

**Revelation**  
**Lesson I**  
**Revelation 1:1-3**

**A Book to be Understood**

**Introduction:**

1. The study of Revelation occasionally generates either antipathy or opposition.
  - a. Is attempting to understand this book “a waste of time”?
  - b. Can anyone be sure of its message?
2. Why Revelation has been neglected
  - a. Heavy symbolism and strange figures of speech in the Apocalypse are foreign to us.
  - b. One needs to know the historical setting of the book in order to understand it.
  - c. Most people are probably scared off Revelation by its frequent abuse.
3. God did not put this book in Holy Scripture to confuse and mystify his people.
  - a. The opening word of its Greek text (apokalupsis) means disclosure, uncovering, the disclosure of truth. Cf. Luke 2:32; Rom. 16:25; Gal. 1:12; 2 Thess. 1:7; et al.
4. The book itself emphasizes that it is intended to be understood. Rev. 1:3; 22:7.
5. The Apocalypse is a book to be understood, and we shall dedicate ourselves to its careful study.

**Body of Lesson:**

**I. Keys to Understanding the book of Revelation**

**A. The historical setting of the Apocalypse**

1. The Roman Empire had tried any number of means in an effort to unify its far-flung territories and diverse peoples.
2. One of the attempts at unifying the empire was the use of religion.
  - a. The Pantheon
  - b. The emperor cult
3. Domitian (AD 81-96) attempted to exalt the cult of emperor worship by proclaiming himself dominus et deus noster (Latin: our Lord and God) and requiring worship of his subjects.
4. Conflict with the Christians over this issue was inevitable. Cf. Acts 4:12; Eph. 4:4-5
5. Write 1 Cor. 8:6b: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Revelation was written to help Christians meet this crisis situation.
  - a. The writer John was himself in exile for the sake of the gospel. Rev. 1:9
  - b. He was a leader of the churches in the Roman province of Asia.
7. The letter was written around AD 95.
8. The tings spoken of in it were to “shortly come to pass”. Rev. 1:1b
9. Revelation is a spawning ground for theological nonsense when

interpreted in isolation from its historical context and purpose.

## **B. Apocalyptic literature**

1. During the period 200 BC – AD 200, a great deal of this sort of literature surfaced among the Jewish people.
2. Patterned after the Old Testament books of Daniel and Ezekiel, along with parts of Zechariah, this style of literature was not meant to obscure a writer's message but to make it more vivid and impressive.
3. The general theme of all apocalypses is that God is in ultimate control of history and fully capable of bringing men and events to his desired ends.
4. Many apocalypses were in circulation by the time this one was written.
  - a. It is not unique in style, but is unique by virtue of being inspired. 2 Tim. 3:16-17
  - b. Because it is the only book of its type in the New Testament canon, it requires a bit more effort of modern students.
5. The general features of apocalyptic writings:
  - a. They reflect dark times in human history.
  - b. They personify good and evil in a situation of conflict.
  - c. Predictions are made about the outcome of the struggle and the fates of those who have participated.
  - d. Their messages are communicated through visions.
  - e. A common symbolism is employed.
  - f. Most are pseudonymous.
  - g. They are typically "sealed" for future generations.
6. Revelation shares the first five of these common traits and differs in the last two:
  - a. The writer does identify himself as John – surely the "beloved disciple". Rev. 1:1,4,9; 22:8
  - b. The book is not "sealed" but intended for immediate consumption. Rev. 22:10
7. The use of this style of writing was ideal for the circumstances under which Revelation was written.
  - a. Name-calling prose would have led to its suppression by the government and would have placed in even greater jeopardy anyone possessing a copy of it.
  - b. The book's imagery was as clear to its first readers as today's political cartoons are to newspaper readers.
8. There is no good reason for any serious reader of the book to mistake its message.
9. Christians of every age – particularly those who live in situations of stress – can read this book and take heart over the fact that God is in control of history.

## **II. Our Approach to the Book**

### **A. Our study of Revelation will be governed by the "keys" to understanding identified above.**

1. We shall interpret the book so as to allow for a meaningful message to its first-century readers.

2. Allowing for its literary style, we shall see its symbols as pointing to the struggle going on between the church and Rome.

**B. We shall acknowledge the book to be a prophecy about the outcome of the great struggle. Rev. 1:3**

**C. We shall keep in mind that one can get the main point of Revelation without resorting to dogmatism about every obscure point or difficult symbol.**

**III. The importance of Revelation for Us:**

**A. This is a revelation given by Jesus Christ. Rev. 1:1**

**B. It is a book whose message centers on Jesus Christ at every stage of its development.**

**C. This book sets forth the Christian philosophy of history.**

**D. A proper understanding of Revelation helps one avoid persons and theories which abuse its contents and lead people into error.**

**E. It underscores the value of trust in God.**

**Conclusion:**

1. Let the heartening, Christ-centered, and faith-generating message of the book of Revelation fill your soul.

2. Allow your imagination to be captivated and your mind challenged.

3. It is hoped that our study will cause you to appreciate Revelation as a book to be understood.

**READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT LESSON:**

Please read Rev. 1 carefully and reflect on the picture it paints of Jesus Christ in his exalted and glorious state. What effect would such a representation of him have upon the distressed Christians to whom John was writing?