



October Bible Tidbits— The Book of Revelation

It is fitting that we end our Bible Tidbits series with the Book of Revelation, the last Book of the Bible, a Book of Hope for all God's people.

The images of the Book of Revelation are the universal images of the human race, the very stuff of our waking and sleeping dreams and nightmares. This Book speaks a universal language of images.

John writes the Book of Revelation in the midst of ruthless and fierce persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor. He writes his book of HOPE as an inspired message to all the faithful, calling them to patient endurance for the VICTORY WAS ALREADY WON ON THE CROSS ! Jesus Christ, the Lamb, has already won the battle over sin and evil.

The Book of Revelation was written sometime between 81 – 96 AD during the reign of Emperor Domitian who launched a fierce persecution against Christians because they refused to sacrifice to him as a God. In symbolic language, the Book of Revelation tells of this persecution by Rome (called Babylon). John saw imperial Rome as an instrument of Satan—his depiction of Rome is negative to an extreme. John tells his readers that the Beast – Rome – is not as invincible as it appears. It tells them not to give in to its power or its pagan religion.

It is clear as you read the Book of Revelation that the author knows the Old Testament thoroughly and has been heavily influenced by the Books of Daniel and Ezekiel. You will see a contrast between the plagues that God brought down on the Egyptians to force the emperor to free Israel in Exodus and the plagues of the trumpets and bowls in Revelation. Although no verse is quoted verbatim from the Old Testament, John is free and creative with them.

The Book of Revelation is prophetic NOT because it predicts future events, but because it unveils our present. It enables us to see the events of the present within the greater picture – God IS IN CHARGE ! Our God desires to set humankind free from the tyranny of sin and evil. God cannot and will not ignore sin and evil; he will not turn a blind eye to oppression. The Book of Revelation shows us God's wrath against evil. John shows us clearly that nothing is beyond God's knowledge or control and nothing can thwart his redeeming purpose.

How do the images of this Book speak to us today? The dragon reflects the oppressive weight of sin bearing on humankind—greed, lust for power and control. Faithfulness demands that we take a stand against power structures which distort the message of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. The plagues are the harvest of our sinning against our environment. The new Jerusalem represents the Kingdom of God where God wills the salvation of all of his people. His gates stand open to all.

The Book of Revelation must be read within the history of Israel and Christianity. To know and understand why John wrote this book, and to see its images taken from the Old Testament and the history of Israel's struggle against paganism brings a greater and more powerful understanding of the message John intended. For this truly is a Book of HOPE !