

Note

Revelation – Part 1 of 15

Summary

Revelation unveils the future, revealing how this world will end and what the new world will be like. This book provides us with the right view of history, one where Christ reigns in eternity. It also gives us the right perspective of Jesus – not as a weak, sacrificial lamb, but as a conquering king.

We learn how Revelation completes the story of God's redeeming love, and see the marriage between Christ the bridegroom and His Church, the bride. It also prepares us for persecution, while reminding us to stand strong in the face of it. At the same time, it provides an incentive for us to live right in this present world, in preparation of a new Heaven and a New Earth where we will live in, for all eternity.

Transcript

Revelation – Part 1 of 15

For many Christians, this is the most difficult book to read. The vast majority of Christians fear even to read this book. They probably never read it through, and even if they did, they probably didn't expect to learn anything or understand very much from it.

So today, we will take a lot of time to go through Revelation because I think it's the most important book. And like the ending of anything, it's very important how everything ends. It's not how you start, but how you end. It is the same with a story, same with sermons, same with God's story and the same with history. So let's take our time through Revelation.

Now what does the word "revelation" mean? The original (meaning) is "apocalypse". It is a Greek word. It simply means "to unveil" or "to reveal". In other words, unless God unveils, unless God takes away, (imagine there is a picture on the wall and there is a curtain over it and you have no clue what the picture is) there is no way to find out, until someone unveils it. So the same with the book of Revelation.

The word means "to unveil". Unveil what? Unveil the future and how this world, the present world, will end. Nobody knows, everybody has their own version. But, after you unveil it, it shows how this world will end and then what the new eternal world will look like. Unless there's an unveiling, none of us will have any idea. We have our own imagination, or even bits and pieces from the Old Testament that speaks of this great future or even of the end of the world. But Revelation ties up everything the Old Testament says of the end of the world and of the eternal future.

Now, for most Christians, this book is considered a mystery. There are two books in the Bible that are critical, and sad to say, they're probably the two books that are the least understood and least respected.

The first one is Genesis. Genesis is not a difficult book to understand. So what does Satan do? He tells you it is too simple, "How can God make the world in 6 days? Come on, it's too simple." It's like the gospel - it's so simple. It's a gift, God's gift of His son. And the Devil says, "You mean just like that. So simple?" So for Genesis, the Devil says, "It's too simple. It's a myth. Don't believe God made the world in 6 days. That's not possible". Today, the vast majority, and I repeat, the vast majority of Christians, the vast majority of Bible schools, teach that they were not 6 literal days, "It's not possible, how can God make the world in 6 days?" Now, God made it very clear. I have taught Genesis slowly and I hope you read it, "day after day", it's evening and the morning, evening and (morning)", and there are Bible schools which say, "Oh it's not a literal day, it's a period of time. It's an era, it's an epoch". An era has an evening and a morning every day, repeated over and over just to tell you it's a literal day? So the truth is, if you can't believe the first few lines of the Bible, what will you think of the rest of the Bible? Simple as that! He doesn't need to make you doubt everything, or every line. He just makes you doubt the first few lines of the Bible and then, you will begin to say, "Oh, the Bible is just full of stories, they are all myths and maybe we can learn some moral lessons from these myths. They were not real stories, there was no Adam and there was no Eve." So people begin to doubt and then what happens is, the rest of the Bible is just moral lessons and Sunday school becomes moral lessons. And you go to church for moral lessons, not much different from Aesop's Fables or the Chinese stories we know, but they are all good lessons to learn.

The second book the Devil attacks is Revelation. He doesn't say it is myth, he just says, "It is mystery. It's so hard to understand, why bother? It's not for you, it's for scholars. Let the scholars figure out what all those strange things are. And let them debate about it. Let them draw charts, we will just listen at our church camps, etc" . It's just for curiosity. It is like you going to a fortune teller to know what will happen in the future. It's for scholars to debate about and no big deal to us.

We know Revelation was not written to scholars. Right in the beginning, it says it was written to seven churches in Asia; seven real churches with real people in it, many of whom were simpler than us, with less education than us, and with less theological knowledge than we have. And they understood it obviously. God didn't write something they couldn't understand. So it's not some mystery for scholars. It is a book for all Christians.

So why does Genesis and Revelation get attacked so badly? Because Satan, who is behind everything, in Genesis, it shows how he has gained control of the world. And, in Revelation, it is how he is going to lose control of the world. Now as we have said before, Satan always likes to work behind the scenes, because he is called the Deceiver. The deceiver never comes out in front. I mean, if I am a deceiver, I like to do things through others to deceive you. So he never wants to be identified and people say, "Oh there's so many problems in the world." He doesn't want to be the one who is the source of the problems, which he is! So we blame the politicians, we blame the systems, we blame everything, except the source. So for Genesis, he says, "Don't believe the 6 literal days. Don't believe the serpent story. It's just a moral lesson there about good and evil. That's it! There's no real serpent". In Revelation, it's the same, he doesn't want you to know that he is real, because he's mentioned there a lot. He is not mentioned a lot in the whole Bible between these two (books). But in these two books, he is clearly identified. That's why he doesn't want you to understand these two books. And that's why most Christians have such a weak respect for the Bible because it's a 'story book'. And worst still, it has no ending because if you don't know Revelation, there is no ending. What kind of story is this? About Christians suffering all the time? And then one day we go to some vague place called Heaven and we sit up there and get bored, playing our harps, sitting on little clouds. Can you think of any more boring than that?

So let's look at this book. Is it something for scholars?

Revelation 1:3 - Let's look at it and see whether we should even bother with this book. It says here,

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

Very few books have this kind of blessing. In fact, no other book out of the 66 books in the Bible has this blessing. You're blessed if you read it, aloud. But if you can't read aloud, at least hear it read, aloud. That's important. Not just read, but read aloud. Now, how many of you have even read the Bible aloud? Most of us study the Bible in great silence. How many of you have even heard the Bible read aloud? Maybe in church, five verses or ten verses, but not Genesis to Revelation. Very few. We almost feel guilty. Let

me tell you, blessed are you if you read Revelation aloud, or if you can't read it aloud, listen to it being read aloud, and you will be blessed.

Next, notice-you keep these words. It's not just for reading, it's not just for curiosity, but to be kept, for very important purposes.

Let's look at some of the benefits that are obvious.

Number 1 - it gives you the right view of history. Now, right now, if you look at history, it always seems the bad guys win. The good guys seem to be bullied left and right. History seems to show a very immoral world where evil pays. It's good to be crooked, get away with it. It seems that way. And even Christians begin to doubt. Job and others began to doubt. It seems that Satan keeps winning all the time. Evil keeps winning. This book will tell you how to get your view of history right. The view of history is not what happens. The view of history is not events in time. The view of history is a big view of history with a long span of time. It is called eternity. We live and will live in eternity. And what we see is, maybe, thousands of years of human history. That is very short. You're going to have a right view of the world's history which is going to span, as far as man is concerned, from Adam to eternity. So it gives you the right view.

And let me tell you, Jesus wins. God wins. We see a garden in the beginning - Garden of Eden. It looks like the devil messed it up. No, let me tell you, if you read Revelation, the Garden reappears, except it's a lot better than Adam's garden. God wins, and wins big time. That's the right view of history.

Number 2 - It helps us to get the right view of Jesus Christ. For many people, the view of Jesus Christ is a manger scene. For many others, He's a dead man on the cross. Either a helpless baby, or a hopelessly dead man. Or for some, the view of Jesus Christ is a poor guy, a carpenter, walking around, and being despised, and finally He gets spat on, nailed and rejected by the world. That's a view of even Christians. But this Lamb is also the King. And Revelation helps us to see Jesus as who He really is, not just the few years of His life on earth. So it helps us to have the right understanding of Jesus Christ.

Number 3 - It completes this book called the Bible. I began by saying the Bible is a love story to be read. It is a love story of God's redeeming love. If you want to put it in a bit more human terms, it is God choosing a bride for His precious Son. And in Revelation, we see the marriage taking place. And then, like all love stories, it ends with, "And they live happily

ever after". But in stories, that's not true. Marriage begins often with a lot of problems and often not "ever after". So this is a real love story, not the fairy tales you've read. That's the ending of this book. I hope you see this book as a love story, to be read. And with a beautiful ending.

Number 4 - necessary to prepare us for persecution. Persecution? Let me tell you, the vast majority of Christians have lived in persecution. Even today, the biggest national church is in China. They live in severe persecution. It's probably the biggest church. The fastest growing churches are in the Muslim countries. And they live in persecution. And many Christians live in minority situations. Many Christians live under totalitarian governments and they live in persecution. And this book is important and vital to them to prepare for persecution. And later, we'll see how it does so.

And then lastly, it is an incentive for us to live right, now, in this world because there will be a new world. We're not going to sit in heaven and play our little harps and sing songs. Eternity is a New Heaven and a New Earth. Just as God made the Garden of Eden and God told Adam and Eve to tend the garden. He made the Garden with great potential, but Adam and Eve were to maximize and bring that potential to its fullest. That was thwarted by Satan, but it will be restored. So are you ready to be part of the New Earth - where things take place, where your brain needs to be working, where your body needs to be working. A new body, resurrected body, but still your body. It's still you. I'm going to recognize you. I may take a little while, because it's going to be an improved version of you, but it's still you. Your new body is not some import from somewhere. It's an improvement of your existing body. Just as they recognized Christ, I will recognize you, and you will recognize me. How are you taking care of yourself now? How are you functioning on this Earth that you can function well on the New Earth? You say, "What are you talking about?" We will understand that in a while. It not only prepares Christians for persecution, more importantly, it prepares Christians for the New Earth.

Who is John? He's probably the Apostle John. He was a very old man at this time. He's the only apostle left. Every other apostle had been martyred. He was living under persecution, but he was still alive, the only apostle who died a natural death. He was on the island of Patmos, a penal island. He was there for being faithful, for not denying his Lord Jesus Christ. The Roman Empire, beginning with Julius Caesar, first came up with the theory

that the emperor is divine. Our idea of God is a God that made the world but the Romans believed in a multi-god world, with all kinds of idols everywhere. Caesar became one of the divines, one of the gods. So Caesar made himself a god. Then the others followed him, Augustus and Nero, and finally at this time, an emperor called Domitian (he reigned about AD 90 to 95). He made emperor-worship so serious that there was a certain day called the "lord's day", where every person had to go before an altar. And at that altar was a bust statue of the emperor, where one had to throw incense on the burning altar and say, "Caesar is lord". Now, the Christians would not do that, including John. Those who refused were martyred, jailed, beheaded, thrown to the lions, or crucified on a stake. This went on from the time of Domitian continued for 200 years until Constantine, the Emperor who claimed to have received Jesus as Savior in AD 312 or AD 313. So many were martyred, including the churches that John supervised in this part of Asia - today's Turkey.

John supervised a group of churches. Now he's writing this circular letter to these seven churches to warn them to prepare for the persecution which is going to get so bad. Two ways to prepare - Number 1 - get right. If internally there were all kinds of immorality, idolatry, and corruption problems inside the church, then you can't stand the persecution. So get right, warning to get right.

Number 2 - after you get right, stand strong. How do you stand strong? You can stand strong only when you think of the eternal hope. So you find in Revelation, he warned the seven churches right at the beginning of Revelation to get right, and then he kept emphasizing, "Don't worry". All will work out well at the end. Jesus will win, He is King. The eternal city is yours. The New Heaven and New Earth is yours. Hang in there. It is waiting for you. Don't deny Christ. Jesus had said in Matthew 10:32-33, "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." So he's telling them don't deny, it's worth it. This letter was sent as a circuitous letter to seven churches, identifying the problems of each church to help them get right, to be read aloud in that church, and listened to by the people and then brought to the next place. The seven churches were on a circuit which John, himself, had been the circuit supervisor, the district supervisor of these churches. It was written to real people, not to scholars or university lecturers, or for those curious about the future. It was written for real people in real

situations, but with lessons that are real and important for all time. So I hope you see that this is something that you will appreciate. If those simple people in those churches could understand, you can, too. And if you think you wouldn't have persecution, don't be so sure. One day, because you will not acknowledge the totalitarian leader is god or is a god, then.....here we go again. And it's not a far-fetched possibility.

Now, why the problems? Why do people struggle with this book? There's a lot of apocalyptic symbols. They are picture images that sound very bizarre to us. This beast, this dragon, all these kind of things. What are these things? So when we see these apocalyptic images or what we call symbols, we freak out. Now, they're not meant to make us freak out. They're meant to help us because things of the future are very hard to describe. As I have explained, trying to explain to Adam and Eve what a laptop does. How do you even explain to Adam and Eve an aeroplane? It's not possible, let alone even an automobile, or even a motorbike, how do you explain to him? You have to use images he has seen already. "It's so fast. It's like a cheetah running." "A motorbike, it's like a cheetah? I don't quite get it." Most of these symbols actually were already described in the Old Testament, they're not new symbols. A beast-Babylon. What does that mean? In the Old Testament, you already have the explanation. So these symbols are not plucked out of the air. They were taken out of the Old Testament which explained them, so it's not that complicated. So as Jesus often taught, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like...", Like this, like that. He uses a parable. In Revelation, God uses symbols, picture images, not stories, to help us understand.

Now the first 3 chapters are very simple, straightforward. They have no symbols, but Chapters 4 to 22 is full of symbols, and that's where most people get stuck. So it starts easy. Now, there are 56 predictions told in Revelation. And actually half of them are in plain language. The other half are in symbols, and that takes a little bit of explaining.

You'll find numbers like number 7, a lot of times. 7 is completion - God's complete number.

You find number 12 - 12 represents God's people.

1000 - that's the biggest number in their language. In Chinese, it is 10,000. In our style, we have trillions, zillion, but in their language, 1000 means the biggest number.

Then the number 666.

So at the end of Revelation, what did you learn? You learn Jesus is King. Not a baby in a manger, not a dead man on a cross, not a carpenter's son. He is King! He rules over a Kingdom that is eternal. For these people who are going to read this, it's going to blow their mind because they thought Caesar is king and Jesus is carpenter and Jesus is dead. And maybe one day, we get lifted up to some little cloud somewhere. No, He's going to be King of a Kingdom, much more glorious than Babylon or Rome or whatever. And you and I will be citizens there.

So I hope that this book helps us to get right on many counts. Our Christianity has no ending. The average Christian has no Revelation, no understanding. He's just hoping to get saved by the skin of his teeth and get out of hell and escape the fire of hell. And that's about it for the average Christian, and then hopefully float in eternity in some kind of non-existence for the rest of his life. And so, he doesn't bother to prepare, what's there to prepare? So I hope that this book not only prepares you for persecution which you may face, but prepare you for the New Earth which you will live in, for eternity.

Are you ready? Are you preparing? You say, "How?" How's your body going to be? How's your mind? What skills are bringing to the New Earth? You said, "You mean those things matter?" What do you think Adam did in the garden? Hung around with no useful body or brain or skills? What do you think he's going to do in the Garden? Walk around every day, just amble and stroll around. My goodness! My friend, it's a New Earth with potentials that you and I will be part of, for eternity, where we will work, work that is satisfying. Have fellowship that has no corruption, no betrayal or pain. And just be the maximal being, serving one another, and being served for eternity. Are you ready? So may Revelation bless you.