

Revelation Review and Survey

*Prior to Chapter 8
Revelation 1:3*

With Study Questions

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Prior to Chapter 8

Revelation 1:3

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 1:3).

Introduction-The Market of Morality

Engaging with an unbelieving world, Christians will often have it explained to them that Christianity has not cornered the market on morality. What appears to be meant by this assertion is that one needn't look to the church, or religion, to find morality or moral people. This does appear self-evidently true. Many of us know irreligious people who are good, reliable, and trustworthy-sometimes more so than our professing Christian friends.

Of course, it is not (or at least, should not be) the assertion that Christianity is a land appealing to the morally superior. Jesus was not unclear that He did not come for those who were of moral excellence.

And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³²I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31, 32).

"Be merciful to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13 NASB) should be the refrain of the Christian. This should not be understood as a license to continue in sin. There is, to be sure, a call to live a life of faithfulness, to **"walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4)**. But prior (both chronologically and importance) to Jesus being the Christian's a source of moral direction, is Jesus being the source, the foundation, of the sinner's redemption. He saves then teaches.

Though acknowledgement, and abhorrence, of one own's sinfulness should be an elementary principle in our faith, what the world fails to wrestle with, and what Christians often ignore, is that even though the Christian faith has not cornered the market on morality (at least in terms of success in outward behavior), it uniquely provides a justification for morality.

Justifying Morality

By justification¹ I am speaking of an explanation for what constitutes morality in any absolute sense. It may be asked, *From where does morality originate, and why should it be considered moral?* People are fond of quoting Nietzsche in his/their jettison of God and any absolute sense of morality (who doesn't sound smart quoting Nietzsche?).

But this highfalutin appeal to Nihilism (no right, no wrong, no nothing) routinely pulls a wagon of indignation into the depot, regarding some conviction, or behavior, of the simpletons on the farm of religious hee-haws. That knife cuts both ways. You can't say there are no absolutes, then tell me I'm absolutely wrong for believing in them.

All this to say, I may not be very good at morals or ethics (morals generally understood to be individual behavior, ethics the codes of a culture, an ethos) but at least I know from whence they hail. I may not excel in following my Master, but I do know who my Master is. This is a critical difference between the believer and the unbeliever. The vast majority of the world cannot give an account, or a justification, for the morality which they hold so dear-for which they will fight-sometimes to the death.

Trust With Ethics/Trust With Soul

And if we may take it one step further, it is one thing having a master, known or unknown, who you trust with your ethics, it is quite another thing to have a Master who you can trust with your soul. Any honest person who looks at Jesus, the ultimate keeper of the law (Hebrews 4:15, 1 John 3:4) then looks at him/herself walks away with the words **"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).**

But Jesus is not merely Master (or Lord) He is also Savior. When Peter, having had a close encounter with the power of Christ, beckoned Jesus to depart. He seemed to realize the company was above him. But Jesus didn't depart. Instead, He brought comfort and a call,

And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." ¹¹ And when they had brought their

¹ Show or prove to be right or reasonable.

boats to land, they left everything and followed him (Luke 5:10, 11).

These are the same words (“**Fear not**”) the Apostle John heard in his encounter with the glorified Christ in Revelation 1:17. In order for Peter, James and John to harbor a proper frame of mind in their commission to fish for men in a hostile environment, they needed the prerequisite fear of God followed by the tender, yet powerful, hand of Christ which would quell that great fear. In one respect Jesus was a contemporary, but in another respect, He was anything but!

The Environment of the Seven Churches

Perhaps you’re asking, why this lengthy introduction to our review/survey. In all the sensationalism surrounding the book of Revelation, I have my own fears. I fear that we have lost what this book meant to the original readers and, therefore, lose what it means to us when we find ourselves in a similar situation to them.

It is not in vogue in today’s western church to herald the fear of God which is the “**beginning of knowledge**” (**Proverbs 1:7**). We are, therefore, disastrously parroting the world by which it is surrounded rather than vice-versa. Instead of the salt flavoring the stew, the stew is watering down, and taking over, the salt. This was precisely the danger lurking in these seven churches in Revelation (at least most of them).

The seven churches were surrounded by a religious community (a community that had been God’s covenant people) that had become Satanic (Revelation 2:9, 13; 3:9) and a powerful political empire which had become Satanic as well (Revelation 13:2). The false religion was seeking to lure them into loveless, heresy and immorality (Revelation 2:4, 14, 20; 3:17, 18).

The political empire was seeking to mother them-to be their provider, protector, and caregiver. The only cost for the service of this mega-nanny was your heart and your labor. This would be spiritually communicated as a mark on your hand or forehead (Revelation 13:16).

Would we even see this coming? In today’s eschatological dog-and-pony show, the ringmasters have us nervous about tattoos and computer chips. Perhaps we should be more concerned with who/what has captured our minds and hearts. If you’re confused about who has your heart, you can begin an assessment by examining what your hands are finding to do.

Section One-Our Powerful Advocate

In an effort to avoid losing the forest for the trees, I will offer a brief review/survey of Revelation. As I have offered numerous times, I find myself in agreement with Dr. Greg Bahnsen who summed up the theme of Revelation as “the *triumph* of Christ (of Christianity) over all opposition, or evil.” The question for the readers is, what side of this battle will you plant your flag?

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 holding seven angels in His right hand (Revelation 1:12-16). The explanations for what this all means are given in the text itself. The candlestands are the churches and the angels (likely) their pastors.

We are to avoid the spiritual myopia which forgets who is in our midst. The power and glory of your Advocate should ever remind us of what a drop in the bucket (Isaiah 40:15) those things are which distress us or desire our hearts and convictions. Right up front we are to know our Master, who is also our Savior. Keep in mind, in all his visions of terror and monsters, the only time John fell “**as though dead**” (Revelation 1:17) is when he saw Christ in His glory.

Section Two-Darkly Influenced Churches

The things “**that are**” referred to the current conditions, and challenges, of the seven churches (Revelation 2, 3). One might think that understanding the angels as the pastors is a bit inflating to pastors. But if pastors (and elders) even begin to appreciate the accountability (Hebrews 13:17) they have before God in the capacity of shepherding His children, we would ever be taking refuge in the knowledge that His right hand bears us up.

These seven churches would hear of the soon-to-come devastations that would fall upon their detractors. The problem was, they were beginning to imitate, both in thought and deed, those detractors. If they refused to repent, they would find themselves on the wrong side of these judgments, both in history and eternity.

Section Three-A Tale of Two Judgments-Jerusalem

These soon-to-come devastations are the final point of the outline, the things **“that are to take place after this”** are the next nineteen chapters. So, we see this is not equally spread out. Let us briefly survey these nineteen chapters, where we will see the judgment of Jerusalem then Rome.

In chapter one we saw Christ on earth, in the midst of the church, in chapter four we see Christ in heaven. John, and only John, is invited to this vision. This is not the rapture; this is God revealing to His church who is on the throne of history. The word **“throne”** *thronos* is used sixty-three times in the New Testament, forty-seven of those are in Revelation, fourteen of those forty-seven are in chapter four.

The praise in chapter four focuses on God, the Creator, upon His throne. The praise in chapter five moves to Christ, the Redeemer, who is worthy to open a scroll. This is the scroll of redemptive history, especially events which will soon take place.

In chapter six Jesus, the Lamb, begins to open the seals of this scroll, one by one, which preview the judgments that will soon mark the end of the **“obsolete...and...vanishing”** Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:13). The world would call this the transition from BC to AD. It is the most significant event in human history.

These judgments on Jerusalem (Revelation 11:8) are previewed by the breaking of the seals seen in chapters six and seven but will be brought to fruition in chapters eight through eleven with the seven trumpets of judgment. The trumpets which sounded the downfall of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-27) will now sound the downfall of apostate Israel. The **“mystery of God” (Revelation 10:7)** would be fulfilled as God’s covenant people would no longer be restricted to one nation but **“all nations will come and worship [Him]” (Revelation 15:4).**

The first enemy of the church, apostate Israel, is judged in chapters six through eleven. Let us notice two things before we move on: first, John will be told that he is to prophesy again. This second prophecy (the little

book/scroll) would be more international—a prophecy about **“many people and nations and languages and kings” (Revelation 10:11)**. The prophecy regarding Rome (Revelation 17:9) would follow the prophecy concerning Jerusalem.

The Other Side of Christmas

Second, John would answer the natural question regarding how these things can possibly be. Chapter twelve is sort of a parenthetical. We are given the heavenly/spiritual perspective of the Christmas story. The efforts and failure of the devil to **“devour”** the child (Revelation 12:4). We learn in chapter twelve how Satan is **“thrown down” (Revelation 12:9; Luke 10:18)**. Similar to what we will see in chapter twenty, the power and dominion of Satan is dealt a crippling blow in the victory of Christ.

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it (Colossians 2:15). “It” being the cross.

Section Three—A Tale of Two Judgments—Rome

In chapter thirteen we are introduced to the beast (likely a reference to the Roman Empire and/or its current emperor) to whom the dragon (the devil) gave power. We see another beast (likely the Emperor Cult of Asia Minor) 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 were able to calculate. I will say little here about this here, other than neither the seals nor 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.

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.

The Great Commission-The Enemy Bound-The New Heavens and Earth

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).

We have gone from Paradise Lost in Genesis to Paradise Restored in Revelation. We are to find our comfort, govern our lives and ever persevere in light of this glorious promise of eternal peace and victory.

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. Have Christians cornered the market on morality? What is meant by this? Discuss the difficulty the world has in justifying morality (pages 2, 3)?
2. Is Jesus primarily your teacher or redeemer? What's the difference (pages 3, 4)?
3. Explain the environment of the seven churches in Revelation. How similar or dissimilar to ours (page 4)?
4. What is the theme of Revelation and what do we learn from section one of John's outline of the book (page 5)?
5. What are the seven churches being prepared for in section two of John's outline? What dangers are lurking in these churches (pages 5, 6)?
6. What judgments are recorded in chapters six through eleven? What are the implications of this (page 6)?
7. How is chapter twelve the other side of Christmas (page 7)?
8. Who is the second judgment against in chapters thirteen through eighteen (page 7)?
9. How is chapter nineteen related to the Great Commission (page 8)?

