftness

4 = associated with the four directions of the world

6 = Number of incompleteness

7 = Number of completeness

We will deal with 144,000 and 1000 later on

**4. The Perspective** - It is important to see this is written not from our view but God's. It is revelation from God. Ch 1v 1-2. Jesus and the cross are central to understanding history and when we read paper, watch the news, and wonder what is happening in the world

This point is made very clearly in Ch 5. The Lamb and the Scroll. Jesus and the cross are God's revelation to us. They show the love of God, and his care for us. He is willing to die for us. Jesus reveals to us how we are to live by daily sacrificing ourselves and becoming a servant, by bringing God's love to the world, identifying with the poor, broken, lost oppressed. Jesus came to oppose the evils of this world, : oppression, sickness, death, famine, injustice. He came to bring the kingdom of God.

We are not to sit back, draw up charts of end times, and look at how evil everything is. With prayer, love, power of God, we are to come against everything evil, wrong with this world.

Note: I trust you will get excited about this book over this series. Please read the first vision, Ch 4 v1 to Ch 7:17 in preparation for next week.

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## REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. Where are you at with the book of Revelation? Is it in the too hard basket?
2. Does one of the 3 views outlined resonate more than others? What do you think of the idea that how we see Revelation has been impacted by the culture/world view of the time?
3. Are you open to revisit how you read the book, or alter your views?
4. What impact have the events of the last few years in the world/NZ had on you? Does one event stand out more than others?
5. Do you sense things getting worse in the world, or better, or just the same as it has always been? What evidence supports each view?
6. Do you think we can make any difference in the face of what is happening in the world and society?



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