

**Handout 1: Introduction to Revelation (Talk 1)**  
**David Crabtree, Reformation Fellowship, June 27, 2021**

**I. Introduction**

- A. How I got here
- B. How am I thinking about what I am doing?
  - 1. There are as many interpretations of the book of Revelation as there are interpreters.
    - a) It is very difficult to interpret.
      - (1) It is written in symbolic language.
        - (a) It is very difficult to know how to interpret symbolic language.
      - (2) It is very difficult to determine how it is organized.
    - b) It is very difficult to determine how it is organized.
  - 2. This is my current best guess as to what Revelation is saying.
    - a) It is precarious work.
      - (1) At every turn, I have made guesses as to what is being said.
      - (2) Then I proceeded as if I had made the right choice.
      - (3) So it is only as good as the assumptions I have made.
        - (a) It is like a house of cards.
        - (b) Some assumptions have more resting on them than others.
      - (4) Two of the assumptions I am making:
        - (a) Revelation was written by the apostle John.
          - (i) He is the author according to tradition.
          - (ii) I see no good reason to question that.
        - (b) Revelation was written about 90 AD.
          - (i) I think it was written after the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD).
          - (ii) This assumption does not play a significant role in my interpretation.
    - b) Interpreting the symbols in light of the latest headlines is an inescapable occupational hazard.
      - (1) If one believes that we will only understand Revelation as the predictions in it are realized, we are forced to interpret it according to the latest headlines.
      - (2) I have great empathy for those in the past who have made their prognostications.
      - (3) I don't believe that we have reached the point at which the description of the very end is being realized.
  - 3. I hope to make Revelation a little less bizarre.
  - 4. I hope to help you to think about the big themes of the book of Revelation.
- C. Why would Revelation be a big theme book?
  - 1. Revelation is about the end of human history.

- a) The events surrounding the final judgment
- b) The end is the most important part of any story.
  - (1) It pulls together all the themes of the story.
  - (2) You don't fully know what a story is about until you see the end.
- 2. Revelation answers the question, "Why am I here?"
  - a) It gives the meaning of life.
- D. What is my approach?
  - 1. I have struggled with this mightily.
    - a) How do I make this book clear and yet deal with the complexity?
  - 2. I am not going to discuss every interpretive decision.
    - a) For the most part, I will just present my conclusions.
- E. How does Revelation communicate?
  - 1. It is a highly symbolic vision about the events surrounding the Day of the Lord.
    - a) There is not a story line to be followed.
    - b) We are not encouraged to try to visualize events like in a historical narrative.
    - c) It is a bunch of symbols combined into a semi-narrative.
      - (1) The reader is encouraged to move pretty quickly from the symbol to what the symbol represents.
        - (a) Without spending much time dwelling on the action in the vision
  - 2. The symbolism is derived from two sources.
    - a) OT
      - (1) This is by far the most significant.
      - (2) Symbols from the OT prophets in particular
        - (a) Symbols are reworked to suit the needs of the author.
    - b) Greco-Roman culture
      - (1) There are times when the symbols are drawn from Greco-Roman culture.
    - c) But in many cases the Greco-Roman symbol more or less corresponds to a Jewish symbol.
      - (1) Example—Strange events in the celestial realm.
        - (a) These signal warning from the gods that something is wrong in both Roman and Jewish culture.
      - (2) Example—Palm branch
        - (a) Hellenized Jewish culture and Roman culture both associate this with coronation of the king.
  - 3. Revelation uses three events from Jewish history to give an approximation of the Day of the Lord.
    - a) Exodus
      - (1) Story of God redeeming his people from slavery in Egypt

- (a) In Revelation, we see God perform the redemption of the saints from satanic oppression.
    - b) Babylonian exile
      - (1) Babylon is the epitome of a nation that tried to seduce and oppress Judeans.
        - (a) In Revelation, the saints are seduced and oppressed.
    - c) Roman occupation
      - (1) Rome is the quintessential emperor and empire worshipping society.
        - (a) In Revelation, the saints are pressured to bow down to the emperor and the empire.
  - 4. Based hugely on OT.
    - a) Most allusions to the OT of any book in the Bible.
      - (1) But not a single attributed quote
      - (2) Few direct quotations
    - b) The most important key to the symbolism is the OT.
    - c) It requires encyclopedic knowledge of OT.
      - (1) Which I don't have
  - 5. How does it use the OT?
    - a) It takes symbols from OT passages.
      - (1) Often from the prophets who were writing during the exile
      - (2) But it repackages those symbols to say something new.
  - 6. What was John's role as author?
    - a) Dictation? Literary creation?
    - b) John writes what he sees and hears.
      - (1) But he understands the allusions.
      - (2) So his record reflects the allusions that were there.
    - c) John made a personal contribution to the work.
- F. What does Revelation say?
- 1. It says many things.
    - a) A judgment is coming.
    - b) God is in complete control of history.
      - (1) God wins in the end.
      - (2) But it will be very grim before the end.

## II. A quick look at Daniel 7

- A. Probably the most important chapter of OT for Revelation.
- B. To the extent that there is a plot in Revelation, this provides the plot line.
  - 1. The plot line is filled out.
  - 2. The imagery is used.

- a) Sometimes is reassigned.
- 3. Revelation will call to mind this chapter several times.
- C. How does Daniel 7 fit into the book of Daniel?
  - 1. Daniel is a book about the human proclivity toward empire building.
    - a) It describes the struggle of God's people (Judeans) under the thumb of aggressive and hubristic Empire (Babylon).
    - b) Spirit of empire is the tendency we all have of ordering everything around us to our liking.
      - (1) To accomplish this, we "trample" God's laws, God's creation, and God's people.
        - (a) Nothing is sacred.
      - (2) Empire is the ultimate expression of this tendency.
        - (a) All of mankind is impressed into the service of the emperor.
    - c) Daniel includes several visions in which the history of mankind is depicted as a succession of empires.
      - (1) Daniel 7 is one of the most important of those visions.
- D. Daniel 7:1-8

*In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.*

*Dan. 7:2 Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. 3 Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.*

*Dan. 7:4 "The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it.*

*Dan. 7:5 "And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!'*

*Dan. 7:6 "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.*

*Dan. 7:7 "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.*

*Dan. 7:8 "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully.*

- 1. Four beasts come out of the sea (These are kingdoms).

- a) Lion (Babylonia)
  - b) Bear (Persia)
  - c) Leopard (Hellenistic kingdoms)
  - d) Fourth beast
2. Fourth beast is unlike all the others.
- a) There is nothing it is likened to
  - b) Terrifying, frightening, and very powerful
    - (1) Iron teeth
  - c) Crushed and devoured its victims
  - d) Trampled underfoot whatever was left
3. Fourth beast had ten horns.
- a) Horns were indicative of power.
  - b) A little one sprang up and displaced three of the horns.
  - c) This horn had some human characteristics.
    - (1) Eyes
    - (2) Mouth
      - (a) Spoke boastfully
4. Daniel 7:9-10

Dan. 7:9      *“As I looked,  
 “thrones were set in place,  
 and the Ancient of Days took his seat.  
 His clothing was as white as snow;  
 the hair of his head was white like wool.  
 His throne was flaming with fire,  
 and its wheels were all ablaze.*

Dan. 7:10    *A river of fire was flowing,  
 coming out from before him.  
 Thousands upon thousands attended him;  
 ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.  
 The court was seated,  
 and the books were opened.*

- a) Throne room scene
  - (1) Ancient of Days (God) is seated on this throne.
    - (a) He is very white.
    - (b) Fire is everywhere.
    - (c) He has thousands in attendance.
    - (d) Books are opened.

5. Daniel 7:11-12

Dan. 7:11 “Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. 12 (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)

- a) Daniel’s attention is drawn to the arrogant little horn on the fourth beast.
  - (1) Fourth beast was killed and thrown into the blazing fire.

#### 6. Daniel 7:13-14

Dan. 7:13 “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

- a) Suddenly a human-like figure appears coming with the clouds of heaven.
  - (1) This is the way gods were said to arrive.
- b) He entered into the throne room, into the presence of God.
- c) He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power to rule the entire world.
  - (1) This kingdom is an eternal kingdom that will never pass away.

#### 7. Daniel 7:15-22

Dan. 7:15 “I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. 16 I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this.

“So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: 17 ‘The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. 18 But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.’

Dan. 7:19 “Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws—the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. 20 I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell—the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. 21 As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, 22 until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

- a) Daniel wants to know what this vision is about.
  - (1) He especially wants to know about:
    - (a) The fourth beast (it was so different from the rest)
    - (b) This little horn that waged war against the saints

## 8. Daniel 7:23-27

Dan. 7:23 “He gave me this explanation: “The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. 24 The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. 25 He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.

Dan. 7:26 “ ‘But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. 27 Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.’

- a) The fourth beast will be granted almost God-like power for a period of time.
  - (1) He will oppress the saints for a time, times and half a time.
- b) Then the court of God will meet.
  - (1) Power will be taken from the beast.
  - (2) Power will be given to the saints.
- c) This kingdom will be everlasting and obedient to God.

## 9. Daniel 7:28

Dan. 7:28 “This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself.”

- a) Daniel was deeply troubled by what he saw.

## III. Conclusion

### A. Daniel 7 gives us the basic story.

- 1. Empires on earth take on “God-like” powers.
  - a) Empires become increasingly powerful and frightening.
    - (1) This culminates with an empire that stands out because it is so different from the others.
      - (a) It is particularly powerful and destructive.
      - (b) There is nothing Daniel can think of to liken it to.
    - (2) This empire sprouts an arrogant and mouthy leader.
      - (a) He rails against God.
      - (b) He thinks he can change the times and the laws of the universe to suit his fancy.
    - (3) This empire and this leader are destroyed.

2. The final empire is replaced by the kingdom of God.
    - a) God gives the Messiah authority over the kingdom.
      - (1) Authority over all peoples of the earth
      - (2) This kingdom is eternal.
- B. This will be filled out by the entire book of Revelation.
1. It is complicated.
    - a) A lot more detail
    - b) And it is hard to see how it all fits together.
  2. But if you remember this basic story, it will greatly help you understand Revelation.
- C. There is one part of this story that is of particular interest for us—*this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them.*
1. This is what emerges:
    - a) Just as Jesus played a key role in bringing salvation to mankind, the saints play a key role in bringing in the kingdom of God.
      - (1) Our assignment is to testify with our lives that God is who the Bible says he is, even to the point of death.
        - (a) This has always been the assignment of believers.
        - (b) But at the end of history, it will be more costly for more believers.
      - (2) There will be thousands, if not millions, of saints who will sacrifice their lives much like Jesus did when he died on the cross.
        - (a) Just as Jesus' death was an apparent defeat, but actually a huge victory,
        - (b) The death of thousands of saints will appear to be a huge defeat but will actually contribute to the coming of the kingdom of God.
      - (3) It is critical to understand this.
        - (a) God and his people will look like they are losing hugely.
        - (b) It will look like if there is a God, he is powerless in the face of the anti-God forces.
        - (c) And yet, their sacrifice will play a key role in bringing in the kingdom of God.
  2. Daniel's response to what he saw was to be "deeply troubled."
    - a) I think the treatment of the saints is what most troubled him.
    - b) This was his response, although the overall vision is very positive.
  3. I think our response to Revelation will be the same.
    - a) The overall vision is very, very positive.
    - b) But the fate of many saints is very troubling.