

An Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature

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[0:00] Verse 13. And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea, and I saw a beast coming out of the sea.

The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion.

The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed.

The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast. And they also worshiped the beast and asked, Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies. And to exercise his authority for 42 months, He opened his mouth to blaspheme God and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.

[1:29] He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast. All whose names have not been written in the book of life, belonging to the lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed.

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints. Then I saw another beast coming out of the earth.

He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast whose fatal wound had been healed.

[2:37] And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth.

He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.

He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

Let's hear the word of God. The future.

[4:02] He's given us perspective so that we can live with the right priorities. Right? Isn't that exactly the problem that we have in high school? When we don't understand so many things that are so important, we live for the wrong things because we don't, we're not in the future.

We don't know what's going to be important later. And so God is giving us this perspective so we'll have the right priorities so that we can live without regrets. So we don't have to say, oh, if I only knew what I knew, what I know now, back then it would be different.

So God is going to take us out of this narrow, limited perspective of what we have, this vision of what we have, and he's going to give us a God's eye view of what is going on in the world and his plan for it so that we can live by faith now, so that we can live wisely.

But like I said, this is, it's strange. It's strange. We read Revelation 13 and Revelation 7 is a lot different.

They're sort of cousin passages. It's different than what we're used to. And so this evening, I want to sort of orient you to the rest of Daniel.

[5:17] And mostly I want to give you some keys to understanding and how to interpret apocalyptic literature. And really the goal is I want you to sort of have some of these things in your toolbox so that you can read and appreciate and enjoy and learn from some of these strange parts of the Bible, from Daniel 7 through 12 and like the book of Revelation.

So the first thing that you need to appreciate and to understand is that apocalyptic literature, this literature that we find in Revelation and what we find in the rest of Daniel, is meant, is written to reveal.

It's written to reveal. So our last book of our Bible is Revelation. We've read a portion of it. If you could turn back to Revelation chapter 1, verse 1. And John tells us why the book of Revelation is written.

Revelation 1.1. 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.

Now, the word revelation, the second word in the book there, the revelation, the revelation is where we get our word apocalypse. So it's related to this apocalyptic theme.

[6:50] And it means uncovering, unveiling. So the book of Revelation uncovers what soon must take place. It's written to reveal something.

And this is very important for us to understand from the very beginning, because sadly, we have a tendency to think just the opposite. We approach Daniel, and we approach Revelation, and our first thought is, this is so obscure.

This is so confusing. It's like looking through a fogged up window. It's looking at everything's fuzzy. Everything is elusive. When I try to grab onto something, it's like oil, and it slips right out of your hand, and it's hard to gather what exactly is going on.

It's always running away from me. And so we start to think, when we approach these books, that they are, in fact, this is what we start to think, that they are, in fact, meant to be confusing.

They're meant to hide things. We are meant to come to these books and just have no idea what they're talking about. And we sort of feel good when we leave the book, and we're like, well, yep, again, I don't know what's going on.

[8:00] We're not supposed to get it, so we think. But actually, the exact opposite is true. These books are meant to reveal, to show us things. But there is no denying the fact that they're strange, nonetheless, that they are hard, in any case, for us to understand what's going on.

It's hard for us to wrap our minds around it, because it comes to us in a very strange, it comes with very strange packaging. It comes in a very strange form that we're not used to.

See, we're used to logic and prose, you know? So, we want to read Romans, where it's very logical and very straightforward, and there's these theological terms and these building a case and things like that.

But this stuff, that we read here, it's more like the strange concoction of fantasy and horror, and there's poetry, and we're not used to it.

See, we live in a very, a very ordinary, bland culture. We don't appreciate poetry overall. We like things very straightforward. We don't live in a very picturesque world.

[9:19] And so, we need to, and that's how this literature comes to us. This is how God presents his truth to us. And so, we need to know more than that it's supposed to reveal something to us.

We need the rules to understand it. And so, first, it's meant to reveal, and secondly, apocalyptic literature is written so that the original audience could understand and appreciate it.

So, the original audience would be able to have an understanding and appreciate what God was telling them. And this is where so many people get it all wrong.

If we're ever going to understand Daniel or Revelation, we need to understand that the original, how the original audience would have heard it and how they would have thought about it.

And again, this is where so many people just get it wrong. They come to these books and they don't think about what the original audience would have heard and understood from it.

[10:21] Instead, they want to fill it up with their own meaning and they want to fill it up with their own modern day understanding. So, for example, turn in your Bibles to Revelation chapter 9.

Revelation chapter 9. And let's look at verse 15. Revelation 9 verse 15. And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind.

The number of the mounted troops was 200 million. I heard their number. The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this. Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and sulfur. So, you have these weird, terrifying creatures.

They're horses with lion's heads who, they can breathe fire and later on, a few verses later, it says that they have snakes for tails and these snakes bite men.

[11:31] So, what are these things? Well, some scholars, instead of thinking about how the original audience would have pictured this or viewed this or understood it, they want to think about what it possibly could mean today.

So, how could this be fulfilled today in a literal sense? And so, one scholar writes this, it seems clear that what John envisions for us is the machinery of modern military destruction translated into the military terminology of his own day.

He then goes on to suggest that what John saw was really, this is what he really saw, he just couldn't understand it, it was really tanks and troop carriers and missile launchers and helicopters. So, what has he done? He's taken what the original audience would have thought and he's pushed that to the side and he's filled up the text with his own things, what's going on today.

Hal Lindsey, another famous biblical Bible interpreter, thinks it refers to the effects of nuclear war and so the smoke is radioactive fallout and, you know, the brimstone is the melted earth.

[12:47] Now, whatever this army is, it's not the point to talk about it today, we're going totally the wrong direction if we think about it in modern terms. Without thinking what the original audience would have understood, John didn't write Revelation or God didn't give him the Revelation in the form that he had it and Daniel didn't write Daniel so that no one until the 1970s could understand it, could figure it out.

the seven churches who John wrote to, the audience that Daniel had would have had a certain way of understanding it and as we approach these texts, we need to understand that we need to tie our interpretation and what we think about it to what they thought about it and before we apply it to our lives.

So here's the good news. Daniel 7-12, which we're going to start next week, Lord willing, is understandable to a certain degree. I'm not going to promise you that everything is going to be nice and neat and you're going to have all your questions answered but it's understandable to a certain degree and we don't have to study, you know, all the latest current events.

You don't have to be masters of what's going on in the UN and what's going on in NATO and what's going on in Europe to understand it. We just need to understand and think, study, what would the original audience have saw and seen in these pictures?

So that's secondly. Second point is that it was written so the original audience could understand it. Now thirdly, Daniel 7-12 and all other apocalyptic literature is written from God's, from a God's eye perspective.

[14:29] It's written from a God's eye perspective. This is history from the throne. This is history from God's perspective. So where does John start in Revelation?

Revelation. Well, the first scene that he sees is a throne and there's one seated on the throne and he's glorious and he's separate and he's holy and he's ruling over all and everything is seen coming from the throne.

All the angels leave the throne and they go down to earth and they leave the throne and they go and do their master's bidding and we read it in Revelation 1-1. This is the revelation from God.

These things are from God. This is his perspective on history and what is going on in the world and Daniel's no different. Haven't we seen this repeatedly in Daniel already?

That this is about the Lord's kingdom. This isn't about anything less than God's total dominion. He's setting up his kingdom in the middle of the kingdoms of this world and that little stone is going to turn into a giant mountain until all the kingdoms of men are destroyed and there's only the eternal kingdom of God.

[15:49] He's the most high. His dominion is eternal. He has eternal dominion. He changes times and seasons. In Daniel 7-12 it doesn't go and go off into another theme.

It just brings that theme and repeats it. We didn't read it tonight but Daniel 7 is about God the ancient of days and he's seated on his throne and he's giving the kingdom to the son of man and to the saints.

The throne is central in Daniel 7-12. Now earlier I said apocalyptic literature all this this very strange literature that we find in our Bible is given to give us perspective.

And the reason it gives us perspective is because it shows us God's view of things. It gives us God's perspective his transcendent view.

Now from God's view history is laid out before him. He sees the beginning from the end. He's eternal. eternal. There's no doubt about where this is going because he sees the end.

[17:03] He knows where it's going. He's planned for it. So remember Ecclesiastes chapter 3. It's been a year or two. There's a time for everything under the sun. Remember?

A season for this, a time for that, a time for this. But no one can understand what God is doing.

That's what Kohler told us. So we're on the underside of the tapestry.

We're on the underside of history. And all we see are the knots and the tangles and the problems and the confusing little bits, but we don't see the whole tapestry.

So we don't understand 9-11. Why did that happen? We don't have any good answers. We don't have any solid for sure answers. We don't understand the lawless deeds of men.

How things could get this bad. How people could do that. And then the courts say, oh, it's okay. Why does evil happen to the good?

[18:05] And good things happen to the evil. It seems from our perspective that time and chance happens to everyone. And it can be so disheartening.

It can be so discouraging. Especially when we see the kingdoms of men growing. And God's church is persecuted. God's church is, it seems so small and so insignificant.

But in Daniel 7-12 and in Revelation, God takes us in a certain way above the tapestry. He shows us, he gets us past all the knots and the tangles and he shows us where this is all going.

He shows us enough of the tapestry so that we can see, you know what, everything is going to be okay. There are going to be problems. There is going to be pain.

But in the end, this will be redeemed. Everything really is going the right way. But we can't see that until we have God's perspective and view on things.

[19:14] So that's the third thing that's what you should be looking for when you read it. The fourth, apocalyptic literature is written using symbolic language.

It's written using symbolic language. And again, it's amazing how some people can struggle with this. When a sentence begins, the stars will fall from heaven and the sun will go dark and the moon will start to drip blood, you just know that the rest of the sentence isn't going to go and the rest of the country is going to see partly cloudy skies with a chance of rain.

Daniel 7-12 is written in symbolic language. We're not supposed to understand blood dripping from the moon in a literal way. And so it's not a mixture of strict literalism and symbolism.

What this does is it brings us into this world, into a symbolic world where a picture speaks a thousand words, where symbols interact with each other, not to confuse us, but to reveal, to give us truth, to give us understanding, to give us wisdom.

Remember John said several times, this is going to take wisdom to understand this. You need to apply your mind to this if you're going to appreciate it. And so this world that this literature paints for us is not this world where we have to tear everything apart and just annihilate the picture and just get to the bare bones of the truth.

[20:54] The pictures are the way that the truth is being told to us. It's saying this is how the kingdom of God works. And this is what the kingdom of men are like.

And this is what is going to happen. And it tells us more in several pictures than we could ever put down in a hundred and a thousand pages of a systematic theology.

Because a picture does speak a thousand words. And this is so important for us to understand. the symbols that we're going to see of beasts and exotic animals.

In Revelation you have hills and harlots and horns and thrones. They're meant to show us the true essence of things. The pictures themselves are conveying what these things really are.

What they are really beyond what they look like. So the kingdoms of this earth, the kingdoms of men, they are wild, terrible, appalling beasts.

[22:07] We read Revelation 13 and we saw a beast coming out of the sea. Next week, Lord willing, when we read Daniel 7, we'll see a beast coming out of the sea. And this beast in Revelation, it resembles a leopard but has the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion.

And he's terrifyingly strong. He's so strong that the whole world worships the beast and says, who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?

He's unconquerable. He cannot be defeated. And so the beast has blasphemous names written all over his seven heads and he has blasphemies in his heart and he blasphemes God and he makes war against the saints to conquer them.

And he becomes an idol to every single person on the whole earth except for God's elect. Everyone bows down to him to worship him. Well, what is this beast? Well, first it's Rome but it's a picture of all the kingdoms of men.

The picture is designed to show John's original hearers, what is Rome really like? See, in that day, Rome appeared so attractive on the outside.

[23:21] it seemed so powerful and it could be so good. I mean, Rome gave civilization to so many people and it was so attractive it provided peace and business could flourish under the control of Rome.

Maybe you've seen the movie Gladiator and it has all those wonderful pictures, those computer generated pictures of what Rome would have been like, the eternal city, you know, with all these fabulous buildings.

Rome exuded power and glory and riches and prestige. But God says, let me show you what Rome is really like.

Let me show you what the kingdoms of men are really like in reality. To one degree or another, they are in opposition to God. And above all else, they want your allegiance. They want you to bow down to them.

They want power. power and when the saints resist them, the beast devours them. But the thing is, that isn't how it looks to us so much of the time.

[24:35] See, we look at things from an earthly perspective and not from a heavenly perspective. And the kingdoms of men can look so attractive. And the power and the prestige and the wealth that they could have, it's attractive.

And there's this desire. John's readers in Revelation, they would have wanted to compromise.

Look, if we compromised, then we could have. And remember, what was Daniel up against?

All he needed to do was compromise. And he could be assimilated, and he could keep his little religion on the side, but Nebuchadnezzar would take him places.

But what does God see? It's a monster. It appears like one thing, but it is actually something else.

And this is a theme, this is a technique that apocalyptic literature uses all the time.

Things aren't always what they seem. Things aren't always what they seem. So, remember, I'm trusting that you do Revelation 5, there's a scroll, and let me see, the scroll is there, no one else can open it, there's no one who can be found that can open it, and John begins to weep.

[25:50] And then the angel says, oh, don't weep, see the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has triumphed. He is able to open the seven seals. And so what are you expecting to see?

You're expecting to see a terrifying lion, or a glorious conquering king with a sword in his hand, and then it flashes, and it shows you the lamb, looking as if it was slain.

So you have this bloody, weak lamb. How did Jesus triumph? How is he the lion?

It was by dying, by being the lamb. You see, things aren't always what they seem. the cross looks like a terrible loss.

From a human perspective, the cross looks like a horrible and pathetic story. A deluded man who finally picked on someone who was too big for him, and he ended up dying for it.

[26:58] Or a man with great ambitions. He was going to bring in the kingdom of God, and he ends up beaten and torn to death. The cross doesn't look like victory, but it is.

The world sees no glory in a bloody, dead Savior. Paul says the cross is an offense. Men will actually compromise their Christianity in order so they will not be persecuted because the cross is shameful.

It's foolishness. You believe in an old, dead guy. That's stupid. Or say that. It's stupid. But this world is blind to the truth. Things aren't always what they seem.

What looks like foolishness is God's wisdom. And what looks like weakness is God's power. And what looks so powerful and so enduring is just another animal that God is going to destroy. The kingdoms of man, the United States, all the old kingdoms, and the final, last kingdom that is going to be so terrible that for all intents and purposes, the church will be destroyed until you can't be hardly found, is actually not strong at all.

[28 : 22] Jesus will come, and with the breath of his mouth, he will destroy the Antichrist. And with the glory of his coming, he will destroy the kingdoms of men. For the kingdoms of men appear so strong that they won't last the day.

So things are not what they seem. In Daniel 7 through 12 and in Revelation, it looks like God's people are done for. You're going to read, as we read through Daniel 7 through 12, Daniel 7 talks about the saints are going to get the kingdom.

And then from 8 through 12, it's like they totally disappear off the scene. They're pushed around by greater powers. They're persecuted and Daniel is left looking forward to the resurrection.

Because this life and everything, it seems to have been washed up. It looks like God's people are done for. They look like a small, insignificant people.

In the world's eyes, that's what we are. But they aren't. And you aren't. Because what looks like defeat is actually victory.

[29 : 32] And again, we're going to see that over and over again in Daniel. That what looks like defeat is actually victory. So if you were to go to Revelation 20 in your mind, this is the passage with the thousand year reign.

Satan seems so strong, but he's chained. And the martyrs, they've had their heads cut off for their testimony.

They appear weak. It looks like Satan has won and they have lost. But God shows us what actually is happening. With every martyr's death, Satan is continually chained.

The truth continues to go out. And the martyrs rise and reign. Things aren't what they seem. And the whole point of all this literature is to tell us the simple truth.

that it is not death to die. It's not death to die for Jesus. It's not death to die and fling this dust of our body and go and rise and live among the just.

[30 : 41] We suffer and die, but we are never overcome. That is the point of Revelation and that is the point of Daniel 7 through 12. You'll see it over and over again. It gives you that perspective.

We might die, but we are not overcome. And it's this new perspective, this gospel, triumphant gospel perspective that will change the way you live.

So do you have to fall and rise with the falling and rising of this country or any country? No, you don't. You are citizens of a better country, a heavenly one.

Should you live for the things that this world lives for? Should you have those priorities? No, brothers and sisters, Jesus died and rose again to give us new life so that we could enter the kingdom of God and this world isn't going to last.

The night is almost over, the day is at hand, and so you should live as children of the light because that is what you are. You're children of the day.

[31 : 53] Should the same things that frighten them frighten you? We saw that this morning. No, you've outgrown those things. You've outgrown those things.

You're a child of the glorious king, and so when this world comes in and presses on you to assimilate you like it did to Daniel, when the pressure came, you can say no because your father reigns above heaven and earth.

And when this world tries to press you and conform you and make you want to worship the things that they worship like they did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you can say no and you don't have to give in.

Why? Because King Nebuchadnezzar and all the kings of men, all the great men that so many people fear, are like those high school students that you don't care about anymore because you've outgrown them.

You're not worried about impressing high school students when you're a grown up. And when you're in high school you're not concerned about impressing junior high students. You've grown up.

[32 : 55] You've grown out of it. And this is the thing. You've outgrown the kingdoms of men.

You've outgrown their fears, their concerns, their power.

You're God's heir. You're seated with Christ in heavenly places. God doesn't want us to come to the end of our days and say, only if I could do it over again.

If I knew then what I know now, I would have been braver. I wouldn't have compromised.

I would have believed more. I would have suffered for Jesus. I would have refused assimilation and refused compromise. compromise. Our God doesn't want us to come to the end of our days with regrets.

And so he's showing us the whole scheme of things. He's showing how it's going to end. He's showing what's going, really going on. He's showing us what these things and these people really are. And he wants us to learn those things.

[34:08] Not so that we can impress our friends, but so that we can live a holy, godly life in wisdom now until he comes. And the wonderful thing is, brothers and sisters, you will endure.

You will endure, not because you're so faithful or you're so smart, you're so obedient. You will endure because Jesus loves you and he's upholding you.

And he died for you and he's going to get you home. Let's pray. our heavenly father, we thank you for the truths of your word.

Thank you that you lift us out of our narrow perspective of life and you show us what is truly valuable. You show us what is really meaningful.

You show us true power grace and it's all in Jesus Christ. Thank you for showing him to us, opening the eyes of our heart that we could see Jesus, that we could see through the apparent weakness of the cross and see strength.

[35:26] And we can see through the apparent failure of the cross and see everything that we need. And we can see through the apparent judgment. And we can see grace upon grace coming through the cross to us.

Lord Jesus, I thank you for giving us the eyes of faith. Holy Spirit, will you please strengthen our eyes, strengthen the eyes of our hearts so that we can begin to understand and to comprehend what you are doing, how you have loved us, so that we would live differently, so that we would live gospel centered lives, God centered lives in this wicked world that we find ourselves.

I pray for those who struggle with the fear of men, that's all of us, but for those who especially struggle with that, will you show them how strong you are.

Will you show them how you love them and you can rescue them. Pray for those who are lost, who are blind to the things of God, they're living for a world that is coming to a swift close.

Pray that you would save them and wake them up from their deathly sleep. We ask that you would have mercy on all of us for we need your mercy.

[36:51] All of us need your grace. So we thank you that you are full of grace for us. In Jesus' name, Amen. Let's take our grace hymns and turn to number nine.