

Revelation: Introduction – Revelation 1:1-6 – Rev. Budy Setiawan - DRAFT

The book of Revelation contains many strange imageries that often leads people to misinterpret the contents of the book as prophecies of the future. The first word of the book in the original Greek language is ἀποκάλυψις (apokalypsis), which means “revelation”. In principle, the whole Bible is the revelation of God, through which God is revealing His will, Himself, and how we should respond. Although the book talks about future events, the main goal of the book was to bring comfort to the first century Christians who first received the book and were facing persecution. Only when we understand this historical context can we understand the context of the book for us in this age.

The theme of Revelation can be summarised in Revelation 17:14: “They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” In reading the book of Revelation, we are hearing the word of God to Christians who were being persecuted by the power of this world. God comforts them with the promise and assurance of final victory in Christ, to push Christians in that time, now, and to all eternity to have faith and obey the commandments of the Lord. As it says in verse 3 “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.” The word “prophecy” in the book of revelation and in the Bible refers primarily to the Word of God. A prophet is understood to be an extension of the mouth of God, who prophesies.

In the book of Revelation, we see warnings, especially to those who have heard, but have not obeyed, rebelling against the Word of God. Revelation 21:8 says, “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.” When we read this book, we will also see beautiful imageries that capture our hearts, but we also see frightening warnings that should push us to obedience and to live to glorify God. Revelation comforts and assures the faithful who are suffering, but sternly warns those who are compromising with the world. A few principles in reading and understanding this book:

1. We need to understand that this book was written in the first century. If our understanding of the book wouldn't make sense for the first audience, then we are mistaken.
2. We must not always try to understand this book in a literal sense. The book of Revelation teaches the truth, but it often does so using imagery and figurative language. So how can we understand them? Firstly, John usually explains these imageries within the book itself. Secondly, we need to understand the historical context of the church and the first century. Lastly, we need to understand the Old Testament context to understand the figurative language better.
3. We must understand the main theological message in the book of Revelation. Some say we must understand all the symbols in Revelation to understand the book, this is false. Whilst there are many symbols that are unclear and are still being debated to this day, the central and main point of the book is quite clear.

There are three forces that were persecuting Christians in the first century, which are relevant to Christians today:

1. They were persecuted by Rome. They were in a system that put Caesar in the place of God. We Christians confess that there is only one God and he is Jesus Christ who died and rose to save them.

This is something that all Christians of all ages are going through including us today, in different ways and forms.

2. They were persecuted by the Jews, who at that time were respected by the Romans and received many exemptions from the laws. These Jews persecuted the Christians for their way of life. Currently, we don't have Jews persecuting us, but this is similar to the power of other religions that pressure and persecute Christians.
3. They faced false teachings inside the church. Christians today know that there are many false teachings that lead the children of God astray. So, it's very important for us to read and understand the book of Revelation.

In general, there are two responses that Christians can take. There are those that fear persecution and follow the world. To those people, the book of revelation gave stern warnings, hoping that they are coming back to the right way. The second response is from Christians who continually hold fast to the word and calling of God, even through all the difficulties, persecutions, and struggles. The book of Revelation is given primarily to the latter, to strengthen and comfort them, to reveal to them the vision of the kingdom of God, to reveal that He who has died and risen will come again to reign. This revelation gives hope because God is a God who doesn't change in the past, now, and for all eternity.