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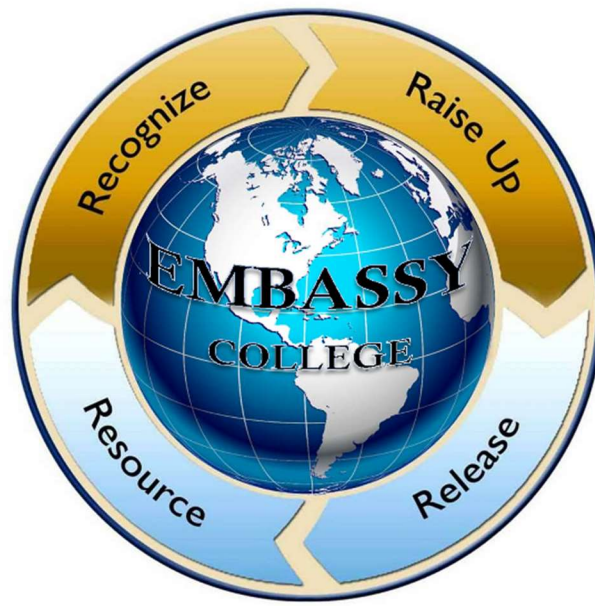


TEXTBOOK (ACADEMIC VERSION)

Letters From the Risen Lord

COURSE: THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION (NT504)

Dr. Ron Cottle



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LETTERS FROM THE RISEN LORD



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DR. RONALD E. COTTLE

LETTERS FROM THE RISEN LORD

LETTERS FROM THE RISEN LORD

The Letters to the Seven Churches

Ageless Principles of Power for Living

Third Edition

A Bible study for laymen, ministers, and teachers, based on spiritual insights and truths given by the Resurrected Christ to John for the seven churches of Revelation.

RONALD E. COTTLE, Ph.D., Ed.D.

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DEDICATION



Dedicated to my mother, Grace Viola Hollar Cottle, who has always been my constant supporter and friend. She has surrounded my life with unconditional love since it began as her firstborn. Never could one ask for greater love and loyalty than I have always received from her. She is, at this writing (1991), a young, vibrant great-grandmother whose life still centers upon her five children and a growing number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

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PREFACE



The book of Revelation was written to seven churches in ancient Asia Minor. Revelation 1:4 and 1:11 not only state this fact, but go on to name the churches in order. However, these were not the only churches in Asia. There were churches at Colossae (Col. 1:2); Hierapolis (Col. 4:12); Troas (2 Cor. 2:12); and Miletus (Acts 20:17). The question arises, given the presence of the other Asian churches, why did John single out these seven? There are several possible answers to this question; however, only the two most likely are given here.

These seven churches were centers of seven postal districts and all were situated on a long road which circled about the interior of the province of Asia. If letters were sent to these larger churches, they would also have been shared with the smaller ones in outlying districts. When one looks at a map of Asia, he finds that these are indeed centers from which one could carry a letter by foot to all of the other churches. Furthermore, when we remember that every letter had to be hand-written on parchment, a very tedious and expensive process in the first century, it is easy to accept this explanation as being the most likely. However, a second reason for seven churches is also worthy of consideration. Seven was John's favorite number, as it was for many other early Christians. It occurs fifty-four times in Revelation.

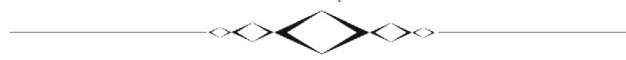
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In the book one finds reference to seven candlesticks, seven stars, seven lamps, seven seals, seven angels, seven plagues, and seven vials. In the ancient world, and especially among certain Jews of the first century, seven was considered to be the perfect number. It stands for completeness. Therefore, by writing to seven churches, John was, in fact, writing to the whole church, and that means the church of John's day, the church of history and the church today—you and me.

The chapters of this exposition, based on John's inspired letters, are written with the prayer that they shall bring new insights and blessings to all who read.

R. E. Cottle
Columbus, Georgia
February, 1991

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INTRODUCTION

Studying the book of Revelation is a daunting challenge. This is especially true for those who have not matured fully in their Christian walk. Yet, it perennially receives substantial attention both from individual Christians and preachers alike. As evidence to its difficulty, note the testimonies of various men of faith regarding this peculiar book.

Revelation is either abandoned as quite unintelligible or it becomes the playground of religious quacks who use it to map out celestial timetables of what is to come.—Hans Lilje

There are as many riddles in Revelation as there are words.—St. Jerome

The study of Revelation either finds man mad or leaves him that way. – R.H. Charles

In 1552, Martin Luther wrote: “Revelation neither taught nor acknowledged Christ, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is not perceptible in it. My spirit cannot adjust to the book.”

He was dismayed that it was included in the Canon of Scripture. By 1545, he had mellowed somewhat in his viewpoint when he wrote: “Some have brewed into Revelation stupid things out of their heads. We can profit from Revelation. The Church will win. Wicked powers fight against the Church.”

Other great Christians of the past loved and acclaimed Revelation above all books. Among them were Thomas Kepler and Phillip Carrington. Their commentary reads:

“In the case of Revelation, we are dealing with an artist greater than Stephenson or Coleridge or Bach. St. John has a better sense of the right word than Stephenson; he has a greater command of unearthly supernatural loveliness than Coleridge; he has a richer sense of melody and rhythm and composition than Bach. Revelation is the only masterpiece of pure art in the New Testament.”

High praise indeed, for a book which has caused other men of renown to bemoan its resistance to profound interpretation and theological persuasion. As a teacher, I have drawn my own conclusions which have provoked me to write and teach it. In so doing, I have developed a heartfelt and deep appreciation for this the final book of the Bible.

Revelation is a difficult book to understand. At times it seems weird; always it is fantastic, its imagery bordering on the absurd. Its only rival in scripture is the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament. That book is also filled with metaphor and allegory which present interpreters with difficult challenges. As a result, I believe it should only be assigned to mature Christians for serious study. Those less developed in their Christian experience will need a seasoned, well-grounded instructor to guide them through its intriguing story.

It is filled with angels, beasts, dragons, and demons. Left without scrupulous guidance and a well-defined basis of

interpretation, these images will leave students filled with speculation and confused. But each word picture was painted as a clear message, especially for the readers of John's day.

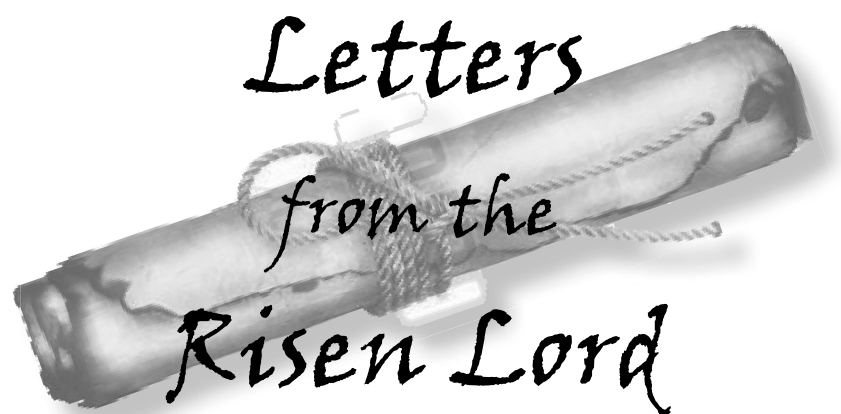
To be perfectly candid, it often puzzles me, just as it did the early Church fathers. But like them I believe it belongs in the sacred canon of Scripture. I believe it was inspired by God and related to John as it professes to be. I also believe it belongs because it is the only fitting conclusion to the New Testament story.

The Gospels offer us four biographical sketches of the life of Jesus Christ. These were written by four different writers from the perspective of their individual communities of faith. The Gospels faithfully depict how, in the fullness of time and in fulfillment of prophetic promises, God brought Jesus into the world. They also describe how He brought salvation to mankind through His life, death, burial, and resurrection.

The book of Acts is a record of how the early Church spread that Good News (the Gospel) from Jerusalem to Rome, as well as to Mesopotamia and Greece. The Gospel message quickly spread from a single people to the universal community as well, so that it became clear the Word of God was and is for all men everywhere and at all times.

The Epistles provide the Church with the underlying principles for living as Christians. Their message teaches us to apply the truths of the Gospel to the myriad problems of everyday life.

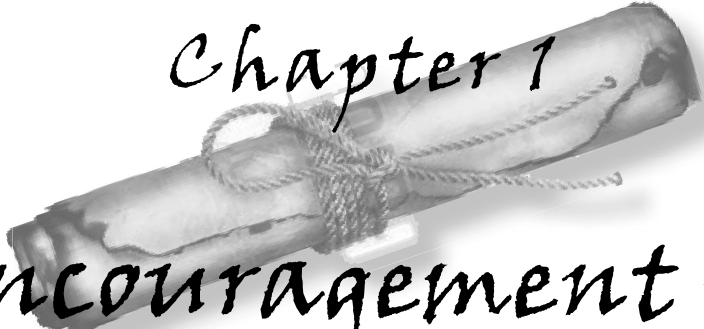
Revelation provides the culmination of the New Testament message. Apart from the terrifying pictures of devastation John describes, the most telling message rises on the unending torrent of worship and praise as multitudes of the redeemed, in exultant adoration sing their songs of praise around the throne of God. One cannot escape the almost deafening sound that resonates across the pages of this powerful unfolding of God's eternal plan.



Part 1

A Brief Analysis
of the
Book of Revelation

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Chapter 1

Encouragement in Troubled Times

Revelation was the last book to be accepted into the Canon of Scripture. Though written near the end of the first century, it was finally approved. It was approved by the western Church at the Council of Carthage (c. 397 A.D.) However, the Eastern Church did not ratify it until The Council of Constantinople (c. 680 A.D.) nearly three hundred years later. The Council of Laodicea (c. 343 – 381 A.D.) simply did not include Revelation in its list of canonical writings.

Apocalyptic writing became very popular among Jewish writers during the post-exilic time (c. 600 A.D. and following). Considered primarily as prophetic in nature, the genre is derived from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, which basically means unveiling. It is a joining of two words, *apo* which means away from, and *kalupto*, which means veil. This term was used to describe the discovery a man would make when he removed the veil which covered the face of his bride. In our New Testament book, it is the removal of the veil of mystery from the risen Christ.