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How the First-Century, Asia Minor, Jewish Christians Understood the Book of Revelation
Abbreviations: FCAM JC – First-Century, Asia Minor, Jewish Christians; RE – Roman Empire; FW – Faithful Witness

1. Preface

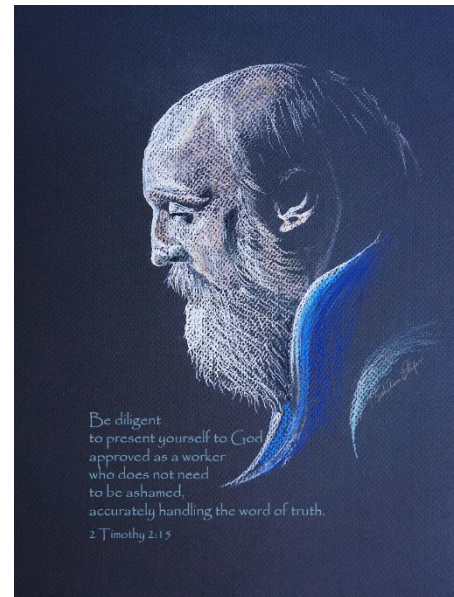
After completing a long but delightful lecture series on the book (scroll) of Revelation, words cannot express how excited I am to share it with you. As I soak in the truth of all I have learned, I realize I have only touched the very tip of a very large iceberg of understanding, and I continue to find connecting echoes throughout Scripture that further deepen the insights. My goal is to share what I've learned about the life-changing messages of this book in a way that brings hope, rest, comfort, and challenge as the original author intended.

Because lectures are different than books, I have taken notes, pared them down, and reordered the learning in a way that I could grasp it. First, I would like to share with you *The Credentials*, *The Reason for the Study*, *A Key Verse*, and *A Summary* of the purpose of the book.

The Credentials

Who am I, and who are the people who have taught me? Just after I was born anew at the age of 23 in 1980, I attended Dr. Dwight Pryor's lectures in Dayton, Ohio. I remember Dwight as a humble, gracious, funny, Spirit-filled man with a heart for teaching the heart of Yeshua (Jesus). In the last several years, I've been learning from Dwight again through the courses made available through *The Center for Judaic-Christian Studies (JC Studies)*, a ministry Dwight founded while he was alive. You may find my notes from this learning at ShaleFragments.com in the category *In His Dust*.

Dwight was also a founding member of the *Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research*. His decades of association with Jewish and Christian scholars in Israel provided him with profound insights into the life and teachings of Yeshua. I asked James Whitman, the President of *JC Studies*, if a study on the book of Revelation was offered there, and he guided me to Ron Herm's teaching called *Heroes, Dragons, and Empires: Reading Revelation Then and Now*.



A charcoal drawing of Dwight

The foundation of this study is my notes from Ron Herm's lectures. Ron serves as Dean of the School of Humanities, Religion, and Social Sciences at Fresno Pacific University and as an instructor at multiple universities. He holds a Ph.D. in Early Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Literature from the University of Durham and a Master of Theological Studies in Biblical Languages and Literature from Regent College.

I have taken detailed notes from the lectures and organized them in a structure to share them with you. Many of my own reflections, Scripture connections, and conclusions are interwoven throughout the text.

Along with the three sections from the notes that I have entitled *The Preface, the Overview, and the Outline*, I have included *Echoes of Revelation* which are devotionals that were born from nuggets the Father has placed in my heart as a result of swimming in this magnificent masterpiece. I anticipate the echoes to be ongoing! You may find all these writings at ShaleFragments.com in the category *The Book of Revelation*.

The Reason for the Study

Ron Herm's statement, "The book of Revelation made sense to the first people who heard and read it," gave me the motivation to listen to his lectures, seek cross-reference echoes throughout Scripture to add to the richness, and somehow pass the learning on to others. After all, if the early Christians knew the meaning of the text, why shouldn't I listen to them?

I was fascinated to learn that apocalyptic literature is a genre of writing that was pioneered by the first-century Jewish community during Yeshua's (Jesus) time and that we must understand its nature to interpret the book of Revelation as it was intended. This study eliminates speculation and wrong approaches and is surprisingly simple.

For months I have felt like I was immersed in the book of Revelation, swimming in its world in a way that has changed my life. I liken the book to the finale of a fireworks display, because it calls out all the substance of the entire Scripture, echoing, affirming, and confirming the profound truth of the ages. John's Apocalypse is a masterful culmination of the Bible's message, a glorious wrap-up!

A Key Verse

Since the Bible was mostly recorded by Jewish people, we need to understand the underlying Hebrew language and idioms. The word *study* in Hebrew also means *to seek understanding*.

Let's look at 2 Timothy 2:15 along with the bracketed, fuller meanings of the original words:

Be diligent [*persistent, careful, and attentive*] **to present yourself** [*to bring yourself near*] **to God** **approved** [*tried, tested, proven*] **as a worker** [*someone who labors for God's kingdom purposes*] **who does not need to be ashamed** [*irreproachable*], **accurately handling** [*rightly dividing*] **the word of truth**. [*or, straightly cutting a path for the word of truth*].

This phrase, *straightly cutting a path for the word of truth*, echoes Hebrews 4:12 – "For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

We want to make a sharp cut so the word can penetrate our hearts. If we are having surgery, we hope the surgeon's knife is sharp, true to its task, not speculating. When Yeshua said He came to *fulfill* the Torah, He meant that He came, in word and action, to *rightly interpret* it as it was meant from God's heart. This is what we want to do with the book of Revelation.

A Summary – Challenge and Comfort

The purpose of the book of Revelation was to challenge and comfort God's people in the 7 Communities in Asia Minor whom John pastored. In the course of this study, *I* have been acutely challenged and supremely comforted and pray you will be, too!

The FCAM JCs (see the legend above under the title) were living comfortable lives and were in danger of assimilating with the surrounding culture to "keep the peace." Lukewarmness and dullness was threatening their witness as God's lights in the world. John's goal was to *reveal* the glorious beauty of the Lamb and to *expose* the evil that stood in stark contrast to the purposes of God's Kingdom of Shalom. As John exposed the evil, they would be able to recognize it. John wanted the Christians to live sharp, cutting-edge, zealous, set-apart lives as bright image-bearers of the Lamb and ambassadors of the Kingdom.