

Are you adventurous when it comes to food?
How about meals prepared from the organs of animals?

Most of you have probably been served
And have enjoyed liver and onions.
But how about black pudding?
Sausage made from pigs blood
mixed with fat and grain.
How about beef tongue?
Slow-cooked or braised
And stuffed into sandwiches.

How about sweetbreads?
Do you even know what sweetbreads are?

I once ordered this in a fancy restaurant in Old Montreal,
Upon the recommendation of the waiter.

I like bread.
I have a sweet-tooth.
Sweetbreads sounded good.

But halfway through the meal I discovered
This meal was made out of pancreas or thymus.
I didn't clean my plate.

How adventurous are you when it comes to food?
How adventurous are you when it comes
To reading your Bible?

Most people are quite at home
Reading those stories in Genesis.

But have you ever read through Ezekiel or Daniel?

Most people are quite comfortable
Even knowledgeable about the Gospels.
But how about the book of Revelation?

Most consider this book the hardest book in the New Testament.

It is difficult to understand
because it mixes more than one genre.

(just like that sci-fi western that you just saw on Netflix).

It is difficult to interpret
because it overflows with strange
And shocking imagery.

The reformer John Calvin wrote a commentary
On every book of the Bible except revelation.

In 16 years in the pulpit I've never preached through it, till now.

Over the remaining Sundays in June and July
We will be following the Narrative Lectionary's journey through
This last book of the Bible.

We won't be going line by line,
But will be focusing on particular passages.
To get the full feel of this book I would invite you
To take the time to read the entire document

even if we are only stopping
At particular waystations.

But to gain any understanding of this book
We need to first explore what sort of literature it is,
As well as the various ways to approach it.

In today's reading,
We encounter the prologue for the book
Which signals from the very outset
Just what sort of book this is.

In verse one we are told that it is
“revelation from Christ” (Revelation 1:1)

“The Greek word... can be translated as “revelation, unveiling”
or “apocalypse”... its literary character is parallel to other apocalypses
in recording extraordinary vision—
often mediated through heavenly beings—
that are highly symbolic, dramatic, and often enigmatic.

The visions are sometimes puzzling
not so much because of their symbolism
but because of their impressionistic, nonlinear quality...”
(Fanning “Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 32)

This unveiling [think of the curtains opening at the beginning of a play]
offers us a view behind the scenes
Of what is going on in the heavenly realms
And what has and will be happening on earth.

Revelation is an apocalypse.
But that's not all.

In verse three this apocalypse is also described as
“words of... prophecy” (Revelation 1:3)
In the Bible, prophecy involves both foretelling,
That is predicting future events like judgment or redemption
AND forthtelling:
boldly declaring God’s truth into present circumstances.

While foretelling reveals what God will do,
forthtelling calls people to respond now with repentance,
faithfulness, or justice.
The book of Revelation includes both:
visions of the future and urgent messages to the churches
in their current struggles. (chatgpt)

Revelation is an apocalypse.
Revelation is also prophesy.

Which bring us to a final descriptor of the book of Revelation.

You may have noted that today’s reading
includes a greeting
and is addressed to an audience of churches.

The end of the book also has a closing.
In this way it follows the pattern of other New Testament letters.
(Fanning “Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 32)

Revelation is a letter. A circular letter.
Correspondence meant to be shared
by a group of Christian churches.
Altogether what we find in the book of Revelation
Is an amalgam of genres:
apocalypse, prophecy, and correspondence.

One scholar puts it succinctly:

“it is ‘an apocalyptic prophesy in the form of a circular letter.’
(Fanning “Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 31)

And it is this mixed character of the book
That makes it difficult to interpret.
Of course if you have ever read Revelation,
What might stand out to you most are the symbols and images
That are part of the Biblical tradition
and amplified in the Bible’s apocalyptic genre.

As the notes to my study Bible declare:
“Symbolism was common in OT poetry
and thus in preexilic prophecy...

but it is even more common
in subsequent Jewish apocalyptic visionary literature.

That Revelation recycles in fresh and symbolic ways
many OT images is undeniable [the plagues, the locusts, and the lamb]...
As often in antiquity, Revelation also appears to use
some symbolic numbers (seven being a particular favorite).
(NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible 2218)

Let me just explore two images:
In Revelation, the Lamb and the Dragon
stand as symbolic opposites
representing the cosmic struggle between God and evil:
The Lamb, representing Jesus Christ,
is slain yet victorious, embodying sacrificial love and divine authority (Rev 5).
He fulfills the Passover lamb of Exodus 12,
and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53,

conquering not through force but through self-giving.

The Dragon, identified as Satan (Rev 12),
is the ancient enemy of God's people.
He recalls the serpent of Genesis 3 and Leviathan of Isaiah 27,
symbolizing chaos, deception, and rebellion.

Together, they frame the book's message:
the Lamb defeats the Dragon—not by violence,
but through faithful obedience, death, and resurrection,
showing that true power is found in humble love. (chapgpt)

Once you have encountered them,
It is hard to forget those images of a slain but living lamb
And a dragon with with seven heads and ten horns.

Maybe we can improve our scholar's description
Of the Book of Revelation.

It is a unforgetably vivid apocalyptic prophesy
in the form of a circular letter.

That is what Revelation is.
So how are we to read it?

Thank God that we have so much distance
Between the letter's original writing till now.

As God's saints in the 21st century,
We have the benefit of understanding the variety of ways
It has been read by the church over the ages.
My own study Bible provides a list of the different

Lenses that have been applied to the reading of Revelation
Through out the ages.

This is a not so subtle suggestion
That everyone who wants to be able to understand Revelation
Should pick up a study bible.

And yes if you prefer the King James Version
You can still find that older english rendition,
With modern study notes.

This is from my Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible.
Ways the church has read the book of Revelation throughout history:

“First, the idealist approach finds timeless principles in the book of Revelation,
though it often ignores specific applicability to first-century situations.

Second, the historicist approach argues that Revelation
provides a detailed map of history from its own day until Jesus' future return.

Third, the preterist approach understands Revelation in its first-century setting.
The most thoroughgoing preterists, apply all of it to only the first century,
ignoring any future prophecies...

Fourth, the futurist approach looks for predictions
about the future in Revelation.

This approach is much more popular today than it was in most of history.
The most thoroughgoing futurists, however, often ignore ways
in which the message was contextualized
for its original first-century audience.
(NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible 2217-2218)

Did you get that.

The idealist approach
looks at Revelation detached from history.
It can provide lessons for any situation.

The historicist approach sees Revelation
As a story that parallels human history in its fullness.

The preterist approaches sees Revelation
Connect primarily with its past first-century setting.

The futurist approach sees it as describing future historical events
That we may connect with what we are reading in our newspapers.

So are we forced to choose between these various approaches?

My Study Bible goes on to say that
“Many scholars prefer a more eclectic approach,
starting with the first-century application
looking for enduring principles (like idealists),
and recognizing some future elements (like futurists).
(NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible 2217-2218)

All to say that a combined approach
Which looks at the book as applying to different epochs in history
Might be the most fruitful.

That being said don't think that the book itself
Is a linear description
Or that it describes a chronological unfolding.

“Some view the three series of seven judgments [seals, trumpets, bowls] as
consecutive; Others... view them as concurrent...
(NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible 2217)

This is all a lot to consider
Even before getting into this selection of Scripture.
So why undertake such a difficult endeavor
As reading the book of Revelation?

If you are someone who is happy with meat and potatoes of the Gospels
Why sample Revelation's exotic sweetbreads?

What you might have noticed in today's reading
Is that this book pronounces a blessing
On its readers and listeners:

"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy
and blessed are those who hear it
and take to heart what is written in it,
because the time is near." (Revelation 1:3)

Ultimately it is given to us
To teach us that our life in God has a good future,
And that by better understanding that good future
We might persevere in obedience.

As Tom Wright notes
"This book... offers one of the clearest and sharpest visions
of God's ultimate purpose for the whole creation,

and of the way in which the powerful forces of evil,
at work in a thousand ways
but not least in idolatrous and tyrannous political systems,

CAN and ARE being overthrown
through the victory of Jesus the Messiah

and the consequent victory of his followers. (N.T. Wright Revelation for Everyone x,xi)

Knowing how things work out is important
Especially when you are suffering in the middle of it...

During Operation Cadence
I joined a groups of soldiers on one of their hikes
To an observation post
Where fresh members would spell off
Those who had finished a 6 hour shift.

The hike to that post was a grind.
I was fighting a cold and my breathing was heavy.
I was wearing 30 pound plates
But thankfully not carrying a rucksack.

On one portion of that hike we hit this eternally long incline,
And at some point I wanted to tap out.

Thankfully I had been told about the whole hike at the beginning.
I knew that the end was near.
I just had told hold on a little more to reach the observation post
And then the return trip back, would be mostly downhill.

In life it is important to know something about the journey
That God has put us on,
so we can press on through the difficulties
To the good end.

That why we read the book of Revelation.
Thanks be to God. Amen.