

The Compass

Week 49

OT Readings: Daniel 11:2 – Joel 3:21
NT Readings: 1 John 3:7 – Revelation 1:20

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- Few of the Biblical books reveal God's heart like Hosea. The marriage motif is threaded throughout; the unfaithfulness of God's people is mirrored in Hosea's relationship with his wife, Gomer.¹
- A plague of locust (chapter 1) foreshadows the coming of an enemy army from the north (chapter 2); both are used by Joel to summon the people to repentance (2:12-17) with the promise of restoration (2:18-27). As part of the future restoration of God's people, Joel 2:28-32 will be understood as fulfilled with the Spirit's coming on the day of Pentecost.²

New Testament

- Take your time with the remainder of 1 John; there is a richness of truth that requires some reflection; invite the Spirit to make it real for you.
- Jude appeals to his readers to "contend" (NLT – defend) for the faith they received.
- Chapter 1 of Revelation is essential to understanding the book. Ask these questions: 1. How would have the seven churches of Asia heard these words? 2. How am I to understand "the time is near" (1:3)? CAUTION! Unless you hear this book in its original context, you will certainly miss its important and profound message.³

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Hosea 11:1-11. This passage is a great help to those who doubt that God's tenderness and compassion is revealed in the OT. We are privileged with an intimate glimpse into the inner reflections and musings of God Himself.⁴ He reminisces, He remembers His tender care for His people when He brought them out of Egypt in the Exodus (11:1-4); He fed them, taught them to walk, led them by the hand, liberated from slavery. Oh, how painful is the present situation of Hosea's time in light of God's tender parental concern! Hosea 11:5-7 paints the tragic picture of their betrayal and consequence – they will go back to Egypt, back to bondage, their sin will catch up with them. God's imagination is at play, He sees war and the destruction wrought on His people by their enemies. He sees it vividly and in 3D high def color.

The next verses are stunning, they pour out, gush out, from God's very inner being and heart, "How can I let you go?! Oh, how my whole heart is in pain and turmoil!" What is the cause? The possibility that His people will come under the impending consequence of their sin revealed in 11:5-7. It hurts Him, it brings Him pain; it creates for God an inner turmoil – "This is not what I want to be!" God resolves His tension by opting for mercy. His mind and heart are filled with a future hope, "I will bring them home again." God's mercy is embarrassing in its reach, its vastness, "I will not unleash my fierce anger!"⁵

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

1 John 4:7-19 and 5:3. Knowing God's love is so important, says John, that unless we know it and walk in, we do not know God (4:7-8)! His love is be our experience (4:18) and is to come to the fullest expression in us as we are liberated by His love to love each other (4:11-12). He loved us first, His love is the foundation for everything else we are to experience in the Christian life (4:9-10, 16). It is no surprise that John brings the Spirit into a discussion of love (4:13); the Spirit makes real to us the things of God and especially His love (Rom. 5:5). How many suffer a love deficiency in their relationship with God!

It is tragic that one might proclaim God's grace so loudly but be so lacking in this essential – and it shows. We can hold God at arms length, we can grieve the Spirit, we can resist His love's power to break our willfulness. He longs to saturate us with His life - as we yield our life to Him in response to His love.

There may be many reasons why people obey God without love and all of them end in the quagmire of legalism, a judgmental attitude and fear. Legalism is subtle, but it is the bane of the church; it is the epitome of religion and frankly *control*. Only love can free us from the “need” to control and the fear that is the root of all attempts to control – my life, others, my circumstances. Only His love frees me to place myself in His hands without qualification; for qualifications are really nothing more than our fears expressing themselves in control. “His commandments are not burdensome” (5:3) to those who trust Him. When our lives are captured by His love, we will quickly and joyfully embrace His will (obedience), no matter what it might be.

Difficult Question of the Week

Revelation 1:1-8. Q. “Is Revelation a book about the ‘end times’?”

If we mean by “end times” that Revelation is simply some sort of “prophecy manual” that predicts the end of everything in detail, then the answer must be decidedly NO! Does this mean that Revelation has no relevance to the present or has nothing to say about the future? Revelation clearly speaks of future events (21-22), but perhaps not exactly in the way we think.

Is it relevant? Absolutely! It is the “**revelation of Christ Jesus**,” this amazing One is revealed in His stunning majesty (1:1, 9-20).⁶ It is about His kingdom and His climaxing of history. It is about the people of God, the church who endure and live victoriously, regardless of difficulties and circumstances; they wait in eager anticipation of His coming (22:17). It is about the great war that raged in the 1st century world and rages even today; the war of which we are a part. It is a book of victory and book of encouragement for *every* age, including our own. Don’t miss the book’s point by looking for some detailed “plan” of future things.⁷ Check out footnote 3 below for help on understanding this book.

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¹ Some of the most heartfelt and revealing passages about God’s heart for His people are throughout; God wears His feelings on His sleeve.

² The exact dating of Joel, and therefore the exact historical situation, is unknown. Likely it is somewhere around 590BC; if so this puts Joel in the same historical time frame as Jeremiah. If this date is correct, then the northern army would be Babylon.

³ The value of Revelation to the church is immense IF we will hear its message on its own terms. What is that message? God is able and will strengthen and empower His people in the midst of suffering and persecution and Jesus, the living One, wins in the end. If you are committed to reading Revelation as some sort of “end times” manual somehow being fulfilled in our time, then nothing I say will likely sway you! However, be clear: there are many schools of interpretation that wrestle with Revelation and the prevailing interpretive scheme of today (Dispensationalism = the “Left Behind” scenario) is in my view the least likely one to be correct. Here are some resources to help with this fascinating, but difficult book. For a quick overview, Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, 426-436. For more depth see Gordon Fee, *Revelation*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010). For a look at multiple options, Stanley Gundry, editor, *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, Counterpoint Series (Zondervan, 1998). Another look is Steve Gregg, *Revelation Four Views A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson, 1997). This book gives four interpretive schemes in “parallel” as it moves through the text. A revised, updated version will be available in the Spring 2013.

⁴ Notice that the text reads in first person, not third. Here God is seen to speak directly, though obviously it is Hosea speaking.

⁵ What seemed as a certain outcome (11:5-6) is suddenly and decisively reversed by God. It is interesting how God explains this, “I am not a man, I am God.” In other words, “My great compassion has overcome the judgment you deserve; I take no delight in seeing you suffer. I am God and I can reverse My decision for judgment, act in compassion if I so choose.” Is not God sovereign over His own decisions, over His own will? Can He not change His mind and do something unexpected? His character is always consistent, but He works in a world that is dynamic and alive. In honoring the choices and decisions of humanity, is He not free to adjust His own course to accommodate them if He so chooses?

⁶ Notice that this book is **the revelation of Christ Jesus** (1:1), **not** the revelation of the end times, prophecy about the end, etc. What could be more wonderful than that – the revelation of Him! Notice that it is *not* written to us (or to any future generation for that matter) but to the believers in Asia Minor in the first century (1:4, 11). Notice that it is about events that will occur “soon” (1:1, 3) which must mean soon to these first century believers, if “soon” is to make any sense at all. The book is filled with OT allusions and images, all of which must be carefully considered by determining their OT meaning *first*. These facts alone should make us pause when seeing Revelation as an end times manual or blueprint.

⁷ Some persons see Revelation as nothing more than a book about future things. You might consider me quite brave to wade into this subject, especially when my answer to the question crosses so many people’s prevailing understanding of this book. However, to ask the question is necessary if we are to be true to the Bible as God’s word. Remember that people of many ages

have looked for “end time answers” in Revelation’s pages, interpreting the intense imagery to fit their own times. All of them were wrong.