

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group (2018): Book of Revelation Chapter 1

Most Bible books start with God having given someone a story/insight/vision to share. The writer has seen or heard or tasted on, more broadly, experienced something, and is bursting to tell others all about it. John has seen God, and, unsurprisingly, wants to share what he has seen. Sometimes, it all seems a bit breathless, but, whatever the immediate impact on John may have been, he has had time to think about it and to craft it carefully – without losing the sense of excitement. If you have time, it is worth looking at some of the other Bible visions of God: John knew he wasn't the first visionary, though he may have suspected that he would be the last. He has a strong sense of urgency.

Isaiah Chapter 6, Daniel Chapter 7, Ezekiel Chapter 1, are good examples. You will notice that John's revelation is of Jesus, and that he writes of Jesus very much as his predecessors wrote of Jehovah: the beginning of all things, the meaning of all things, the end of all things. Revelation Chapter 1 is short enough to read and savour in one or two different versions: the writer tells us something about himself, why he is writing, who he is writing for, and what he wants his "audience" to do. You couldn't ask more of an introduction. Our hymn book links 13 hymns to this first chapter. You might like to see how many you can spot without looking them up.

You might be forgiven for thinking that there were just 7 churches, and that the 7 candlesticks and 7 stars stem from having 7 churches. It is fairly certain that in fact choosing 7 churches is fairly arbitrary, and that the starting point is the number 7: 3 the spirit number, 4 the earth number. On that basis, John is writing to all churches for all time, and therefore to us. In 2018, we might not feel the sense of urgency that John felt; and we certainly shouldn't be trying to use Revelation to pinpoint when the world will end. Frankly, nobody has a clue, and frankly it isn't our business. But we ought to have the same sense of urgency. We only know we have got NOW, and mission ought always to be urgent, though not rushed.

As we hear different words in different versions, what words particularly grab us as descriptions of/ statements about Jesus?

John emphasises worship. Such Christian meeting places as there may have been in John's time were pretty miserable places compared with the splendid pagan temples, or compared with the now defunct Jerusalem Temple. The Christians were not likely to have had money for special robes etc, even if they had fancied dressing up. How do we make worship in our own time "worthy worship" – the sort the angels might want to join in. Does "glory" have to be expensive? (One of our primary school visitors today said that the main thing in the church was the cross. How profound is that!