In the past nearly 34 years, Wednesday night Bible study has become my favorite night of the week. During that time, I have taught 37 series on the Bible, primarily presenting them on the basis of expository teaching, verse by verse. This will be my 38th, and last, series, once again revisiting the Apostle John’s incredible book of Revelation. This series will be completed near the end of January when I retire from pastoring.

The picture above is a view of the Isle of Patmos with its primary settlement, the village of Skala. It was on Patmos that John was exiled by Roman emperor Domitian, about 94 or 95 AD, and it was here that Jesus Christ appeared to him, giving him the “revelation.” Let’s begin this remarkable journey together.

INTRODUCTION

The Place

The Bible, the Word of the Living God, is the ages-old saga of REAL PEOPLE who lived in a REAL TIME in a REAL PLACE. It is important to realize that as we begin this study of Revelation. What, for openers, was the place?
Patmos

It was early spring, 1971. Our old Greek freighter slid into the harbor of the little village of Skala, one of two such communities on the Island of Patmos, located in the Aegean Sea between Turkey and Greece. With me, sharing my cabin, was Jiles Kirkland, then-Bishop of the Methodist churches of Florida.

Skala was not then a deep-water port, so we anchored off-shore and were taken by little tenders (boats) to the docks. To say we were excited about our destination was an understatement. We were eager to explore this rather small, but very hilly, island, where the Apostle John had been visited by the Christ, Jesus Himself. There, our Lord revealed (hence the name: Revelation) to John and to us His plan for the last days that would preface His return and global rule.

Jiles and I were not able to secure a rental car anywhere on this small island; however, we did find a livery stable where we could rent donkeys. We paid for these obstinate little beasts and set out for adventure, making our way to the highest point on the island, a high hill on which sat the famed monastery of Saint John (believed to be near the cave where John had been secured). This huge edifice was completed almost a thousand years ago in honor of Saint John.

Patmos is not a large island, only about 3 by 5 miles, but very rugged. Our donkeys slogged their way to the summit where we dismounted and began our exploration and copious picture-taking. Our old ship, The Monarch, was almost constantly in view, anchored far below in the ocean, awaiting our return later in the day. What a spectacular view! We had been warned that when we heard the ship’s horn, we had thirty minutes to re-board. Suddenly - we heard it! We knew those donkeys would be useless at this point, so we ran - all the way, barely getting back before the ship started to leave the area!
The monastery of St. John, located on the summit of Patmos. This massive structure is an important place for Orthodox and Western Christians alike. It was founded in 1088 by a monk in honor of John. Its towers and buttresses make it look like a fairy-tale castle but it was built that way to protect its treasures. The cave where it is commonly believed that the apostle was held was located just several hundred yards away. No photography is allowed inside the cave, which was sad to me when I visited it on several occasions. However, there is not really much to see inside it.

The Man - John

Almost neglected now by tourists, the ruins of Bethsaida lay at the extreme north end of the Sea of Galilee. In Jesus’ time, it was a thriving fishing village. It was the home of John, and his brother James. His parents were apparently godly people and believed to be related - perhaps cousins - of Jesus. His mother loved Jesus and followed Him in His three-year ministry. His father was a commercial fisherman who owned his own boat and was prosperous enough to hire servants.

John himself was a fisherman. He was working at his trade when Jesus called him to become one of His disciples:
Matthew 4:18-22

And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. [19] Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." [20] They immediately left their nets and followed Him. [21] Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, [22] and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

It is commonly accepted by Bible scholars that John was the youngest of all Jesus’ disciples and the last to die. All of the disciples (except John) died violent deaths by martyrdom - except Judas who hanged himself when remorse for betraying Jesus overwhelmed him. John died a rather old man, probably in Turkey. He was in his 90's.

John wrote the Gospel that bears his name, the book of Revelation and I, II and III John. John and his brother James were cousins to Jesus. They were not shy about expressing their opinions and desires:

Mark 3:17
And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he (Jesus) surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder.

Luke 9:51-56
And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, [52] And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. [53] And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. [54] And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? [55] But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. [56] For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.
While still suffering and dying on the cross, Jesus commended the care of His mother Mary to John:

John 19:25-27

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. [26] When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! [27] Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

There are some who teach that Mary was “caught up” to Heaven; however, her earthly grave is in Ephesus.

On the next page, you will find a full-page picture of the ruins of Ephesus, Turkey, where John pastored and ministered until his death. At the foot of the hill lie the ruins of the Library of Celsus. Finished in the second century AD, it was named for a former Roman governor. The street is of marble and is indeed known as the Great Marble Way. It was down this magnificent highway that Marc Antony rode horseback with his troops to meet the ship of Cleopatra sailing into the harbor. That waterway has long since silted up and serves as farmland rather than an extension of the sea. Off to the right of the photo, and not seen, are the ruins of the massive 25,000 seat theater, still used occasionally today for concerts. It was here, during Paul’s ministry, that the Ephesians rioted for two hours.
Acts 19:24-36

For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; [25] Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. [26] Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: [27] So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. [28] And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. [29] And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. [30] And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. [31] And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. [32] Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. [33] And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. [34] But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. [35] And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? [36] Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.

This story from Scripture had to do with Paul, more than John; but it provides setting for the difficulties that John must have faced during his ministry here.
In the meantime, there was a shakeup in the leadership in Rome that would have direct bearing on John.

**Emperor Dometian 81-96 AD**

Emperor Dometian was the son of Emperor Vespasian (who constructed the Roman Coliseum) and the brother of Emperor Titus.

This Roman dictator was inclined by his nature to extreme cruelty. He had his brother killed and then raised the second level of persecution against Christians. In his rage, he put to death some of the Roman senators and confiscated the property of others. He then commanded that all Jews be killed.

No one was immune from the emperor’s ferocity. His decree was frightening: “No Christian, once brought before the tribunal, should be exempted from punishment without renouncing his religion.” The anti-Christian sentiment in the Roman Empire was that if famine, pestilence, or earthquakes afflicted any of the provinces, the blame was laid upon followers of Christ. These persecutions increased the number of informers; and many, for the sake of personal gain, swore away the lives of the innocent.

Domitian required to be called “god.” His diabolical worship was inflicted upon the Empire and became a required cult. Pastor John in Ephesus was a leader in opposition to this. Domitian decided to end this “troublemaker” once and for all. John himself wrote:

Revelation 1:9

*I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. This was meant to be a death sentence for the old apostle.*

However, there came a divine intervention that brought about the writing of the book of Revelation. Try to imagine, John walking somewhere on
the Isle of Patmos when Jesus appeared to him. Surrounded by
dying men…

Revelation 1:10-19

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice,
as of a trumpet, [11] Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the
last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven
churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto
Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia,
and unto Laodicea. [12] And I turned to see the voice that spake with
me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; [13] And in the
midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed
with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden
girdle. [14] His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as
snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; [15] And his feet like unto
fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of
many waters. [16] And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of
his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as
the sun shineth in his strength. [17] And when I saw him, I fell at his
feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear
not; I am the first and the last: [18] I am he that liveth, and was dead;
and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell
and of death.

[19] Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are,
and the things which shall be hereafter;

What a transformation with Jesus! No longer the gentle Savior, on whose
shoulder John had leaned during the last supper! Notice carefully how
Jesus now appeared! (And one must wonder why we don’t see pictures or
depictions of Jesus in paintings or films according to the way John
saw Him!)
The Promise To Those Who Read This Book

Revelation 1:1-3

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: [2] Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.* [3] Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

*“That he saw” (line 8) John was an eye-witness

John 1:14

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Note the blessing promised to those who read, hear and keep the truths of Revelation: “Blessed is he....” Oh, the sheer delight and fulfillment of those who study Revelation.

Final Note For Today

The book of Revelation is not only a “revealing” of the future, but it is also a revelation of Christ Himself. We learn of His power and majesty over all things that He has made.

Next week: THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA (the western coastline of Turkey)