



Deciphering the Messages of the Apocalypse

Understanding the Revelation to John

Session I

The Bible as a Library

Genres and Styles

Historical

Songs/Poetry

Mysticism

Prophetic

Letters

Prayers

Legends and Myths

Advice/Wisdom

Gospels

What is Apocalyptic?

The appeal to the *imagination*

Good vs. Evil

Eternal vs. Time

The Book of Revelation

Popular image—Cable TV, “Left Behind”, TV Preachers

What does it represent? Vs. What impression does it make?

Visionary experience

Ezekiel 37:1-4

Acts 9:10, 10:11, 16:9, etc.

Background of Hebrew Scriptures

404 verses in this book, 278 have some allusion to the OT

Background of persecution

Written in c. AD 95: Domitian—Empire-wide persecution

Special reference to c. AD 70: Nero—persecution in Rome that killed Peter and Paul

Apocalyptic Literature

This book and the book of Daniel are the only apocalypses in the bible, but at the time apocalyptic was a very common genre in Judaism. Here is a summary of the essential features:

In a time of crisis, to maintain the faith and hope of believers, an author tries to unveil the outcome of history to remove the veil (Latin *re-velare*, Greek *apo-kalyptein*) which separates our world from heaven, and our time from eternity. This style of writing is both pessimistic about our present world, which is incurably in the grip of evil, and optimistic about the future; in the end, God will emerge victorious and recreate his world.

Because this is a Christian apocalypse, the literary genre is substantially changed. The Christian recognizes Jesus as the Messiah: so with Him the end of history has been revealed; with His return comes the ultimate unveiling. Christians believe Jesus is the key to interpreting the world. This book, while using the procedures of apocalyptic, is also a prophetic book, as it speaks words of warning and comfort to God's people in Exile.

The author does not conceal himself under a false name; he calls himself John and locates himself on Patmos. He presents himself simply as a witness to the living Christ. He has presumably been arrested for this, and is exiled rather than executed because of His considerable influence among the people. The identities that are concealed with poetic and mystical language are those of the "powers that be".

John is upset about the current situation, and looks toward the new creation of our old world as history is fulfilled and creation is completed and perfected. However, Christians cannot but be optimists: we know that Christ is the victor and that He is already at work in the world. Like the prophets, John tries to interpret current events and history in order to discover the hidden purpose of God.