

Revelation introduction: chapter 1:1-3
Sunday, July 21, 2019

Back in the eighties there was a show called Quantum Leap. In this show the main character would leap between different time periods. A thought to think about is that God is outside of time and so He can leap between any time period He wants to. God is the keeper of the timeline. He is in charge.

As I do this, take the rope down the center aisle.

I have a rope up here, I have many feet of rope and I am going to pull it out and just watch as it falls to the floor. Now, suppose that this first end of the rope is Genesis 1:1. This is creation. Now, as I move, look at this rope and imagine all of this rope is time. So, we would have Abraham somewhere close to the same end and then Moses and then David and then Ezekiel and then Isaiah and then we would get to Ezra and that would be, oh, about 3500 years of history and then we go another 400 years and we have Jesus' birth and then we have 2000 years until now and then we keep going until Jesus comes again and makes thing right. Now, as we look at this rope type of time line we are on the rope around, I don't know, maybe here [point towards the opposite end of the beginning]. We are bound by our little time. We are stuck in the rope. Oh, but God, He created the rope. God created the time and He is powerful and in control. Take this thought a little bit further and understand that God put you in your spot for a reason, wow!

Be encouraged, seriously be encouraged. We can easily look at this rope and be discouraged about all of time and all of existence, but, no, be encouraged because God, Who is not bound by time, chose to put you on this earth at this time. God can go anywhere He wants on our rope timeline. God can, "quantum leap." But let's go a step further: God is to time as we are to this rope. He looks down on the time all at once. He is not limited by it, for He created it. As we look at Revelation 1:1 we are going to "Quantum Leap" back in time to, around, 96 A.D. But not only us, notice that Jesus is also entering John's realm of existence through an angel and even Himself later on.

Revelation 1:1-3:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,² who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.³ Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

- I. This letter is revelation from Jesus Christ. This is all in verse 1.
 - a. It is from the Father to the Son.

- b. It is from the Son, Jesus, to the angel.
- c. It is from the angel to John.
- d. It is from John to us.
- e. Look the verse says that God gave this to His servants to show His servants what soon must take place.
- f. Be encouraged that God is not limited. There is nothing limiting God. God wanted to show us and all Christians through the ages things that must take place.
- g. I must pause here because you are likely looking at this and thinking, "But it says must 'soon take place.'" Let's handle some of the background to this letter.
- h. First notice that it is titled the "'Revelation' to John." It is not "Revelation's.'" This work, which is a letter, in the New Testament format, is one gynomous Revelation of Jesus Christ given to John.
- i. Remember that to God, He is outside of time. The Bible says in 2 Peter 3:8, when talking about the end times: *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.* So, when this passage says, "soon" we can know that it could be soon in our thinking or God's thinking and God is outside of time.
- j. There are four primary ways of interpreting Revelation.
 1. One of these is the Historicism method:
 2. This method interprets chapters 1-3 taking place in the first century, chapters 4-20:6 taking place between the second century and the end times and then chapters 20:7-22 being when Jesus makes things right.
 3. Second, is Futurism: This method most of Revelation is in the future, chapter 4 and throughout chapter 22.
 4. Then there is the Preterist. The preterist which is a past fulfillment or contemporary to John's readers. Those would believe that it had to do with the Roman Empire and the fall of the Roman Empire. Fulfillment is entirely in the past by the fall of Constantine and Rome in 476 AD. Some see it as the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD but this is a very narrow view. This seemed to start in the late 1500's or early

1600's. This would be the earliest understanding of Revelation in the period following its dissemination

5. Then there is the idealist: Sees Revelation operating at two levels.
 - a. General spiritual principles operating at all ages.
 - b. There was an immediate meaning for John and his readers but there is a profound spiritual reality for all ages.
 - c. Idea that there is a clash between good and evil
 - k. There are variations on each of those interpretations especially when we get to the Millennial reign and the tribulation period and we are not getting into that today.
 - l. Next, let's look at dating. It appears that John is exiled to the island Patmos and this was under persecution. He might have been there forced to work the mines. This could have been the great persecution under Caesar Nero in the 60's AD or in the 90's AD under Domitian which may believe.
- II. John witnessed for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ with all that he saw. This is verse 2.
- a. We may wonder what he saw. This gets into the type of literature Revelation is. It is a letter with apocalyptic literature and prophesy. Think of the idea of pulling back a curtain and revealing something. That is the idea of apocalyptic literature. It means that God is showing us the spiritual realm. God is pulling back the curtain and showing us the end.
 - b. Let me talk about apocalyptic literature. Some of these initial notes come from a lecture given by Dr. Mulholland, professor, Asbury Theological Seminary.
 - c. People have always had visionary experiences. These happened in the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. We even know of Christians who have had visionary experiences throughout church history.
 - d. Paul the apostle had visionary experiences and we will look at one in a minute.
 - e. This Vision takes the ordinary out of the normal consciousness. A visionary experience takes the visionary beyond the normal. It is an expansion of reality. It is a deeper reality. We will see expansions of a normal reality. **It is NOT out of your mind.** The is very important in Christianity. See 1 Cor. 15:15: *What is the outcome*

then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.

- f. Notice how Paul uses the Spirit and the mind. A visionary is having an experience of the deeper reality.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10:

Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. ³ And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴ was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. ⁵ On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. ⁶ For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.

***7** Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸ Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹ And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

- g. I know a person in Christ (He is using the third person to refer to himself.)
- h. He says that he was caught up in the third heaven.
- i. Some of the intertestamental writings refer to 7 heavens.
- j. Paul says whether in the body or out of the body, I don’t know. That is an indicator. He doesn’t know, but God knows.
- k. Paul talks about paradise
- l. Paul uses the plural, visions and revelations.
- m. Julian of Norwich (1342-after 1416 English mystic) talked about seeing three heavens: “All this blessed teaching of the Lord was shown to me in three parts.” She says that she cannot show the spiritual visions as plainly and fully as I wish.

- i. That is common throughout history. We cannot explain all that we experience in a spiritual experience.
 - ii. Julian: She wrote it down and waited twenty years and had a second experience and she says that she cannot fully explain her experience.
 - iii. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179, German) she drew pictures of visions and gave details descriptions of what she was experiencing. Even with the pictures and descriptions she cannot explain what she experienced.
- n. John is told to write it down and to send it to 7 churches. John may be thinking: "How do I do that?"
 - o. John uses a pool of images that are very familiar to him and to his readers, but not familiar to us.
 - p. John uses a Jewish pool of images.
 - q. He uses a few from Hellenistic culture.
 - r. Most of the imagery is from the Old Testament and inter testamental period. They are plain to his audience
 - s. We must understand this. If we divorce Revelation from its original context and meaning we can have multiple understandings and make it say whatever we want it to.
 - t. Early 80's Reader's Digest article titled the Motel of the Mysteries. It was written as if it was an archaeological report. It was about the late twentieth century America that is now buried under dirt. An Archaeologist comes across a motel, but with the description they say that this was a late twentieth century burial site. The toilet seat was something you war around your head. The bath tab was a sacred tower and the shower was a musical instrument. The article goes on and on, but we know better. If we don't know better it makes perfect sense.
 - u. Time Magazine in 1992 when the Republicans took over congress shows a Donkey under the Republican Elephant. We understand the image because it is part of our time, but in hundreds of years they may not know that.
 - v. John's audience understands the image.
 - w. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah are primary examples of John's Old Testament imagery.
 - x. Also imagery from Baruch, Song of Songs and some other inter testamental imagery.

- y. There are no single quotations of the Old Testament in Revelation. This in comparison of John Wesley's writings and hymns that were steeped in Scriptural imagery. John is steeped in his Jewish context that these images just flow out of him.
 - z. The Old Testament must be understood to understand Revelation or we are hard pressed to make any sense of Revelation. You cannot understand Revelation without understanding John's imagery.
- III. Verse 3 tells us we are blessed when we read this letter.
- a. This is the only Bible book which says this.
 - b. But we may not feel blessed. We may feel cursed as we try to get through.
 - c. I remember sitting with my older brother on his bed, and I was probably in grade school, as he read the whole book of Revelation to me. I was confused. Yet, we are interested, aren't we?
 - d. Martin Luther mistrusted Revelation because of its obscurity. "A revelation should be revealing" he said.
 - e. One wrote (Dr. Constable): "The symbolism is drawn from many previous Bible books. Revelation is similar to an airport, or a railway terminal, where materials from many other sources come together." I like that description.
 - f. We must read the letter. We must study the letter.
 - g. Revelation 22:10: *And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near."*