

BASIC NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON 16--REMAINING NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS: PART II

I-II-III JOHN

These three letters are written in the spirit of the Gospel of John. They are apparently not by the Apostle, but are a product of the Christian community in Ephesus, which based its teaching program on the Apostle John and his interpretation of Jesus' teachings. After the Gospel of John was published, various Christians in Ephesus and other cities interpreted the Gospel of John in differing ways. These letters are an attempt to make the Gospel of John and its statements correctly understood, as opposed to certain conclusions wrongly inferred from the Gospel of John.

SUMMARY OF I JOHN

- 1:1-4 - The purpose of this letter is to impart a true understanding "concerning the word of life" [tou logou tes zoes]. (1:1) This statement links I John with the Gospel of John, using two of its key terms: Logos, (Word) and Zoe, (Life Principle). The author also writes as an eye-witness; he may have been an elderly man who remembered Jesus during his ministry.
- 1:5-10 - Statements are made regarding light and darkness, paraphrasing the Gospel of John. "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all." (1:5) We are to walk in the light, as Jesus is in the light. To do so, we have to acknowledge our mistakes, so that we can be cleansed of all false attitudes.
- 2:1-6 - Continuing the same basic theme: We need to think and live as Jesus thought and lived. Only then can we validly lay claim to know God and to be in the light. "Whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection." (2:5)
- 2:7-14 - The new commandment of Jesus is to love one another, as he has loved his disciples. Those who love others are in the light, but those who hate others are in spiritual darkness. For the light is oneness, the Unity of Being; and Jesus' affirmation of love is an affirmation of oneness.
- 2:15-17 - Do not love worldly thoughts or things, which are effects. "The world and its desires are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever." (2:17)
- 2:18-28 - Beware of deceivers; "now many antichrists have come." (2:18) This apparently refers to another faction, whose identity is unknown. The reader is told to rely upon the Son as the Inner Teacher: "As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him." (2:27)
- 2:29-3:3 -The Sonship: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." (3:1) Yet there is a greater illumination to follow: "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he [footnote, "or Lt"] is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." (3:2-3)

- 3:4-10 - Those who are born of God do not sin, for the Divine Word and Its ideas ("seed") are implanted in their consciousness.
- 3:11-24 - Again, Jesus' new commandment: To love one another. "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death." (3:14) This love is to be expressed in action. "Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him." (3:21-22)
- 4:1-6 - Test the spirits, as to whether or not they are from God. Those who affirm the Law of Expression are from God. "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." (4:2) Also, the One that is within you is greater than anything external. (4:4)
- 4:7-21 - God is Love. The text discusses various facets of this truth, e.g.: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." (4:7-8)
 God implants the Son within the inner world of our soul, giving us spiritual life. (4:9)
 We don't see God with our physical eyes, but we know God through the Love that He is, flowing through us. (4:12)
 "God is Love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." (4:16)
 "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." (4:18) Love and fear cannot coexist.
 "We love because he first loved us." (4:19) All genuine love is an expression of God or Love; God as Love is undivided.
- 5:1-5 - Faith conquers all worldly thought and belief. (5:4)
- 5:6-12 - Testimony concerning Sonship, the Indwelling Christ. "And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." (5:11)
- 5:13-21 - Concluding summary. "I write these things to you who believe in the name [nature and power] of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask [claim] anything according to his will, he hears us." (5:13-14)

II JOHN

This short letter is addressed by "The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth." (v. 1) The elect lady, who is unnamed, may have been the minister of a local Christian church.

The primary themes of II John are truth and love. It emphasizes walking in the truth and loving one another. It also warns against those who do not teach the truth.

III JOHN

III John is addressed by "The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth." (v. 1) The writer rejoices that Gaius walks in the truth. The Elder also gives Gaius a blessing for prosperity and health, as well as spiritual well-being. "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul." (v. 2)

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The Revelation to John is of the apocalyptic literary genre, but probably derives from the same school of early Christians who published the Gospel of John and I-II-III John. It is set in the form of a Greek drama, including choruses. It is multilayered in meaning, and incorporates the imagery of the ancient Near East, including Hebrew, Persian, and Egyptian elements. While it makes no direct quotations from the Old Testament, it portrays similar images.

Dorothy Elder, author of Revelation for a New Age (DeVorss, 1981), successfully shows that the Book of Revelation, by its use of universal images and symbols, depicts the overcoming of inner conflicts. The war between divine and satanic forces represents conflicts within the individual psyche, and does not refer to anything external. The text's central issue is: What is to be seated on the throne of our loyalty and attention, the Omnipresent God, or human error?

Scholars have debated whether the material in Revelation is based upon actual dreams and/or visions, or whether it consists of literary imitations of such material. In either case, the text has a definite affinity with the imagery of dreams; and the method by which it was formulated, in a literary sense, is thus less important than the imagery itself and what it signifies.

Those who use the Book of Revelation in the "literal" sense, as depicting hoped-for or dreaded future events, are missing its basic meaning and purpose. Also, it is not valid to use this book for purposes of divination, to predict specific events that are to occur in our own times. It does portray a new heaven and a new earth in Chapter 21:1--which we will discuss shortly--but this is depicted as already fulfilled in the Mind of God.

Also, it is not appropriate to look to Hindu, Buddhist, or Taoist symbology in interpreting the Book of Revelation, except as illustrating the universal symbology which the Bible also portrays. From a literary point of view, it must be treated as a Near Eastern, not a Far Eastern, document.

On one level, the text makes an historical statement. It was written during a time of persecution, probably that authorized by the Roman Emperor Domitian in the last decade of the First Century A.D. In its covert denunciation of the Roman Empire, its mood is notably less congenial than that expressed in I Peter. The readers are assured that the eternal forces of right are on their side, and that they will triumph in the end while Rome--"the Beast"--will perish. Its depiction of Babylon and its fall, in Chapter 18, actually refers to the Roman Empire and its predicted downfall. However, its language is so enigmatic that those outside of Jewish and Christian centers would not have understood its hidden intent. The actual city of Babylon had fallen centuries ago.

Revelation 2:1-3:22 is addressed to seven Christian churches in western Asia Minor, and gives various advice and warnings pertaining to them. These messages no doubt apply to actual Christian groups in these cities. The "angel" of each church, mentioned in the text, actually refers to the minister of that church who is called to take pastoral action. These cities are (top of next page):

(1)	2:1-7	- Ephesus	(5)	3:1-6	- Sardis
(2)	2:8-11	- Smyrna	(6)	3:7-13	- Philadelphia
(3)	2:12-17	- Pergamum	(7)	3:14-22	- Laodicea
(4)	2:18-29	- Thyatira			

There is, however, a deeper metaphysical message in the Book of Revelation. We are alerted to this in Revelation 1:9-20. The glorified Christ, who appears in this section, is not the historical Jesus. Rather, as “one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest.” (1:13), he represents the Cosmic Christ which is our own spiritual Identity. The number seven, a symbol of completion, is prominent both in the book’s literary structure and in the frequency with which the number itself is used.

A key text is Revelation 21:1-5, which proclaims a new heaven and a new earth. This refers to the realization of Omnipresence, which is followed by a transformation of consciousness as well as the harmonious expression of that consciousness in the body and outer conditions. It reflects the threefold Unity of Creator, creative action, and creation as understood in Divine Science. By attunement with Omnipresence, the new heaven of Christ Consciousness is brought forth into action as true thinking, and is expressed outwardly as health, harmony, and well-being.

The old heaven and the old earth pass away. This refers to our former belief system founded in the illusion of separation from God, and the conditions of disease and discord which resulted from that mistake. All such errors are symbolically thrown into the lake of fire, and are dissolved into their native nothingness.

With this recognition, we can approach a study of the book of Revelation without any fear that an outside God will act upon us to punish and destroy. The holy city, The New Jerusalem, is not a place--it is the consciousness of God’s peace. The tabernacle of God is no longer apart from the people, as in the Book of Exodus, but is with us and within us. The One dwells forever in us, and we dwell forever in the One.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes.
 Death will be no more;
 mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
 for the first things have passed away. --Revelation 21:4

REQUIRED BIBLE READINGS

Read I-II John and the Book of Revelation.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the teachings of I John on God as Love?
2. What are the teachings of I John on the Sonship?
3. In what sense is the Book of Revelation an historical allegory?
4. What is the metaphysical message of the Book of Revelation?