

Route Sixty-Six

*Part Sixty-Six
Revelation
The Triumph of Christ
(Revelation 1:19)*

With Study Questions

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4/18/2021*

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(Revelation 1:19)

Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this (Revelation 1:19).

Introduction

Checking out of the grocery store, I couldn't help noticing the cover of *Newsweek Magazine*. It donned a copy of the painting 'The Vision of Ezekiel' by Raphael. It is a painting which shows the ominous coming of angels and God's judgment. In letters bigger than the title of its own magazine was the word 'PROPHECY' with a sub-heading, "What the Bible says about the end of the world."

There may not be a section in any Christian bookstore that attracts more browsers than the shelves dedicated to eschatology (the study or science of last things). The best-selling non-fiction book in the entire decade of the seventies was *The Late Great Planet Earth*. This was a book bought by Christians and non-Christians alike which popularized the study of last things. The sixteen volume *Left Behind* series, written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins between 1995 and 2007 sold, in the neighborhood of, eighty million copies, along with a number of movies.

Although the views proposed in these books will not be found in any confession or creed (or anywhere else) prior to 1800, the influence of these books, and others with the same theological flavor, was phenomenal. So much so, that those views have become somewhat of an untested modern orthodoxy. To hold views inconsistent with the brand of eschatology found in *LGPE* and *Left Behind* will cause not a few eyebrows to be raised. For this reason, a study of the ancient confessions on this subject should be of value to Christians.

At arguably richer theological times, none of the great masters of the faith held to the views that dominate today's airwaves and bookstores. This is not to suggest that there were no disagreements among early, brilliant theologians. But it should get our attention that in all the

disagreements, no one held the view that is most popular today. I don't want to misrepresent here. It can be argued that today's dominant view can be seen briefly in seminal form. But even those seminal views are quite unlike what you've probably read or seen when it comes to end times.

It should be an assumption among Christians that the Church is a spiritually richer place when it holds more closely to Biblical Christianity. We should also note that today's dominant view is prevailing during a period of apostasy in western evangelicalism. Seeking to be charitable, I will argue in part, that our current negative trajectory has become a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is no small thing to convince an entire generation (or more) of Christians that it is God's will for the world decline morally, spiritually, economically and in almost every other way.

Be that as it may, we should not be sheepish about questioning what the majority of a, arguably, lukewarm generation in the church believes about the Christian faith. None of this makes any position right or wrong. But it should make us a little more comfortable when giving modern notions of Christian thinking a healthy critique – especially as we examine alternatives that have a richer theological history.

Let us first ask the question, is eschatology important?

Is Eschatology Important?

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 1:3).

Some might question if studying eschatology has any value at all. I have heard mixed reviews in terms of enthusiasm behind a sermon series on Revelation. Many pastors I know have opted out of the issue altogether. They make jokes about being panmillennialists. They say it will all pan out in the end. Or they suggest that it is simply an unknowable aspect of the Christian faith. Some wonder what difference it makes. They assert that there doesn't seem to be any direct application in terms of personal behavior.

There are a number of reasons, however, why eschatology is important. The most obvious reason is because it is part of God's word. We certainly don't think the Holy Spirit added a branch of theology to the Bible that was unnecessary. Eschatology is part of God's word so to

propose that it is useless to the Christian is an insult to God. It is part of God's word and it deserves our study. It may be a difficult subject, but the entire Bible is difficult. That certainly is no excuse for never opening it.

Eschatology tells us what God's plan is in history. We are to work and pray toward that plan. As James Henley Thornwell (1812-62) stated,

If the Church could be aroused to a deeper sense of the glory that awaits her, she would enter with a warmer spirit into the struggles that are before her.¹

Finally, I would hope to approach this book in a very ministerial way. Like all of Scripture, the Revelation is designed to teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

If you were to ask what, at its heart, do we learn from Revelation when it comes what we are to believe concerning God and what how we are called to respond (duty), I think the words of Dr. Greg Bahnsen sum it up well. The basic message of the Revelation is "the *triumph* of Christ (of Christianity) over all opposition, or evil." This is what the Revelation teaches us regarding what God accomplishes in His Son. In light of this, our duty is to endure, conquer, overcome, persevere *nikonti* to the end.

It is remarkable that the word "**throne**" *thronos* is used sixty-three times in the New Testament, forty-seven of those sixty-three are in the Revelation. It is universally agreed that Revelation gives a message of Christ upon His throne. What there seems to be less agreement on is when that happens and what that looks like. Is Jesus currently on His throne? Some would say not entirely. And if Jesus is on His throne, how will that affect the course of history, if at all.

Survey of Revelation

It might be overly ambitious to seek to survey this entire book in one sermon, yet we will make an effort. I will seek to achieve this by staying out of the theological weeds and just offer an overview, which itself will be difficult enough. In our verse-by-verse approach we will get deeper, but even then, these will be sermons and not a seminary class. Nonetheless, it is my prayer that we will all have a richer understanding of God's word

¹ Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism, An Eschatology of Hope*, (P & R Publishing, 1999), p. 47.

through our own examination of the text over merely embracing what appears to be the prevalent view.

After a greeting and very lofty description of Christ (Revelation 1:1-8), we learn that John (likely the Apostle John), as a political and religious exile is writing from the rocky and barren island of Patmos. He is instructed to write a book and send it to seven churches which were along a Roman mail route in Asia Minor. John is given a vision of the glorified Christ with attributes which will be referred to as each church is addressed.

It's as if the church under the oppression of Jerusalem (Revelation 11:8) and Rome (Revelation 17:9) needs to look beyond those despotic and overbearing circumstances to see the deeper truth.

An outline of Revelation is then given to John.

Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this (Revelation 1:19).

In terms of pure devoted literary space, this outline doesn't unfold evenly. The things which John had "seen" are in chapter one; things like the glorified Christ in the midst of the seven candlestands (Revelation 1:12-16). The things "that are" refer to the current conditions of the seven churches (Revelation 2, 3). Finally, the things "that are to take place after this" are the next nineteen chapters. So, we see this is not equally spread out.

As stated, the previously seen things have to do with the power and authority of Christ and how that should underscore and encourage our hearts in the midst of difficulty. In the seven letters to the seven churches, things become more specific.

Each church is addressed by Christ with a reference to some attribute we learned of in chapter one, for example:

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands (Revelation 2:1).

The Lord then reveals to these churches that He knows of the things taking place in His churches. He knows our works (Revelation 2:2). He knows our tribulation (Revelation 2:9). He knows where we dwell

(Revelation 2:13), etc. Christ is intimately acquainted with what is happening in all of His churches, both good and bad.

With some exceptions, each church is given words of encouragement, words of critique, a call to persevere/conquer, a promise of blessing and/or a warning of sanction or threat if they continue in rebellion. The church is the means by which Christ overcomes the “**gates of hell**” (**Matthew 16:18**). If the church waxes cold and is unwilling to persevere, repent and obey, they will be like a fruitless branch to be thrown away (John 15:1-11).

It is in chapter four, the things “**that are to take place after this,**” that theological paths begin to diverge.

After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this (Revelation 4:1).

Some take this as the rapture of the church. I respectfully disagree. It is John alone (second person, singular) who is called to “**come up here.**” And John alone, according to the next verse, is the singular one who goes. To what are we being introduced here? Herein lies the “**throne**” talk. Fourteen times in this chapter alone!

Most people, and certainly all Christians, have a sense that good will win out. Why do we think that? The very notion that good will win out is mere cockeyed optimism if we have no solid notion of what constitutes good or why we think it will prevail. Do we have any basis for this disposition? Chapter four climaxes with an appeal to God as creator:

You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created (Revelation 4:11).

It is God who created all things. And it is God, as the one who controls history, who will assure that good will prevail. In chapter four, we are shown just that. He is most assuredly on His throne. David S. Clark teaches, I think appropriately, of the purpose of the vision. It is designed to...

...lift their [our] hearts and thoughts above the deadly decrees of tyrants, and their [our] souls above the fear of prison, sword, and stake.²

In chapter five we're introduced to a seven sealed scroll, which I take to mean the course of history (especially immediate history). Christ alone is worthy to open the scroll for He has prevailed. Chapter four emphasized God as creator, chapter five emphasizes Christ as redeemer. The means by which He has prevailed is by having been slain as the Lamb (Revelation 5:6).

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing (Revelation 5:12)!

In chapter six we see the seals begin to be opened. We are now getting a preview of how God will protect His church. The opening of the seals reveals things that have become immensely popular in western literature. The four horsemen of the apocalypse. The cries of the slain martyrs for God's vindication. There is then an appeal to both natural calamities and political siege.

To assure that these calamities would not fall upon the "**servants of God**" (Revelation 7:3), the avenging angels are told to wait in chapter seven until God's people are sealed on their foreheads. Here we are given a picture of great multitude that "**no one could number**" (Revelation 7:9) clothed with white robes...made white with the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14).

Early in the prophecy of things that will "**that are to take place after this**" the saints are given this blessed assurance that they are sealed by God, belong to Him and will be preserved by Him. In a Christian culture where the faith is viewed more as a massive colloquium of self-help, purveyed by life-coaches, these assurances may mean little. But to a persecuted church, both then and now, these words carry much greater depth.

...for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters.

² The Message From Patmos, David S. Clark, p. 46.

**And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes
(Revelation 7:17).**

In chapter eight, the prayers of the saints (for vindication) will be answered (Revelation 8:3, 4). We read of a half an hour of silence. This is the calm before the storm, allowing God's sealed saints to flee the wrath that will come upon Jerusalem (Matthew 24:16; Luke 21:20, 21). With the scroll fully opened, we now read of seven angels with seven trumpets (Revelation 8:2, 6). We haven't time to dig too deeply here, but the seven trumpets yield natural calamities and human woes.

These trumpets of judgment extend through the end of chapter eleven. In these accounts we read of John given another prophecy to deliver via a little book (Revelation 10:9-11). This is addressing something more international in nature, "**...about many peoples, nations, tongues and kings.**" The current judgment is upon Jerusalem. This is where the temple stood (Revelation 11:1) and where Christ was crucified (Revelation 11:8). The natural outworking of the Great Commission (Christ's universal authority) is heralded at the sounding of the seventh angel.

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

In chapters thirteen through eighteen we will read of God's judgment turning to Rome (Revelation 17:9). But not until we read of Satan eluded, defeated and cast down in chapter twelve.

In chapter thirteen we are introduced to the beast to whom the dragon gave power. We see another beast as well. Allegiance must be given to the beast in order to simply conduct one's life. There is no buying or selling without taking his mark upon "**their right hand or on their foreheads**" (Revelation 13:16). The number 666 is associated with this beast which, apparently, those who have understanding can calculate. I will say little here about this here, other than neither the seals or marks of God or of the beast or likely tattoos or subcutaneous computer chips. The forehead is how we think, and the hand is how we behave.

With Christ firmly on Mount Zion with His established saints, we read in chapters fourteen through eighteen of the deposing of Rome as an

enemy of Christ's kingdom. It is not as if Rome happily leaves. Many Christians will be tempted and threatened to yield. But **"blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13)**. This great persecutor of the church will find themselves subject to **"seven angels and seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God" (Revelation 15:7)**.

In a visit to Rome I saw carved into an ancient building, the size of the Rome at its height, at the time of Christ. It extended north into today's Great Britain, west to Spain, east through Asia Minor to the Caspian Sea and south to Egypt. The carving also showed its decline and how, today, it is a mere dot. Conversely, the Kingdom of God has continued to cover the earth. This is the prophecy found in Revelation.

With its initial persecutors deposed, chapter nineteen reveals all heaven breaking open, Christ called **"Faithful and True" (Revelation 19:11)**, on a white horse. His name is **"called the Word of God" (Revelation 19:13)** and the sharp sword of His mouth strikes the nations. The Great Commission now races forward through history.

Success of this Great Commission is assured, we learn in chapter twenty, because Satan, that strong man (Matthew 12:29), has been bound **"that he should deceive the nations no longer" (Revelation 20:3)**. We then have a reference to the millennium (thousand years), which I take to reference the periods between the first and second advents of Christ.

When the thousand years expire, Satan will be released for a short time, as if to remind humanity of its continual need for Christ. This will be followed by the Great White Throne Judgment. It is universally agreed, regardless of eschatological convictions, that only those clothed in the robes made white in the blood of the Lamb will endure that judgment.

The book concludes in chapters twenty-one and twenty-two with a reference to a new heaven and a new earth. The struggling saints, truly in every age, can look to their eternal glory.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4).

That is what we learn of God, what He will do. We have gone full cycle now in our Route Sixty-Six series. We have gone from Paradise Lost

in Genesis to Paradise Restored in Revelation. In light of this, let us take our duty to heart.

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son (Revelation 21:7).

Questions for Study

1. What is 'eschatology' and why do you suppose it has become so popular? What questions come to mind when you consider today's most prevalent views (pages 2, 3)?
2. Why is eschatology important (pages 3, 4)?
3. Discuss Dr. Bahnsen's view on the basic theme found in Revelation (page 4).
4. From where did John write the Revelation and to whom was it initially sent (page 5)?
5. How is Revelation outlined (pages 5, 6)?
6. Is Revelation 4:1 speaking of the rapture of the church? Why or why not (page 6)?
7. How does Revelation achieve what David S. Clark suggested (page 6)?
8. What does it mean for God to seal His people? How does this speak to the mark of the beast (page 7)?
9. Who are the two persecutors of the church found in Revelation (page 8)?
10. In light of what we learn regarding what God will do, how should we respond (page 9)?

