

## The Book of Revelation

Week One: We studied the history and the background of the book.

- We have chosen to date this book as concurrent with the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian. He was the Roman Emperor from 81 – 96 AD.
  - That would make the Apostle John anywhere between 70 and 80 (ish) years old at the time of writing, quite plausible.
  - Domitian's reign is the first time that Roman persecution of Christians becomes *systemic* throughout the Empire. Previously it was localized under
    - Nero – nasty but localized to the city/province of Rome
    - Vespasian – again nasty but localized to Judah/Jerusalem
- At the time of Domitian's reign the following major historical events have occurred:
  - Nero has blamed the Christians for a fire that engulfed over half of Rome, and he has tortured them publically in response.
  - The Romans have a competitor; the Parthian Empire has shown an ability to stand up to the Roman military juggernaut and win (or at least stalemate). The Battle of Carrhae is the site of a terrible defeat for Rome at the hands of Parthian mounted archers.
  - Vespasian has laid siege to Jerusalem and utterly destroyed the city and the Temple, in response to a brief Jewish rebellion against Rome
- Historically the church is *just about* to enter a time of intense, systemic persecution at the hands of Rome. It is just beginning at the time of the writing of Revelation, but will continue until 313 AD.
- John is writing this book from the prison Island of Patmos, because Rome has caught and arrested him. God sends him a vision while in prison, and the Christians are successful in smuggling/transporting it off the Island and passing it around to the churches. That one singular vision, is the book of Revelation.
- Stuff that would be fun to look up online to enhance your read:
  - The Roman Emperor Domitian
  - The life of the Apostle John
  - The Parthian Empire
  - The Battle of Carrhae
  - The Jewish Revolt

## Week Two: Revelation chapter 1

- We discussed the portions of the letter that connected with the history we shared in lesson one
- We discussed in detail the vision of Jesus Christ that John sees in this passage. Most notable points are as follows:
  - We have **never** seen Jesus this powerful before.
    - His visage is full of light, fire, strong as metal, holds the stars in his hands, and his very words are swords. The point is driven home symbol after symbol, this is the *son of God*.
  - Wearing your sash up high on your chest in the ancient world, instead of at your waist (where you can gird up the rest of your garment) means that *you have finished your work*. The shirt is untucked, the comfy clothes are on, *you are done*.
  - White hair means age, experience, and a completed run. This is Jesus the Senior Citizen (so to speak). Again an image of completion.
  - Seven is the Biblical number for a “complete set” or “the whole thing”
    - In the seven stars and seven lampstands you see a complete set of churches, of angels of the churches, and arguably of the cosmos itself.
  - He holds the keys of Death and Hell in his hands.
    - He has entered the realm of the dead and the damned, conquered its master, and gained the ability to *leave* the ultimate prison.
- As you read this, each symbol should resonate with POWER, over and over. The point is made, he is first and he is last, he IS.
- We discussed how important it was to understand that Christ *has already won*, that the God that the Christians in the first century serve, is the one *who wins*.
- Interesting scriptures to look up to enhance your read:
  - Take a look at the one time that Christ has appeared in a form somewhat like this one. It's called the *Transfiguration* and was revealed only to Peter, James, and John
    - Matthew 17:1-13
    - Mark 9:2-13
    - Luke 9:28-36
    - 2 Peter 1:16-18

### Week Three: In depth on the letter to the Ephesians

- We covered the History of Ephesus
  - It was a metropolis of a town in Asia
  - Home to one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis/Diana of the Ephesians (not to be confused with Diana the hunting goddess, they are not the same).
- Paul began this church and the work here includes other well known Biblical leaders: Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos.
  - The outreach in Ephesus was far more successful with the non-Jewish than it was with the Jewish.
  - It was so successful with the Gentile (non-Jewish) people that the silversmiths who made idols for the competition (Artemis) started a riot to get Paul kicked out of town.
- Historically Ephesus will go on to become the center point of the mission of Christianity throughout Asia. It was a *very successful* congregation.
- We discussed the letter to this church in the book of Revelation
  - They're clearly still doing good work for the Lord, *but*
    - They are accused of "forgetting their first love", of not being as committed or connected to Christ as they used to be.
  - This led to a good discussion on the dangers of getting 'comfortable' as a church. It looks like some of the Ephesian success has actually become a stumbling block for them.
    - The remedy:
      - Remember the place you have fallen from and repent
      - Return and "do the works you did at first"
  - If they do these things they will return to the good graces of Jesus Christ.
    - It is a convicting thought to consider that it's quite possible to be doing "church stuff" and still miss the point.
- Scripture worth reading:
  - Acts 18 – Paul starts the Ephesian Church
  - Acts 19 – Paul returns to the Ephesian Church
  - Acts 20 – Paul bids farewell to the Ephesian Church
  - The book of Ephesians (Paul's letter to the Ephesian Church)