



Revelation: A Message for Our Times

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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Introduction:

The world we face today is different from the world we knew 10 years ago. The events surrounding September 11 and then the war with Iraq changed our world, our lives, and our outlook toward the future. Our whole nation fears the political threats of terrorism. But we, recognizing that the terrorism is grounded in religious persecution, fear that Muslims may answer the battle cry of the Koran and begin their holy wars in our communities. On the one hand, I believe the chances of that are extremely slim. On the other, what if it happens? I think about our brethren in the first century. They faced persecution that is unimaginable to our American mindset. I think about the kind of sermons they must have heard on a regular basis to encourage them to maintain faithfulness. I think about Paul's message to the churches in **Acts 14:22**, "...through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (ESV). I think about Paul's words to the Thessalonians in **I Thessalonians 4:15-18**. "Therefore encourage one another with these words" (ESV). I think about John's message in **Revelation**. As we face uncertain and discomfoting times, we can turn to **Revelation**. It is a message for our times.

Discussion:

I. **Revelation** is not a prophecy of modern events.

- A. Do not misunderstand me. **Revelation** did not prophesy the attack on the World Trade Center or the Pentagon. It did not prophesy the war on Iraq or the military action in Afghanistan. In fact, **Revelation** does not directly prophesy any events of our time.
- B. To believe that **Revelation** is a prophecy of modern events denies the historical context of the book. The first chapter explains how we should read the book.
 1. **Revelation 1:1-3** says the book would talk about things that would "soon take place" and that "the time is near." This book is not about events thousands of years in John's future.
 2. In **Revelation 1:9**, John claimed to be a partaker of the tribulation. When John wrote this book, his readers did not need to know what would happen in a future "Great Tribulation." They needed comfort to make it through the tribulation they were in.
 3. In **Revelation 1:9**, John also claimed to be a partaker in the kingdom. In **vs. 6**, he claimed he and the Christians to whom he was writing had already been made into a kingdom. This book is not about the establishment of a future kingdom. It is about the perseverance of an already present kingdom in the midst of great persecution.
- C. Therefore, when we read **Revelation** we should not be trying to figure out what events it is foretelling for our future. That is not the book's purpose. Rather, we need to determine what it meant to them and then see how it applies to our situation today.

II. What parallels can we find?

- A. To the extent that our times mirror the times of the early Christians, **Revelation's** message is for us. What parallels can we see?
- B. We have parallel enemies. In **Revelation 13:1-10**, we read about the beast coming up out of the sea. It represents a government opposed to Christianity. Today, our government is not executing us. However, it is not altogether friendly to us either. In **Revelation 13:11-18**, we see the beast from the land (the false prophet) who promotes false worship. This represents the attack on Christianity by false religion. That parallels one of our biggest fears: the attacks of Islam (a false religion) on Christianity. What about atheism (also a false religion) that has been attacking us for years?
- C. Based on these parallels, we note four lessons from **Revelation**. To do so, we will look at some very symbolic passages. John said in **Revelation 1:1** that the message of God was "signified" (NKJV), that is, given in signs and symbols. Because of time constraints, we will not be able to dig deeply into this symbolism. Rather, we will simply take note of the points themselves.

III. What lessons can we learn for today?

- A. We will have enemies who attack us.
 1. Several passages demonstrate enemies of God's servants or people. **Revelation 11:7-10** shows the beast out of the abyss and the people of the world attacking God's witnesses.

2. **Revelation 12:17** pictures a dragon attacking those who keep God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.
 3. **Revelation 13:1-8** describes a beast. This beast speaks words of arrogance against God, His house and His people. He even makes war on God's holy ones.
 4. John wrote of the enemies of the early church. But it is not different today. God's people have always had enemies and will have enemies until the last enemy is conquered and the kingdom returned to the Father (**I Corinthians 15:24-25**). We will have enemies who attack.
- B. Sometimes it will look like God's enemies are winning.
1. Can you imagine being one of the first century Christians, hearing about the imprisonment, torture, and death of friends, brethren, and leaders? Can you imagine what affect that might have on the courage of the early Christians? Can you imagine how easy it would be to think they were on the losing side? **Revelation** deals with that very issue showing such seeming success for God's enemies that one might believe Satan's side is going to win.
 2. In **Revelation 6:3-8**, we see the ravages of men slaying one another, of poverty, of famine, of war, of pestilence, and of wild beasts. So much success for Satan that even the martyred saints cry out, "How long?" (**Revelation 6:10**).
 3. In **Revelation 11:7-10**, the beast kills God's witnesses, and the inhabitants of the earth gloat and rejoice. God, it seems, has lost, and the beast has won.
 4. In **Revelation 13:7**, the beast is allowed to "overcome" the saints. In **Revelation 13:14-18**, the earth beast, or false prophet, convinces all mankind to worship the beast and his image. He has so much success that he is able to control the marketplace, not allowing the few who refuse to worship the beast to buy and sell or eat and drink.
 5. **Revelation 17:6** pictures a woman called "Babylon the great." She is drunk with the blood of the saints.
 6. There will be times when it appears that God is losing and Satan is winning. We may wonder, as did the martyrs, "How long will this go on?" The world and the worldly will rejoice and gloat over us. But we must remember the next lesson. Despite how things appear ...
- C. We must take comfort and courage, God always wins.
1. This is the message the Christians of the first century needed to hear. They faced a more aggressive and militant enemy than we ever have. They needed to know that God was going to win. **Revelation** demonstrates that over and over again.
 2. In **Revelation 6:3-8** we see the ravages against Christianity. In **Revelation 6:12-17** we see God's judgment on the kings and people of the earth. God always wins.
 3. In **Revelation 11:7-10** we see the death of the witnesses and the gloating of the world. But in **Revelation 11:11-13** we see the witnesses resurrected, called to heaven, and then judgment on the enemies. Even death cannot conquer God's people. God always wins.
 4. In **Revelation 13** we learn about the beast and the false prophet and how much success they seem to have. But, in **Revelation 16** we see bowls of judgment poured out on the beast and the false prophet. Finally, in **Revelation 19:20-21**, the beast and the false prophet are seized and cast into the lake of fire. God always wins.
 5. In **Revelation 17:4-6**, "Babylon the great" feasts on the blood of the saints. But in **Revelation 18:2ff**, "Babylon the great" is fallen.
 6. The early Christians were being whipped and beaten; they needed to know that God was not being whipped and beaten. **Revelation** explained, "God always wins." No matter what happens today. We need to remember. God always wins.
- D. If we are faithful, we will be rewarded.
1. What caused the early Christians to persevere? What will help us continue through everything the enemy throws at us? Knowing that if we are faithful, we will be rewarded.
 2. The letters to the seven churches show the reward for the faithful. They will eat of the tree of life (**Revelation 2:7**). They will not be hurt by the second death (**Revelation 2:11**). They will partake of God's hidden manna and have a name written on a new stone (**Revelation 2:17**). They will have authority over the nations and will receive the morning star (**Revelation 2:26-28**). They will be clothed in white, their name will not be erased from the book of life, and Jesus will confess them before His Father (**Revelation 3:5**). They will be made pillars in the temple of God. The name of God, the city of God, and Christ's new name will be written upon them (**Revelation 3:12**). They will sit down with Christ on His throne (**Revelation 3:21**).

3. **Revelation 7:14-17** describes the reward of the faithful. Their robes have been made white by the blood of the Lamb. They were before the throne of God, serving Him night and day and He spread His tabernacle over them. They will never hunger or thirst again. They will be shepherded by the Lamb to drink the water of life and God will wipe away their tears. The martyrs had asked, “How long?” When God brought about their desire, it was worth the wait.
4. After we read about the victory of the witnesses and the judgment on their enemies, we read about the reward of the faithful, both small and great, in **Revelation 11:15-18**.
5. In **Revelation 14:13** we learn about those who refused the mark of the beast, but rather were marked with God’s seal. They were blessed because they died in the Lord. They will rest from their labors, and their deeds will follow them.
6. In **Revelation 19** we read of the victorious marriage supper of the Lamb. Those who have been faithful are part of that feast and celebration.
7. **Revelation 20:4-6** reminds us of those martyrs in **Revelation 6:10ff**. Just because someone died does not mean they miss out on the victory which belongs to the Lord and those who are His. Those who die in the Lord are rewarded as well, reigning with Christ.
8. Finally, **Revelation 21-22** pictures the new heavens and new earth, which contain the river and tree of life. What a picture of victory for those who overcome God’s enemies. We will have peace, rest, and victory if we remain faithful against God’s enemies today also.

Conclusion:

Revelation was not written to us. It does not prophesy events of our time or our future. But, insofar as our times mirror the times of the early Christians, it is a message for our times. We will have enemies who attack us. Sometimes it may seem as though they will win. But God always wins and He will reward those who maintain faithfulness to Him. Just about halfway through the book, in **Revelation 12:10-12**, John was told how the saved will be saved. They will be saved by 1) the blood of the Lamb, 2) the word of their testimony, and 3) by not loving their life, even to the point of death. We are saved by God’s grace through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We cannot earn our salvation. At the same time, however, God expects something from us. He wants our testimony. He wants us to lead lives that glorify and point people to Him. He wants us to testify to others about His glorious Gospel. He wants us to follow Him even if it leads us to our death. His word is to hold absolute sway. That begins when we submit to His Gospel, His way. How can anyone claim to be willing to die for Christ, if they are not even willing to be baptized for Him? Follow God’s Word, “Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins” (**Acts 22:16**).