

“REVELATION: DOES IT DESCRIBE OUR DAYS?” SERIES

#4: “Chapter by Chapter Overview”

INTRO:

William Hendriksen describe the book of Revelation this way:

“Beautiful beyond description is the last book of the Bible. Beautiful in form, in symbolism, in purpose, and in meaning. Where in literature do we find anything that excels the majestic description of the Son of Man walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (Revelation 1:12-20)? Where in Scripture do we find a more vivid and picturesque portrayal of the Christ, Faithful and True, going forth unto victory, seated upon a white horse, arrayed with a garment sprinkled with blood, followed by the armies of heaven (Revelation 19:11-16)? Where again, do we find a sharper contrast than that between the doom of Babylon, on the one hand, and the felicity of Jerusalem the Golden, on the other (Revelation 18-22)? And where are the Throne set in heaven and the blessedness of heavenly life depicted in a manner more serenely simple, yet beautiful in its very simplicity (Revelation 4:2-5; 7:13-17)? What a wealth of comfort; what an insight into the future; above all, what an unveiling of the love of God is contained in the words of the prophecy of this book!” (More Than Conquerors, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1939, 1967, p. 11)

The main purpose of the Revelation of Jesus to John is to comfort the church in its struggle against the forces of evil.

Evil takes on many different forms. It's not just immorality and violent behavior. It's greed and the hunger for power. It's often diabolically political.

Evil's enemy is belief in God and Christ and His church, therefore Satan, the leader of evil's forces, attacks the weakest part of the forces for good, which is the church and the individual Christian.

The church struggles against the forces of evil and ultimately wins. This is the message of Revelation.

Today, I'd like to take you on a quick trip through the book of Revelation, chapter by chapter, while recognizing at the same time the seven sections.

I am indebted to William Hendriksen's commentary on the book of Revelation for much of the rest of this series.

THE FIRST SECTION OF REVELATION IS CHAPTERS 1-3.

In these three chapters, we see Jesus' presence in the church, symbolized by golden lampstands. He is with His church through thick and thin, as long as she remains faithful. He has a plan for His church, and He will see to it that His plan is realized in history.

The churches named are in the province of the Roman Empire known as “Asia.” In the order they’re presented, they are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Some believe these churches represent the church throughout the entire church age, motivating some to believe we are in the Laodicean time today.

Others believe that the condition of each of these seven churches represent the condition of the church at various given times, not necessarily in any certain order. They also believe that the conditions of these seven churches occur over and over again.

THE SECOND SECTION IS CHAPTERS 4-7.

Once again, the church age is revealed and summarized symbolically, from its beginning in A. D. 30 to its ending with the return of Christ.

Hendriksen says concerning this section:

*“Whenever in history the church is faithful to its calling and bears testimony concerning the truth, tribulation is bound to follow. Aside even from this fact, the church is **in** the world. Hence, it suffers along with the world. Children of God do not escape the horrors of war, famine, and pestilence. The church needs these tribulations. It needs both the direct antagonism of the world and participation in the common woes that pertain to this earthly life as a result of sin. The church, too, is sinful. It is in constant need of purification and sanctification”* (p. 99).

Chapters 4 and 5 assure us that God is on His throne and in control. Men may assert their authority, show their power, and drench the earth with the bloodshed of war, but God is still in control.

Chapter 6 begins with the opening of the seven seals of the scroll that Christ took from the hand of God in chapter 5. This scroll containing the seven seals is God’s master plan for the universe! Jesus, the Lamb of God, opens the seals of the scroll:

- The first seal produced a white horse whose rider was none other than Christ Himself.
- The second seal produced a red or fiery horse, which together with its rider represents religious persecution of believers.
- The third seal produced a black horse, which together with its rider, who carries a scale, represents poor, oppressed people.
- The fourth seal produced a pale horse whose rider’s name was Death, followed by Hades. This horse and rider represent war, which often leads to famine, pestilence, and death.
- The fifth seal produced the souls of those who had been killed for standing up for the faith.

- When the sixth seal was opened, there was a great earthquake, followed by judgment day.

Chapter 7 is a description of the victorious church made up of both Jews and Gentiles, standing before God and the Son, who are seated on their thrones. The 144,000 is symbolic of a great number of believers.

THE THIRD SECTION IS CHAPTERS 8-11.

For the third time, the church age is described but with different symbolism.

To quote Hendriksen:

These trumpets of judgment, chapters 8-11, indicate series of happenings, that is, calamities that will occur again and again throughout this dispensation. They do not symbolize single and separate events, but they refer to woes that may be seen any day of the year in any part of the globe. Hence, the trumpets are synchronous with the seals” (p. 140).

The judgments described are God’s upon those who harm His people, but they are by no means final judgments. Trumpets are *warnings*, not final judgments. God’s big hammer is yet to fall. What’s more, believers are not harmed by these judgments.

Hendriksen comments:

“Observe also that these trumpets of judgment affect the various parts of the universe: the land, the sea, etc. Nowhere is there safety for the wicked. Yet, a certain order is evident. The first four trumpets harm the wicked in their physical being; the last three bring spiritual anguish; hell, itself is let loose!” (p. 141).

The symbols of these judgments are like the ten plagues of Egypt during the time of Moses, only they’re much more terrible. Hail and fire is mixed with *blood*; the locusts don’t hurt grass or trees but *men*!

What are these things symbols of? What kind of calamities do they represent? Are we experiencing any of these today? We’ll deal with that when we’re into the Revelation chapter by chapter.

THE FOURTH SECTION IS CHAPTERS 12-14.

These chapters return to the beginning of the church age and symbolically describe it in its entirety. But there is a difference here. Chapters 1 through 11 picture the church and its struggles with the world, while chapters 12 through 20 focus on the war between Christ and the dragon, Satan.

The setting of Chapter 12 is heaven, where a gloriously arrayed woman is about to give birth to a child. Standing in front of her is a dragon, a huge red dragon. Why is he there? He’s there to kill and devour her child as soon as it’s born. But he doesn’t succeed.

Who *is* this woman? Is it Mary? No. The woman symbolizes the church. And her baby is none other than Jesus. After making war with Christ, the dragon is defeated and cast out of heaven to the earth, where **“he prowls about, seeking whom he may devour.”**

Satan uses two **“beasts”** as his instruments in his attack upon the church, one from the sea and the other from the land. He also employs a third agent called “Babylon, the harlot.”

It is here in this section we read about **“the mark of the beast”** and that his number is “666.” Who or what could it be? Hopefully, we will find out as we get into our study of the text of Revelation.

Chapter 14 shows the triumphant church.

THE FIFTH SECTION IS CHAPTERS 15-16.

When we get to chapter 15, the church age is described for a fifth time.

Hendriksen offers the following summary:

“In the history of the world a definite and ever-recurring order of events is clearly evident:

“Through the preaching of the word applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit, churches are established. Again, and again, this happens. They are light-bearers – lampstands – in the midst of a world that lies in darkness. They are blessed with the constant spiritual presence of Christ, chapters 1-3.

“Again, and again, God’s people are persecuted by the world. They are subjected to many trials and afflictions, chapters 4-7.

“Again, and again, the judgments of God are visited upon the persecuting world. These judgments again, and again, fail to move men to repentance, chapters 8-11.

“Again, and again, this conflict between the church and the world points to a deeper, more fundamental warfare between Christ and Satan, between the ‘seed of the woman’ and ‘the dragon,’ chapters 12-14.

*“The question now arises: whenever in history the trumpets of judgment, the initial plagues, fail to result in penitence and conversion, what then? Does God permit such impenitence, such hardness of heart, to go unpunished until the final judgment of the last day? Must we conceive of God’s wrath as being completely pent up until the second coming, until the vintage described in chapter 14? This question is answered in our present vision. The answer, in brief, is this: whenever in history the wicked fail to repent in answer to the initial and partial manifestation of God’s anger in judgments, the **final** infusion of wrath follows. **Final**, though not **complete** until the judgment day. These plagues are the last. They leave no more opportunity for repentance” (pp.189-190).*

THE SIXTH SECTION IS CHAPTERS 17-19.

Chapter 17 begins the church age for a sixth time.

Thus far, five enemies of Christ and His church have been introduced:

1. The dragon;
2. The sea-born beast;
3. The earth-born beast or false prophet;
4. The harlot Babylon; and
5. The men who bear the mark of the beast.

Here in chapters 17-19, is described the fall or defeat of Babylon, the sea-born beast, and the earth-born beast or false prophet.

Chapter 17 describes the nature and tells the history of the great harlot, Babylon. Who could she be?

Chapter 18 shows the inevitable, complete, and irrevocable character of Babylon's fall.

Chapter 19 introduces the rejoicing in heaven at the overthrow of Babylon and at the wedding of the Lamb. It presents Christ as the rider upon the white horse and the victor over all his enemies.

THE SEVENTH AND FINAL SECTION IS CHAPTERS 20-22.

Chapter 20 begins the seventh and final time the church age is symbolically described. Because of Christ's victory over Satan in the wilderness and in the resurrection, Satan is bound, or limited, from the beginning of the church age, represented symbolically by "***a thousand years.***"

During this time, Christ reigns, along with faithful believers who have died for the faith, over His spiritual kingdom, the church, from His heavenly throne.

Chapter 21 describes the new heaven and earth and continues the description in chapter 22. Heaven is described symbolically as a perfect cube – fourteen hundred miles in each of its three dimensions – perfect in every way!

IN CLOSING:

Chapter 22 begins and closes with Jesus saying that He is coming soon, and a warning those who would add to or take away from this book of Scripture.