

Revelation Two – The world of the book

1. You've heard of the terrible twos or the terrible threes. The reason they can be difficult is that the little person is just figuring out what is them and what is other. How much of what they see is them and is about them and what is outside of them, outside of their control? All these limits have to be explored...and God created us to be explorers.
2. When we come to the Book of Revelation, it is full of signs and symbols and apocalyptic language. That can, and usually does, make it a mirror in which we find ourselves, our time, and, suddenly, the book is all about us. Let's hold back on that for now.
3. There are several different theories and ways to look at this book, but I want to hold off on those until we've looked at the plainer language of the first few chapters. The messages to the churches in Asia are critically important and, you'll be happy to know, not encoded in apocalyptic language (much).
4. This book is to them and to other churches where this book might circulate. It takes the form of a pastoral letter, using, in chapter one, the same setup, introduction, and purpose statement that Paul makes in his pastoral letters. Whatever meaning you read into the rest of the book needs to be examined through the lens of: would this be of any use or comfort to the Christians alive during the reign of Domitian?
5. In fact, this book has the current, horrific, tragic world of Domitian all over it. The Jews and Christians had barely survived the horrors of Nero's reign. Now, Domitian comes, and he is evil personified.
6. This book is a polemic against Rome. It is also a call to Christians to NEVER compromise with the State and NEVER water down or compromise their loyalty and allegiance to Jesus by accommodating with the State. It is anti-assimilationist, anti-accommodationist, resistance literature.
7. It is a call to warn Rome and any human who would raise themselves up against God. It is a Theopolitical book – a book stating that God is

king and emperor and the only true ruler. It is in THIS sense that the book is prophetic. It is a call to live a First Commandment life. Before we vote, before we invest, before we choose our way through life, each day at a time, we have to ask if our decision means we are wrapped around **First Commandment Faithfulness**.

8. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." Exodus 20:2,3. There are echoes of what God said to Job in Job 38 here.
9. I often tell you that there are just two facts in the universe. One: there is a God. Two: you are not him. Perhaps, in an election year when we are fraught with worry, viruses, riots, and fears we should add a third fact here. Three: no person and no system and no political party can save you. They cannot be your King and you are expressly forbidden by God to compromise your loyalty to Jesus Christ in order to support any other agenda, person, party or thing. Period. Maintain your integrity as a Christian and don't trade it away to people because they made promises to you.
10. Imagine that you live in the time of Domitian. You would pass by the equivalent of billboards every day that declared "Caesar is lord!" Your coins have stamped on them "Caesar is lord." You are considered dangerous to the community because you don't join in with that chant. In fact, you say "Jesus is Lord" and that is seen as an act of rebellion.
11. Most public activities had a prayer to Caesar built in. Most business practices had a ritual included that declared allegiance to Caesar and the gods of Rome. Could Christians just go along with that and have mental reservation (Roman Catholic teaching)?
12. Go to sporting events, buy meat in the market, learn a trade and, if you are fortunate, be invited to join a trade guild (union, protected market or occupation). All of them had pagan elements. Social events, dinners, parties all had them, too. Refuse to join in and you might lose your job, your children would go hungry and would have nothing but menial jobs offered to them the rest of their lives.

13. John, the writer of Revelation, understood all of that. He mentions an early Christian martyr, Antipas, who died because of it. **Revelation 2:13**. Christians were branded “atheists” because they didn’t approve all the gods.
14. Rome was not evil because it persecuted the church, though that didn’t help matters. It was evil because it usurped the loyalty due only to god, called itself a savior, called itself lord. Christians were to live as aliens on this earth. **1st Peter 2:11; Phil. 3:20**.
15. This book calls us – as it called them and every generation of believers since it was written – to worship the true God. In fact, Revelation is a book of worship. Here, let us just pour out the worship, the calls to worship, and the examples of worship in this book. Ready? Here it comes.
16. **4:8-11; 5:9-13; 7:12; 11:17-18; 15:3-4**.
17. **Impressed? We aren’t done. 1:5-7; 7:10; 11:15; 12:10-12; 16:5-7; 19:1-9; 22:20-21**.
18. We have to be aligned with the runway before we land this plane. We have to have our hearts and minds right before we plunge into this book. We worship God for creation, for His reign, for salvation, for justice, for mercy, for Christ’s death and resurrection, and for the coming of the reign of Christ in heaven. Caesar or any other earthly celebrity, politician, despot, or King is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. None of them are the first and the last.
19. Only God is God.