

“A Rave Review” (Revelation 1-22)

How many of you are good with directions? How many of you like to read maps? [Choose a volunteer to come up and find directions on a Thurston County map. Have the volunteer locate a valid street]. This volunteer is gifted at reading a map.

I have an embarrassing confession to make. I’m directionally impaired. My mind doesn’t think like a compass. I have no real north, south, east, and west bearings. In fact, I struggle to accurately read a map. Without a navigator, I would be continually lost. Fortunately, I’m married to a woman who is more directionally inclined than *MapQuest*. Therefore, when it comes to directions, I take my cue from Lori.

The book of Revelation is like a map. Even if you know how to find your way around the Bible, the book of Revelation humbles all Bible students to dust. That’s why it is so important for us to have a good navigator. The only navigator worth trusting is the Holy Spirit. He alone can direct us through the maze of Revelation.¹ If you have been feeling a bit confused or even overwhelmed by our study of Revelation, I hope and pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten you through this review and summary. Please open your Bible to Revelation 1:1.

As we begin our walk-through, it is important to understand that the title “**Revelation**” (*apokalupsis*) means “a disclosure or an unveiling.”² The stated purpose of Revelation is to reveal Jesus Christ (1:1): His person, His power, and His plan for the future. The first truth that we must grasp is that Revelation is all about Jesus. He is the leading character, the director, and the producer. When the credits are rolled...Jesus is the focus. When the *Oscar* awards are given out, He is on center stage. If we fail to remember this, we will lose sight of the big picture.

Chapter 1:1 also informs us that Revelation was written to “**bond-servants.**”³ It does not say that God gave this book to biblical scholars or prophecy junkies. Those that will understand Revelation best fear God and are devoted to Christ. Are you a bond-servant of Christ? Have you trusted in Jesus as your Savior? Have you then said, “Jesus, I want to become a bond-servant...I want to deny myself, take up my cross daily, and follow You? (See Luke 9:23; 14:26-35)

Another important consideration is that a blessing is promised to those who heed the words of Revelation.⁴ In 1:3, John writes, “**Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near**” (cf. 22:7). Revelation is the only book of the Bible that promises us a blessing for reading, hearing, and heeding its contents. This should result in Revelation being thoroughly studied and applied. Have you determined in your heart that you will return to this great book? Are you willing to teach this book to your children and teens? Are you willing (with the help of great tools) to take a small group through this book? If so, you are ready for the key to unlock the book of Revelation.

Please look at 1:19. As far as interpretation goes, 1:19 is the single most important verse of Revelation. This outline is God’s intended outline for the book and shows us that we should have a futuristic approach to the great majority of Revelation. The simple three-point outline is as follows: (1) “**The things which you have seen**” (the things past). The past things refer to those things which John had seen from 1:9-19 including 1:20, which is an explanation of part of the vision of the glorified Christ (1:9-20). (2) “**The things which are**” (the things present). The things present deal with the message to the seven churches and the state of the church of the church age (2:1-3:22). (3) “**The things which will take place after these things**” (the future things). This dominant section looks at the events that will occur after the church: the tribulation, the millennium, and the eternal state (4:1-22:21). So when you’re on the verge of being lost, keep this outline in mind so that you have a map to guide you.

In chapters 2-3, John records seven messages from Jesus directed to seven churches.⁵ The seven churches existed in John's day in Asia Minor (what is now Turkey). In the Bible, "**seven**" is the number of completeness, perfection, and fulfillment. These seven churches perfectly represent the strengths and weaknesses that have been and will be characteristic of various churches throughout history. The warnings and exhortations given to the above churches apply to us today. Though each letter is written to a specific church, all seven letters close with the words, "**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**"⁶ John is writing for all who will listen!

In these two chapters, two principles stand out. First, God's people are called to persevere. At the conclusion of each of the seven letters, Jesus speaks to the one that "**overcomes.**"⁷ In these chapters, the overcomer is one that does not lose his love for Christ (2:4-5), holds fast the faith (2:13, 25; 3:11), and is faithful to death (2:10). Unfortunately, many Christians struggle with perseverance and fail to overcome. Perseverance can be a struggle for us in many intentions and commitments. Did you know that only 8% of the people who start a fitness program in January are still doing that program just three months later? Did you know that 25% of the people who enter a college to get a degree leave with one four years later? When we do not exercise self-discipline and persevere in seemingly small areas of our lives, we will fail to be spiritually disciplined and will lack staying power.

Harvard University once did a long-range study tracking the long-term progress of its graduates all the way to their retirement. It turned out that only 5% of them had reached retirement with a nest egg that allowed them to retire without any dependence on social security or any other program. The interesting thing is that they could only find one factor that the 5% had in common with each other and didn't have in common with the 95% back when they graduated. And that was this: they wrote down their goals.⁸

Will you stop for just a moment and write down a perseverance goal? You may want to write a general goal (e.g., I will persevere in the Christian life by finishing strong). You may want to write a specific goal (e.g., I will read the Bible with my family three times a week). Write down whatever goal the Lord prompts you with. Then review that goal again and again. It is likely that you will accomplish the goal that the Lord lays on your heart.

[Display a large blue and gold can of WD-40]. You may have a can of WD-40 around the house. Do you know what the WD stands for? It stands for "water displacement." Do you know what the 40 refers to? That's how many times they tried to develop an effective formula. They failed 39 times but succeeded on the 40th try. The message is: don't give up. Don't quit when you are tired. Don't quit when you fail. Don't quit when you meet obstacles.⁹

The second principle is this: The faithful will receive their eternal reward. Jesus promises eternal rewards to the one that overcomes. These rewards include The Tree of Life, the crown of life, hidden manna, a white stone with a new name, ruling over nations and receiving the morning star, being clothed in white, having one's name confessed before God, being an eternal pillar in the temple with new names, and ruling with Christ. This reality reminds us that our earthly lives are very significant.

We are living right now in Revelation 2-3. But beginning in Revelation 4 through the end of the book, everything is future and has not yet been fulfilled. In chapters 4-5, the theme of worship is accentuated. In chapter 4, God the Father is the focus and in chapter 5 Jesus Christ is the focus. Both chapters resoundingly declare that believers are called to a life of worship. True worship is simply acknowledging God's true worth. It is praising Him for all that He is.

I hope that our study through Revelation has caused you to love and worship Jesus more. If it hasn't, I have failed. The goal of Revelation is for you to love and serve Jesus more. It is for you to understand Him more intimately, and passionately.

In chapters 6-18, the events and personalities of the tribulation are revealed. Most people struggle with why God spilled so much ink describing the tribulation. Yet, we acknowledge that God has a purpose in everything He writes (2 Tim 3:16-17). We will just briefly touch upon the dominant themes. First, we must note that the tribulation demonstrates that God is completely sovereign. After all, Jesus is the One that opens up the tribulation seals (ch. 6). He is also responsible for the trumpet and bowl judgments (chs. 8-9 and 16). He uses these judgments to bring unbelievers to Himself. God is so sovereign that He ensures people from **“every tribe, tongue, people, and nation”** will eventually trust in Him and be found in heaven (5:9). He also assures us that the tribulation events will draw unbelieving Israel to faith in Christ (see esp. Rom 11:26).

A second principle that is found in these chapters is: Persecution will never destroy God’s church or God’s purposes. Prosperity has often been fatal to Christianity, but persecution never has been, nor ever will be. In 6:9-11, John writes, **“When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.”** We see from these three verses that martyred saints have a future home with Jesus, will be rewarded, and will be avenged. Satan cannot thwart God. As Martin Luther said, “The devil is God’s devil.” While he attempts to use persecution to bring about the demise of the church, the church rises up with health and growth when Satan uses this tactic. This is yet another reminder that God is sovereign over human history.

A third tribulation principle is: Evil will be punished in God’s own time. There will come a day when God’s patience with the unbelieving world will expire. At that time, He will judge the world in righteousness. This is seen in the events of the tribulation and later in the destruction of all wickedness (16:19-21; 19:11-21) and the great white throne judgment (20:11-15). Since these events have yet to unfold, many people reject Jesus Christ because of the problem of evil. But one day, Christ will have the final word.

As we conclude our study we must note two very important principles that we find throughout this book. The first is that Christ could return at any moment. We first see this in 1:7. Revelation then concludes with three assurances of **“I am coming quickly”** from Jesus (22:7, 12, 20). This is a cardinal belief for Christians. The Bible calls us to live like we could be leaving at any time. Are you ready to depart? Are you prepared to meet your Maker? Can you echo John’s words in 22:20, **“Come, Lord Jesus?”** If not, the time to prepare for your tomorrow is today. If you have any unfinished business with Christ or another believer, take care of it today. This will ensure that you will not be ashamed when Christ returns (1 John 2:28). It will also ensure that your life counts for much in eternity.

The final and most important principle is this: Salvation can only be found in Jesus Christ. The clearest expression of this is found in 22:17b where John records, **“And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.”** The good news of Revelation and the whole of the Bible is that a relationship with God is free. It is given **“without cost”** to the one that thirsts. If you are thirsty, you can entrust your eternal destiny to Jesus. He promises that He will save you and preserve you. Will you do this today?

One evening a woman was driving home when she noticed a huge truck behind her that was driving uncomfortably close. The headlights were shining in her rear view mirror, blinding her eyes. She stepped on the gas to put some distance between her and the truck—but to no avail. When she sped up, the truck sped up. The faster she drove, the faster the truck followed. Her heart began to pound. With sweaty palms, she turned the steering wheel and took the next exit ramp off the freeway. But the truck stayed with her as closely as ever. Now frantic, this woman turned up the main street, hoping to lose her stalking pursuer in the traffic. But the truck ran a red light and continued to chase her.

Reaching the panic point, the woman whipped her car into a service station, threw open the door, and bolted across the pavement screaming for help. The truck driver jumped from his rig and ran toward her. He yanked open her back door and pulled out a man who was hidden in her back seat. The woman has been running from the wrong person! Unknown to her, the truck driver had spotted a would-be rapist in the back seat of her car. The chase was not his effort to harm her. His pursuit was intended to save her, even at the cost of his own safety. His desire was to help the woman escape that which would harm her. Many people are like that woman. They run from God, fearing what He might do to them. But if they would simply stop running from God, He would give them their escape from what truly threatens them—Satan, sin, and the second death.¹⁰

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Notes

¹ Jesus said, “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you” (John 16:13-14).

² See Luke 2:32; Rom 2:5; 8:19; 16:25; 1 Cor 1:7; 14:6, 26; 2 Cor 12:1, 7; Gal 1:12; 2:2; Eph 1:17; 3:3; 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Pet 1:7, 13; 4:13.

³ Gk. *doulois*: “used of God-fearing people.” See Rev 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6; Luke 2:29; 1 Pet 2:16, BDAG Electronic Ed.

⁴ There are a total of seven “blessings” in Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).

⁵ “Seven” is a key word that is used 59 times in Revelation (7 groups of 7).

- Group 1 - The 7 Churches (Ch. 2-3)
- Group 2 - The 7 Seals (Ch. 6)
- Group 3 - The 7 Trumpets (8:2; 11:19)
- Group 4 - The 7 Persons (Ch. 12:1-14:1)
- Group 5 - The 7 Bowls (Ch. 15-16)
- Group 6 - The 7 Dooms (Ch. 17-20)
- Group 7 - The 7 New Things (Ch. 21-22)

⁶ It is important to note, the word “churches” (*ekklesiais*) is plural. The clear implication is these messages are designed for any church that hears or reads this book.

⁷ See Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21 [twice]; cf. 21:7.

⁸ Successful Fitness Resolutions, Volume 11: <http://www.explosivefitness.com/AdvInfo/Resolve01.html>

⁹ Preaching Today Citation: Ted De Hass, Bedford, Iowa.

¹⁰ Slightly revised from Steven J. Lawson, *Heaven Help Us!*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995), 151-152.