

Revelation

*Part One
Blessed is the One
(Revelation 1:1-3)*

*With Study Questions
And Bibliography*

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The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants – things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. ³ Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near (Revelation 1:1-3).

Preface

Circa 1992 I took a deep breath and set to preaching through the Revelation – how difficult could it actually be? I raced along swimmingly for about four or five chapters (really three) before I was greeted by a conscience condemning experience right in the pulpit. The convicting episode had to do with me allowing a commentator to have more influence in my opinion than he should have.

Commentaries are valuable tools – consulting a commentary is like having a conversation with an erudite scholar holding well-thought-out biblical convictions. But when you get right down to it, it's still just somebody's opinion. I was teaching on a passage that I truly didn't understand. I figured this commentator, since he wrote a book, must have had a better grip on the issue than I, so I just took his word for it.

I quoted the verse in Revelation and then the commentator for the explanation of the verse. In set the guilt. The commentator's opinion didn't make sense when I read it in my study, and it didn't make sense (at least to me) when I read it from the pulpit. What does one do in the middle of a sermon when confronted with the sad reality that he doesn't know what's he's talking about?

I cancelled the rest of the sermon – explaining to the congregation the values and dangers of commentaries, utilizing what they had just witnessed as a supreme example (of the danger). I then introduced the

closing hymn. Church ended early – sadly, no one complained – at least for a while, but that’s another story.

I spent the next five years immersing myself in the issue of eschatology (the study of end-times or last things). I discovered there were all sorts of views that I had never even heard. I read numerous books to gain a decent working knowledge of the various positions. There are four pretty dominant positions within the realm of Biblical Christianity, all with their own variations (we will touch on these throughout this series).

I then read the Bible from cover to cover with all those views in mind, seeking to determine which view best comports with the Scriptures. I have probably spent more time studying eschatology than any other theological discipline in Scripture, and less time teaching on it than any topic. I did draw some conclusions. I will say they are somewhat flexible, but significant. I say it this way for two reasons:

First, for the most part, I would not find those with whom I am in disagreement, as entirely unreasonable or heretical (there are exceptions). Provided their eschatological convictions do not lead to unorthodoxy in other matters, I don’t find it difficult to be charitable with those holding other convictions. I hope they are equally charitable with me.

Second, Revelation/eschatology is a difficult system of doctrine. The conclusions people draw, including myself, are not always iron clad. For example, when a certain position requires that in Isaiah 65:20 we must read that a **“young man shall die a hundred years old,”** as referring to the eternal, immaterial realm, that is possible, but certainly not the natural reading of the text. All this to say, I arrived at conclusions that required (to put it a certain way) I do the least amount of dancing and straining at what the Bible seems to obviously say. If it was all that easy, there wouldn’t be so many disagreements among sincere, generally orthodox, believers.

Introduction

With that preface behind us, let us be reminded of what appears to be the theme of Revelation-*The Triumph of Christ (or Christianity) Over All Opposition (or Evil)*. We must study the entire book with that, at some level, in mind. The Revelation was written with the strengthening of the church in mind. The church, during this era, was under great oppression by its religious surroundings and persecution by its political surroundings.

The Revelation, as the name so indicates, reveals or unveils to our minds what is truly taking place. It reveals who is on the throne and what He intends to accomplish. In light of this, the church (Christians) are to endure, conquer, overcome, persevere *nikonti* to the end.

I'm committed that these sermons not merely be that which satisfies end-times curiosities or that which tantalizes our intellect. It is my desire that these messages be ministerial. By ministerial, I mean that which elevates our understanding of the glory of God and advances our worship of Him. By ministerial I mean that which both comforts our souls and directs our convictions. G. K. Beale writes,

The Apocalypse Was Revealed So that Believers Would Be Blessed By Having a Heavenly Perspective on Redemptive History and Consequently Obeying the Commands of the Lord of History (1:3).¹

H. B. Swete writes, that we see in Revelation...

...a supervision of all the Churches, which surpasses the powers of any earthly pastor; an ordering of nature and life, which bears witness to the investment of the risen Lord with *all authority in heaven and on earth*; a perfect knowledge of men, and a prescience which reads the issues of history. The revelation of the Lord's heavenly life becomes, as we proceed, a revelation of *the things which are and the things which shall come to pass hereafter*; we see the glorified life in its bearing upon the course of events, until the end has been attained and the whole creation has felt its renovating power.²

Prologue and Benediction

¹ Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (p. 184). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

² Swete, H. B. (Ed.). (1906). [The apocalypse of St. John](#) (2d. ed., pp. vi–viii). New York: The Macmillan Company.

In these first three verses we see a prologue which contains a benediction. Benedictions are usually saved for the end, but here in the beginning is a great promise of blessing. But let's get there.

The Revelation *Apokalypsis*

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ" John writes. If ever a name seemed inconsistent with the book, it is here. Rather than the revealing, it seems more like the concealing. But, as stated, it is a revealing from a heavenly perspective. Let us not approach this book as if it is entirely cryptic. Much will be revealed.

The Testimony

It is popular today, and no doubt of some value, for us to give our testimonies. But John writes that this is the **"testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw."** Let us not lose focus on who this is about. The four Gospels painted the life of Christ in Galilee and Jerusalem. The Revelation reveals the heavenly life of our Lord and how He continues to inhabit, refine and protect His church.

His Servants

It is written to **"His servants"** *doulo*. If we don't find ourselves in this category, with this designation, the book will be of little use to us. It is a designation for Christ (Philippians 2:7). It is the word which the apostles use to refer to themselves (Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1). It is the target audience of the Revelation. There are many ways a Christian can think or refer to him/herself: child, saved, saint, brother, sister, beloved, etc. Servant should be on that list.

The Time is Near

Twice in the first three verses we have a time text, **"things which must shortly take place"** in verse one and **"the time is near"** in verse three. It is here, at the very beginning of the book, that we, as mere pedestrians when it comes to the word of God, are so easily swayed. You'll hear

explanations like, 'once it begins, it happens quickly' with references to "shortly" *tachei* used elsewhere in that manner.

For example, the angel told Peter to "arise quickly" *tachei* (Acts 12:7). Paul was told to "get out of Jerusalem quickly" *tachei* (Acts 22:18). Or that Festus would go to Caesarea "shortly" *tachei* (Acts 25:4).³ Again, you can make that work. But it is hardly the natural reading. Even in these cross references, it's not as if Paul or Festus would sit there for a while (a long while) then merely get up quickly when the time came. If an angel tells you to "arise quickly" you get up right now!

Similarly, with "the time is near" in verse three. Some will refer to 2 Peter 3:8 that "with the Lord one day is a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." The same theological camp, interestingly enough, will not allow that method when it comes to the thousand years which constitutes the millennium in chapter twenty. Be that as it may, let us here recognize that the Revelation is not written to the Lord. It is written to the church. The church (specifically the seven churches in Asia Minor) is hearing that "the time is near." How would they understand such words?

If we begin reading the Bible this way, time texts won't mean anything at all. "Three days" (Matthew 12:40) won't mean three days. "Forty days" (Matthew 4:2; Acts 1:3) won't mean forty days. It is possible to read the Bible this way (and in some places it may be accurate), but it is not natural or obvious. The reference to immediate action is also mentioned in Revelation 3:11; 22:6, 10, 12, and 20. One more look at the passage, that we may read it for ourselves and, at least at this juncture, determine the obvious, literal meaning.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants – things *which must shortly take place*. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John, ² who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. ³ Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for *the time is near* (Revelation 1:1-3, italics mine).

³ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 928). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Beale comments,

The least that can be said is that the wording in Revelation refers to the immediate future.⁴

At very least, something was about to happen soon.

Chain and Type of Communication

The chain of communication in verse one is from God to Jesus to an angel to John and finally to Christian “**servants.**” Some have asked, ‘if Revelation is addressing the events of the first century church, of what value is it to us? Yet the answer to that question lies in the very opposite conundrum. If the Revelation is only addressing the church in existence at the end of history, of what value is it (or has it been) to the entire church throughout history?

In many (most) respects we need to read Revelation the same way we read other books in the New Testament. First and Second Corinthians, for example, were written to a specific church, addressing specific issues in that church (incest, factions, pride, lawsuits, profaning the Lord’s Supper, denying the resurrection, etc.). It is of value to any and every church in history experiencing similar issues.

That these seven churches (and likely others receiving this encyclical) were hit with specific historical issues, does not mean that we should not benefit from the lessons given. Christ is no less “**the ruler over the kings of the earth**” (Revelation 1:5) now than He was then.

We are also informed of the type of communication we will be studying. Christ, by His angel “**sent and signified it**” *esemanen* or ‘signify’. This verb carries the idea of figurative representation. Robert Mounce (a Greek scholar, holding to a view different than my own) explains,

⁴ Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 185). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

This should warn the reader not to expect a literal presentation of future history, but a symbolic portrayal of that which must come to pass.”⁵

Revelation is not to be read as if it is a futuristic newspaper. At times I will agree with those who are not fond of interpreting the Bible symbolically or metaphorically. Such a method can lead to some pretty dark places. Yet, to interpret the Bible too literally can lead to some pretty ridiculous places. Nobody thinks that Jesus is holding literal “stars” (Revelation 1:16) in His hand or that literal “stars” fall to the earth (Revelation 6:13). Symbolic when symbolic and literal when literal, needs to be our rule.

Numerous reasons are given for why John would write this way. Warren Wiersbe explains that, since this letter would likely infuriate any Roman officers who found it, it was written to be understood by those conversant with the Old Testament imagery. In four-hundred-and-four verses, there are two-hundred-and-seventy-eight allusions to the Old Testament. Ignorance of the Old Testament makes Revelation very difficult to grasp. Also, the imagery, though difficult, is not weakened with time. If John spoke directly of swords and catapults, it would not carry the same power when those weapons lost their force. Finally, the symbolism imparts, and arouses, emotions.

Blessed is He

Finally, we have this glorious benediction. Reminiscent of Jesus beginning His statements with “**amen**” (John 3:5; 5:24) rather than ending them with “**amen.**” There is an assuredness of “**blessedness.**” This is a word too rich to exhaustively define here. Suffice it to say, it carries the idea of being fortunate in its most glorious and godly sense. But this blessedness is not universal in its scope.

It is granted to those who “**read**” *anaginoskon* these words (primarily a reading aloud), along with those who “**hear**” *akounontos* that reading. These are reasons why we read and hear the word of God in our gatherings. Of course, the mere reading and hearing is insufficient.

⁵ The Book of Revelation Made Easy, Gentry, p 21.

We are also called to **“keep what is written in it”** *terountes*. We are to keep watch over the word. We are to guard the word. We are to obey the word. As James writes, we are to **“be doers of the word, and not hearers only”** (James 1:22). The **“doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing”** (James 2:25). Let that be our heart and intent as we examine this book.

Questions for Study

1. What is a commentary and how can it be valuable? How can it be dangerous (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is the theme found in Revelation and how should Christians respond to it (pages 3, 4)?
3. Whose testimony is given in Revelation and to whom is it written (page 5)?
4. Discuss the time texts found in verse one and three. How should we understand these (pages 5-7)?
5. If Revelation is written primarily to the first century church, how does that speak to its value to churches throughout history (page 7)?
6. What type of communication is John telling us we'll be reading and how does that affect our approach to the book (pages 7, 8)?
7. What must our disposition be if Revelation is to be a blessing to us (page 8)?

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Inclusion on this list does not imply agreement with the authors on my part

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