

Revelation 1:1-8

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

The book of Revelation is interesting, confusing, and sometimes scary as it addresses cosmic changes through a series of visions. It should be interpreted with enough wisdom to view the information provided with a balance of literal interpretation and metaphorical interpretation. In Revelation God allows the devil to have reign on all of those on the earth that are not with God. The power of evil is in control of an evil age of human history. Even the righteous are afflicted by demonic human agents. It is not fair but in love and righteousness God allows evil to even harm Jesus. It is all temporary as God overcomes evil through direct divine intervention resulting in a happy ending for the righteous.

It is very important to know the difference between being righteous and being self-righteous. Righteousness is according to God and self-righteousness is according to the individual. John, the author of Revelation, is probably not the Apostle John, but it is incorrect to state or assume that he is or isn't. The author identified himself as a servant of God and that is what is important. Near the end of the 1st Century, Emperor Domitian was worshiped as a god and as a consequence, John was exiled to a small island that served as a Roman penal colony of political banishment.

God wins in the end but that is only after Christians are punished and killed for their religion. It is important to notice that this triumph is only after people suffer. When people suffer in spite of their faith, it serves as a refining agent for the truly faithful who will stay true to God in good times and bad. Revelation is abused by some that use it to frighten people and predict world events. That is not why it was written. It is written for comfort and assurance for those that are suffering due to their beliefs. There was no official Roman campaign against Christians but sporadic persecutions did exist and resulted in devastating consequences for the early Christians. Revelation reveals that God is ready to act and stop the powers of evil that hurt God's people. Until then, there is the conflict between the way things are and the way things should be. God is just and loving and the world that God created is to be just and loving also.

God is the source of the information in Revelation. The word goes from God and Jesus, to an angel, then to John, and finally to the churches and us. This is the word of God using an angel as an agent of interpretation. I like it when the Bible gives us the interpretation because we can be so far off on our own accord. Blessed are those who read it aloud. This means that it is intended for Christian worship. You are blessed to hear the word and keep it. There is a very important lesson here on the significance of keeping the word.

The original scripture is going to seven churches in a part of Asia that is modern day Turkey. Back then it was a Roman province. The word is from God. Who is, who was, and who is to come are three tenses of divine entity revealing the past, present, and future. God was with Israel throughout history. God is with us today. God will prevail in the future. The Alpha and Omega is the beginning and the end and stresses God's supremacy over all of history. The word from Jesus Christ made us to be a kingdom of priests. It is very important to get this. We are to hear the word, keep the word, and live the word. We are to be priests representing Christ to the world around us.

Prophecy calls out evil, condemns reckless wealth and oppression, warns of anguish, defeat, and devastation, and offers a promise of hope. The mighty Roman Empire was politically the keeper of law and order on earth and appears in Revelation as the beast. The church at the time was a poor minority in a hostile and indifferent society. But in Revelation this small oppressed church is seen as a multitude of too many to count from every nation; all tribes, all people, and all tongues, standing before the throne

Revelation tells us that this present evil age of human history will be overthrown by God. The Bible has a happily ever after ending but first we must see in this unjust world the injustice that is woven in our economic system. We cannot escape it even if we want to. It is important to see ourselves in the position of the churches addressed in Revelation. They either had lost their spiritual passion, were inflicted with sexual rituals, were led by false teaching, had a reputation for being alive while their faith was dead, or were lukewarm. The challenge is to remain faithful during good times and difficult times and patiently wait for God's loving response.

The problem I see with mainstream religion is that people tend to conscript like minded beliefs. They expect and compel others to think and believe alike and force their opinions on others. This causes many to be turned off from contemporary religion. What we should be doing is leading by example and exemplifying Christ. We should lead the world to togetherness and peace, as directed by Christ, instead of separating from one another and claiming to be with Christ.

I like to talk about the church in Philadelphia. All of the churches addressed in Revelation have an internal problem. But the church in Philadelphia is set up as an example of faith. There is nothing negative said of them. It is probably a small church, with little physical strength but strong in faith. I like to compare you to that church because it is like you are. A small church of strong faith that is focused on living the life as taught to us by Jesus, a church that does not insist on dogma, or skewed doctrine of self favor. I would rather serve in a small spiritually healthy church than a large church of selfish ambition. What Jesus condemns most is hypocrisy and selfish ambition. I would rather serve a church like Philadelphia where the Lord has nothing bad to say, while others assume righteousness but are far from being righteous in the eyes of the Lord. This Thanksgiving, of all the things I am thankful for, one of the things at the top of the list is that you are that kind of church. Thank you & God bless you.