



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Understanding the New Testament

The Revelation to John or the Book of Revelation

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.” Rev. 1:1 NRSV

*“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.
Rev. 1:8 NRSV*

The first thing to note is that the title of the book is Revelation, not Revelations. I make that point because it is routine to hear or read references to the “Book of Revelations.” It’s surprising that so few writers of fiction, movies and television write the title correctly. Revelation is a translation of a Greek word, *apokalypsis*, or in English, apocalypse. Apocalypse means “to reveal.” Revelation is an example of a form of literature known as Apocalyptic. Apocalyptic literature was written by both Jews and Christians. As we saw in our study of the Old Testament, one of the oldest examples of apocalyptic literature is found in Chapters 7-12 of the Book of Daniel.

Apocalyptic literature was written to encourage people to be faithful to God during times of great persecution. It has several common traits. Apocalyptic literature divides history into two eras: the evil present and the coming reign of God. It emphasizes the conflict between Good and Evil and usually indicates that, for the present time, evil will seem to be prevailing. However, victory is ultimately to be God’s, followed by the end of history and a Judgment where the faithful are rewarded and those who have fought the Good are punished. Apocalyptic also makes use of symbolic images such as beasts, dragons, horns, seas of fire and more. Some scholars believe that the use of symbolism was to hide the message of the book from everyone but the faithful but most scholars believe that the use of symbolism was intended to impart a sense of mystery to the writings.

Revelation was probably written during the closing years of the first century during the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-96 C.E.) although references in parts of it seem to refer to persecution during the time of Nero (54-68 C.E.). Both Domitian and Nero engaged in active persecution of Christians. Of particular interest in this regard is the reference to the number 666 or 616 (Rev. 13:18). The letters of the Hebrew language were, at one time, given numerical values. In Hebrew, there were two ways to write the name Nero. In one way the name would equal the value 666. In the other way the name would equal the value 616. Both figures appear in manuscripts of the Book of revelation. However, modern interpreters seeking to argue that the Book of

Revelation is foretelling modern history have claimed that the “beast” referred to is Adolph Hitler, Mussolini, Henry Kissinger, Barrack Obama and even Pope Paul the VI. Other nominations though the centuries have included the Papacy in general, Muhammad, Labor Unions, European Banking Cartels and a supercomputer located in Brussels. The symbolism in revelation is open enough so that many individuals and organizations can be shoehorned into the image.

The writer of the Book of Revelation claims to be a man named John in exile on the island of Patmos, apparently for preaching the Gospel. (See Rev. 1:9). This is unlikely to be the Apostle John both because of the age of the writing and the fact that the writer refers to the Apostles but makes no claim to be one of the Apostles. It is also unlikely to be the same John who is connected with the Gospel of John or its Epistles since those documents do not have any elements of apocalypticism.

Chapters two and three outline the messages that Jesus wishes conveyed to seven churches in Asia Minor. These churches are admonished to remain faithful to the Gospel and not grow weary or afraid of preaching the Gospel. They are to be wary of false teachings and false prophets and apostles. The text then turns to the vision of the future that has been revealed to John.

From this point on in the text, the imagery is very difficult to interpret and it cannot be put into any sort of recognizable chronology. For instance, in chapter six, after the breaking of the “sixth seal” of a scroll handed from the “the one on the throne” (God) to the “one like a slaughtered lamb” (Jesus) the earth and the Universe apparently comes to an end.

² When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, ¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. ¹⁴ The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

The sky has been ‘rolled up’ and the mountains and islands have been removed. However, according to the text, the Kings of earth, and apparently all its people are still present and are in for further cataclysms in at least ten of the coming chapters.

The Beast imagery referenced above begins in chapter 13. Some people refer to the Beast as the Antichrist although, as discussed last week, that term only appears in the letters of 1&2 John and refers to **persons** who have left the Johannine community. Reading the Book of Revelation as Apocalyptic literature written during a time of Roman persecution, the Beast can be interpreted to be the Roman Empire, supported by the power of Satan, dominating the world. The beast makes war on the Saints and its mouth is filled with the blood of the martyrs. Likewise, the “Whore of Babylon,” seated on seven mountains (Rev. 17:9) would seem to be the City of Rome perched upon its seven hills. After descriptions of the many battles between Good and Evil, Satan is defeated, the world is judged, and the world is reborn as a “new heaven and a new earth.”

When you attempt to read through the Book of Revelation I encourage you to utilize a scholarly commentary that is not trying to make the case that Revelation is a prediction of what is in store for the present day world. As noted above, this is an activity that has been undertaken for centuries and the symbolism of revelation is pliable enough to allow it to be applied to most any time and place. However, read as a call to be faithful to the Gospel even in times of great persecution, such as the Christians of the Sudan are experiencing today, it can be a source of comfort and encouragement.

The Poverty and Justice Bible

The Poverty & Justice Bible is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to www.Justicebible.org.

*¹⁰ Every bone in my body
will shout:
“No one is like the LORD!”
You protect the helpless
from those in power;
you save the poor and needy
from those who hurt them. PS 35:10 CEV*

Do all those in power seek to exploit the poor? Of course not. But, as shown by the Book of Psalms in texts dating back around 3000 years, it is also something that has happened again and again. The Bible proclaims that God is on the side of those who are victimized by the powerful.

When you give a dinner or a banquet, don't invite your friends and family and relatives and rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return, and you will be paid back. ¹³ When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ They cannot pay you back. But God will bless you and reward you when his people rise from death. Luke 14:12-14 CEV

The Gospel of Luke takes a different tack and encourages Jesus' disciples to seek relationships among the poor and those who are in need. Sharing a meal with someone in the first century was an affirmation of that person's worth in the eyes of the host. Jesus is encouraging his disciples to see all people as their brothers and sisters.

Bible Study

For the last two years I have led a bible study on Thursday mornings. We are currently studying the Book of Psalms. There is room for as many as would like to participate. Please call me if you have questions or simply come and be a part of our study. We meet from 10:00 to 11:30 on Thursday mornings.

I believe that the study of scriptures with other Christians is an essential part of our journey as Disciples. If you would like to be a part of a bible study at another time, during the day or evening, please contact me. If we can interest four or five people in gathering at a particular time I would be glad to lead another study.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

January 26th: Shredding the Church: There is a lot that can be done with a piece of paper, or even half a sheet, or a quarter-sheet. But at some point, if you keep tearing at it, the paper becomes confetti; possibly decorative but not very useful. In many ways we have been tearing the Church apart for centuries. My texts are Matthew 4:12-23 and 1 Corinthians 1:10-18.

February 2nd: These Are Blessings? The Beatitudes are a curious collection of blessings. Jesus describes some very unlikely conditions and proclaims them Blessings. What do you think? My texts are Micah 6:6-8 and Matthew 5:1-12.

Worship Leaders Schedule

January 26

Jason Aldred, **Liturgist**

Sam Richardson & Marty Bauguess, **Greeters**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Ushers**

February 2

Marty Bauguess, **Liturgist**

Dawn & Richard Stevens, **Greeters**

Sam Richardson & Herb Haynes, **Ushers**

Announcements

SPRC Meeting January 26th following Worship: There will be an important meeting of the Staff Parish Relations Committee on January 26 immediately following worship. A light lunch will be provided and information from the Cabinet concerning the Church's preference form will be reviewed.

Updated Directory:

A **draft copy of the printed directory** will be made available for your review again this Sunday, January 26. The drafts are located on the table inside the back door of the church. Please review your information for accuracy. Make any corrections to names, address, phone numbers, email addresses on the draft copy. After corrections are made, a final copy will be printed and will be made available to those who want a copy.

The **pictures for the directory** are nearly ready for your review. When the process is complete, you will receive directions to access the secure web address where the pictures are located. You will select the particular pose that you want to be printed in the directory and provide that information to Judy Richardson.

January Birthdays

Dawn Stevens, Aislinn Crowell, Cherry Klein, Dennis Meaker, Judy Richardson, Jessica Moore

Happy Birthday!