

Why Revelation Still Matters

Revelation 1:1-2

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Recently, we received an update from Go Team Partners, Riley and Debbie Shelton, who minister in South Asia. Several months ago, we sent them some funds to construct a well. Here's what they shared: *"We praise God that the water well that Edgewood provided is completed! The well is providing for many families in that village where they depended upon water from rivers and streams which dry up, not to mention are unclean. Thank you and God bless you Edgewood family! May they all come to know of His 'Living Water'"*

Several weeks ago, I conducted an informal survey on Facebook in which I asked people to share what comes to mind when they think of the Book of Revelation.

- *The word that comes to my mind...is confusion. But people are so hungry to have clarity [about the] end times...I think there will be deep curiosity, excitement and anticipation.*
- *I'm so excited by the news of this certainly blessed exposition.*
- *For me it is excitement and encouragement but also conviction to make sure my family and friends are ready.*
- *It is the revelation of God. He wins the war. He gets all the honor, glory, and worship for all of eternity.*
- *We are not afraid, and we are hopeful in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ!*
- *LET'S GO!*

I have waited for 40 years of ministry before attempting to preach through the Book of Revelation. I'm eager to do so now, but also share the viewpoint of Charles Spurgeon:

...I scarcely consider myself qualified to explain any part of the Book of Revelation, and none of the expositions I have ever seen entice me to attempt the task, for they are mostly occupied with a refutation of all the interpretations which have gone before, and each one seems to be very successful indeed in proving that all the rest know nothing at all about the matter. The sum total of substantial instruction in nearly all the comments upon the Revelation amounts to this, that our heavenly Father has said in his Word some mysterious things which

few of his children can yet comprehend. This is just what we might have expected when the infinite God speaks to finite men, and it is no doubt intended to humble us and draw forth our reverent adoration.

Many shy away from Revelation, imagining a book full of confusion, doom, or unsolvable puzzles. In this series, we will see Christ in His radiant glory and embrace His call to faithful living. Far from being frightening, Revelation is a book of comfort, encouragement, and assurance for every believer. However, if you are not yet saved, you should be afraid of the future! Let's worship the Lamb who is worthy and the Lion who wins as we ask God to renew our faith, increase our awe, and cause our joy to be contagious.

To help you get the most out of this series, stop by the Café Resource Center and purchase a copy of the Revelation Scripture Journal for \$3 and use it to take notes during your Bible reading or the sermons (we also have a commentary by John MacArthur and a Bible study by David Jeremiah available for purchase).

In addition, you might want to pick up the fill-in-the-blank sermon notes sheets and discussion questions in the lobbies each week. These are also available on the app and the website. If you'd like the sermon manuscript emailed to you on Fridays, simply indicate this on a Connection Card. All our sermons are available as full-text manuscripts and in video and audio formats on the app and website.

Preliminary Points

Here are some preliminary points that will help frame our study of Revelation.

1. **Revelation was written to be read.** To get the most out of this majestic, mysterious, and magnificent book, I encourage you to read Revelation at least three times between now and Easter. To help with that, Pastor Kyle has put together a January Bible reading plan that includes chapters from Daniel, the Gospels, and the Book of Revelation.
2. **The Book of Revelation was not written to scholars but to ordinary people going through persecution.** Our study will show us that suffering is not random or wasted (Romans 8:28), that evil is temporary and destined for judgment (Revelation 20:10), and that God's people overcome not by their own strength but *“by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony”* (Revelation 12:11). One commentator referred to Revelation as the persecuted church's survival manual and worship soundtrack. Speaking

of worship, Heaven breaks out into worship 21 times in this book! I pray that happens during every sermon and that this study will equip us to endure trials, resist temptation, and wake up those who are spiritually sleepy.

3. **The Book of Revelation is all about Jesus and His kingdom.** It's a book from Jesus, about Jesus, and for Jesus' people in every age and place. Revelation is the most Christ-exalting book in the Bible. One author writes: *"Revelation is actually less about when Jesus will return and more about what we are to do, who we are to be, what we can expect to endure as we wait for Jesus to return to establish His kingdom."* Someone else commented, *"If we finish Revelation and are more fascinated with the Antichrist than with Christ, we have missed the point."*
4. **It's important to keep your Old Testament handy when handling the Book of Revelation.** There are more allusions in Revelation to the Old Testament than all the other New Testament books combined. John wrote about the same heavenly reality that Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Zephaniah did. It could be said that John viewed everything through the lens of the Old Testament. Many commentators have pointed out that Revelation contains at least 400 echoes, allusions, motifs, and parallels to the Old Testament. I find it fascinating how many truths that have their commencement in Genesis find their consummation in Revelation.
5. **I understand Israel and the church to be distinct.** The church is not a replacement for Israel, and the promises made to Israel are not to be spiritualized away but will be fulfilled as God has declared (see Ezekiel 37; Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:25–29). God's covenant faithfulness guarantees a future restoration for ethnic Israel, even as He presently works through the church to proclaim the gospel to the nations.
6. **It's important to avoid excessive sensationalism.** The book is sensational on its own! Having said that, there are things happening right now that *are* part of God's prophetic plan and demand our discernment. Just this week a story came out of Alabama with this headline: *"Arrests were made by police Tuesday at a campsite in Alabama where a religious group who believes their leader is the reincarnation of Jesus Christ was staying."* The leader made this creepy claim by calling himself, *"the only begotten son of the living God."* Here's what Jesus says about that in Matthew 24:23-24: ***"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not***

believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.”

Jesus calls us to observe and interpret these signs in Matthew 16:3: ***“You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.”*** We must keep our eyes open while avoiding unhealthy obsessions about the identity of the Antichrist or seeing every headline as a fulfillment of prophecy. I appreciate G.K. Chesterton’s insight: *“And though John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators.”* Our focus will remain on Jesus as the victor because He wins in the end!

7. **May God use our time in Revelation to awaken evangelistic urgency and mobilize us to live on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus in our families, among our neighbors, and among the nations.** Words translated as *“testify”* and *“witness”* and *“martyr”* appear 17 times in Revelation. Judgment is real. Hell is hot and lasts forever. And since there will be representatives from every people, tribe and tongue worshipping the Lamb of God, let’s do our part to proclaim and publish the gospel to all people.
8. **Let’s stop fixing our hope on earthly politics and personal comfort and center our lives on the Lord who reigns forever and forever.** The main message of Revelation is that God triumphs! To that point, the word “throne” appears 46 times, the word “authority” 33 times, and “king” 25 times in the book. As one author says, *“Do not allow the ‘thrones’ of this world to distract you from the One who alone is worthy of your worship.”* Pastor Samuel Rodriguez captures it like this: *“It’s not the donkey or the elephant, it’s the Lamb! Only the Lamb that was slain and resurrected can save America. Behold the Lamb!”*
9. **Much of Revelation contains symbols that made sense in the First Century.** Early believers easily understood these symbols, much like we know what a donkey and elephant portray in politics. I appreciated the insight of EBC member Chip Hesler: *“The key to understanding the symbols of Revelation is recognizing that almost all these symbols have been given to us elsewhere in the Bible. If you try to read Revelation without any understanding of the rest of the Bible, you are doomed to confusion.”*

10. **There is symbolic significance to numbers in Revelation.** We see this especially in the numbers four, seven, and twelve which refer to fullness or perfection. For instance, the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls underscore the completeness of God’s worldwide judgment.
11. **There are parts of this book that are difficult to interpret and challenging to understand.** Let’s allow the mystery to create a sense of wonder which leads us to worship. Understanding the Bible requires diligence and discipline, so let’s work hard at it. As one commentator said, *“God did not end the Bible with a question mark, but with an exclamation point!”*
12. **Revelation is all about spiritual warfare and we should expect it in our lives.** Terms translated as *“war”* or *“battle”* appear 15 times in the book. The ESV Study Bible captures this well: *“Revelation unveils the unseen spiritual war in which the church is engaged...in this conflict, Jesus the Lamb has already won the decisive victory through his sacrificial death, but the church continues to be assaulted by the dragon, in its death-throes, through persecution, false teaching, and the allure of material affluence, cultural approval...and sensual pleasure.”*
- Bryan LaBerge shared what happened when he tried to watch the Edgewood video podcast about Revelation. He received a pop-up notification asking if he needed to “report content that breaks YouTube’s rules.” Bryan sent me this message, *“Talk about Revelation, and AI wants to report you. Talk about End Times stuff.”* Remember this: Evil has an expiration date!
13. **I don’t have all the answers when it comes to the Book of Revelation.** As we begin this study, I want to express my gratefulness to Pastor Mel Brown, who served as senior pastor at EBC for 44 years. He equipped this church well and was especially gifted in teaching and preaching about prophecy. It’s inevitable that you will disagree with something I will say, or I’ll bring more confusion than clarity on something that is very clear to you. Because there’s so much disagreement on how to interpret and apply Revelation, let’s be gracious with one another and not divide over this beautiful book. Please remain humble and resist judging those who view Revelation differently than you do.
14. **I’m praying that God will use our study in Revelation for His glory and our good.** Like John’s original readers, we live in a worldly culture which

makes sin seem normal and righteousness appear strange. May our time in Revelation humble us and cause us to repent, so we can be revived, refreshed, and realigned both individually, and as a church. Revelation 2:5 says: ***“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first.”***

In her book called, *Blessed*, Nancy Guthrie shares how Revelation not only equipped churches in the first century but continues to encourage believers today. In it we learn about...

- *the opposition we can expect to escalate.*
- *the endurance we need to cultivate.*
- *the judgment we will celebrate.*
- *the victory in which we will participate.*
- *the enemy Jesus will annihilate.*
- *the sorrow He will alleviate.*
- *the creation He will regenerate.*
- *the marriage He will consummate.*
- *and the home we can anticipate sharing with Him forever.*

While we could spend more time on preliminary points, let's jump into Revelation 1:1-2: ***“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.”*** May the Lord bless the reading, the hearing, and the keeping of His word.

Here's a helpful summary: *God unveils Revelation to surrendered servants who center their lives on Jesus Christ.*

We'll see the person, purpose, and process in these verses. Next week, we'll discover the promise, the peace, and the power.

1. The Person. The book begins with a strong statement: ***“The revelation of Jesus Christ.”*** Observe that this is in the singular, ***“The revelation,”*** not plural “revelations.” In a similar way, some of us say ‘Aldi’s’ instead of Aldi, and ‘anyways’ instead of anyway. It’s ***“revelation”*** because God is unveiling one unified message centered on the one and only Jesus Christ.

In Greek, the word “**revelation**” is *apokalupsis* and means, “*to disclose, to reveal, to unveil, or uncover.*” This tells us God is pulling back the curtain to show us something previously hidden and unknown. At His first coming, His glory was veiled. At His Second Coming, Revelation unveils Jesus as the sovereign “**KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**” (19:16). When most of us hear the word “apocalypse,” we think something catastrophic is about to happen (some of us think of the movie “Apocalypse Now”). Others use the term more casually to describe a heavy snowstorm, labeling it a “snowpocalypse” or media outlets declaring an “apocalyptic” economic collapse.

While apocalyptic literature does describe the end times, as it’s used in Revelation 1:1, it means God is pulling back the curtain so we can understand and apply something that has been previously hidden. The apocalypse isn’t about hiding the future; it’s about unveiling Jesus Christ so we can keep following Jesus when “Babylon” pressures us to capitulate and compromise.

Daniel 12:4 says, “***But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end.***” John is told something different in Revelation 22:10, “***Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.***” What Daniel expected to occur in the last days, John believed to be imminent, or beginning to occur now. Thus, Revelation is to be explored, examined, and embraced with a sense of expectant urgency.

The Book of Revelation is preeminently a book about the preeminence of Jesus Christ as it presents Him with numerous powerful names and titles, highlighting His divine nature, authority, and redemptive work, including The Alpha and Omega, The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Lamb, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, The Word of God, The Faithful Witness, The Son of Man, and the Bright Morning Star, showcasing His eternal existence, sacrificial role, ultimate sovereignty, and glorious return.

At the *Cross Conference* in 2019, David Platt preached a 50-point sermon which included 48 characteristics of Christ from the Book of Revelation. He ended the sermon with two exhortations.

- Pursue Jesus as the all-consuming passion of your life.
- Spend your life for the fame of Jesus’ name where He is not yet known.

The Book of Revelation is “**of**” Jesus Christ, “**from**” Jesus Christ (22:16), and is all *about* the majesty and glory of Jesus Christ. Eight references to Christ are

found in the first chapter alone, while there are 12 references in the final chapter! Hebrews 1:2 says, ***“But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.”*** Jesus is the one doing the revealing, and He is the one who is being revealed.

It’s His book, His story, and His victory. Revelation mentions Jesus Christ hundreds of times by name and title, while the Antichrist and the mark of the beast together appear in only a handful of verses. The last book of the Bible is not primarily about beasts and bowls; it’s all about the relentless triumph of the Redeemer. I agree with one commentator who believes the theme of the book could be described as *“the majesty and glory of the warrior Lamb, King Jesus, who is coming again to rule and reign forever!”* If we focus on anything or anyone other than Jesus in the book, we’ll miss what Revelation is all about.

God unveils Revelation to surrendered servants who center their lives on Jesus Christ.

2. The Purpose. In the second part of verse 1, we read, ***“...which God gave Him to show to His servants the things that must soon take place...”*** God’s desire was to show His servants what is right around the corner. The word ***“show”*** means, *“to point out or cause to see.”* We see this in 4:1: ***“Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”*** God gave this revelation that it might be shown, not hidden.

The word ***“servants”*** (*doulos*) means “bondslaves,” and emphasizes complete devotion and willing obedience to a master rather than mere hired service (see Exodus 21:5-6). Specifically, a bondsman was someone who was a slave, then set free, but willingly went back to his master and said, *“I want to stay with you.”* These “servants” are not casual followers but those who have chosen to surrender their lives to Christ’s authority. Is Jesus your Savior and are you His bondsman? If not, according to 1 Corinthians 2:14, you’ll not be able to understand Revelation: ***“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”***

The word ***“must”*** conveys the sense of *“certainty, necessity, and inevitability,”* emphasizing that future events will take place according to God’s plan and purposes. One commentator writes: “History is not a haphazard sequence of unrelated events but a divinely decreed ordering of that which *must* take place.”

The word “*soon*” refers to “*swiftly, quickly, suddenly, and shortly.*” 1:3 states, “*...for the time is near.*” 22:6 says, “*...has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.*” 22:10 adds, “*...for the time is near.*” In 22:12, Jesus declares, “*Behold, I am coming soon...*” The word “*soon*” also conveys the idea that when end times events begin, they will take place in rapid succession. James 5:9 tells us, “*The Judge is standing at the door.*” 1 John 2:18 affirms, “*Children, it is the last hour.*”

This is a good time to mention the four main methods of interpretation for approaching the Book of Revelation. As one pastor writes, “*How you approach this book will determine how you interpret it; and how you interpret it will determine what you will receive from it.*” We won’t take a lot of time on this, but it is important. I appreciate John MacArthur’s concise summary of the various views.

- **Preterist.** This view believes that the events of Revelation were fulfilled in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.
- **Historicist.** This approach sees Revelation as a sweeping overview of church history, describing various times of persecution and tribulation, traced through various popes, the reformation, and the French Revolution.
- **Idealist.** This view interprets Revelation symbolically, as a nonliteral description of the battle between God and the satanic forces of evil.
- **Futurist.** This approach understands Revelation 4-22 as a prophetic account of actual future events, specifically focused on the end of this age. This view is the natural result of a straightforward reading of the book. I subscribe to this approach.

We’ll get to 1:19 in a few weeks but I do want to mention that this verse contains an inspired outline of the Book of Revelation: “*Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place after this.*”

- Past: “*the things that you have seen*” (chapter 1). John saw the glorified Christ and “*fell at His feet as though dead*” (1:17).
- Present: “*those that are*” (chapters 2-3). Jesus had a customized message for seven churches located in what is now western Turkey: “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).
- Future: “*those that are to take place*” (chapters 4-22). We see this in 4:1: “*Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.*”

I know some of you are curious about my own beliefs about the end times. While faithful believers hold differing views (and that's OK), I personally believe the Bible teaches a pre-tribulational rapture of the church and a pre-millennial return of Jesus Christ. If these terms don't mean anything to you, you're not alone. We'll explain more as the series progresses.

You may be interested to know Edgewood's statement about the end times from our doctrinal statement: *"We believe that the end of this age is approaching and will culminate in 'That blessed hope' - the personal, imminent return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the just and of the unjust, the everlasting blessedness of the saved, and the everlasting punishment of the lost."*

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3. The Process. We also see the process of how the Book of Revelation came to us in verses 1-2. God gave it to Jesus who sent it to His angel who showed it to John who sent it to the servants: *"...He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw."* The phrase, *"made it known"* is also translated as *"signified,"* which literally means, *"to give sign."* This is a clue that the Lord will use signs, symbols, and word pictures in the book. Thankfully, many of these symbols are explained in the text, and others are rooted in the Old Testament.

Angels are mentioned 71 times in Revelation. The word *"send"* means, *"to send forth on mission."* 22:6 reiterates that the Lord *"has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."* This is stated again in 22:16: *"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches..."*

It's clear from the book that the beloved apostle John is the human author (1:1-2, 4, 9, 22:8). He also wrote the Gospel of John, and the letters called 1, 2, and 3 John. Most believe he wrote Revelation around A.D. 95 when Domitian was the emperor.

In 1:2, we see that John *"bore witness to the word of God,"* which means he testified of the truth. The language John uses suggests he understood this revelation to carry divine authority. 1:9 tells us he'd been exiled as a prisoner to the island of Patmos *"because of the word of God."*

Interestingly, the word translated ‘*witness*’ comes from the same root as ‘martyr’ and is used repeatedly throughout Revelation. The other disciples, except Judas, had all died martyr’s deaths by this time. He also gave “*testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.*” John was an eyewitness of Jesus on earth and now he’s giving testimony of all he saw and heard when he was brought up to Heaven.

Brothers and sisters, since this is God’s final word to us, we must take it seriously. We must read it, hear it, and heed it. We can’t skip it, take something out, or make it say something it doesn’t. As 22:18-19 says, we can’t remove the warnings or soften the judgments: “*I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*”

Some of the most repeated commands in the Book of Revelation are:

- **Behold** – look carefully.
- **Hear** – listen expectantly.
- **Repent** – respond obediently.
- **Worship** – express yourself willingly.

God unveils Revelation to surrendered servants who center their lives on Jesus Christ.

Communion

Revelation begins by unveiling Jesus Christ in all His glory. He is King of kings, Lord of lords, the triumphant Victor who reigns forever. But before we see Him conquering the nations, we remember Him laying down His life for sinners like us.

Revelation is filled with images of judgment, victory, and ultimate triumph, but at the center of the book stands the Lamb who was slain. The Lion conquers because the Lamb was crucified. The throne of Heaven is forever marked by the wounds of Calvary. And the future hope we celebrate in Revelation is only possible because of the finished work of Christ in the past.

When we take the bread and the cup, we proclaim that forgiveness was purchased by His sacrificial body and His shed blood. As we come to the Table, we come

not as spectators, not as scholars, not as those who have it all figured out, but as humble bondservants who need grace, mercy, and cleansing once again.

The Apostle Paul tells us that every time we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death "*until He comes.*" That's Revelation language. Communion looks backward to the cross, inward to our hearts, and forward to His return. It anchors us between the sacrifice that saves us and the Savior who is coming soon.

The bread and the cup also point ahead to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Communion is not only a memorial of what Jesus has done; it is a preview of what is coming. Every time we eat the bread and drink the cup, we are reminded that history is moving toward a feast, not a funeral, to a celebration, not a cemetery. In the future, the Lamb who was slain will be the Host of the meal. The suffering will be over. The battles will be finished. The tears will be wiped away. And we will sit at His table forever.

As we receive the bread and the cup, we do so with gratitude for the cross behind us and anticipation for the crown ahead. We remember the price He paid, and we rejoice in the promise He made in Revelation 19:19: "*Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*"

I invite you to examine your heart, to repent where needed, to rejoice in Christ's finished work, and to renew your hope. The same Jesus who died for you is the same Jesus who reigns, and the same Jesus who is coming again.

1 Corinthians 11:28 says we're not to take communion flippantly: "*Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*" The bread represents His body, and the cup is a reminder of His blood which paid the ransom price for our forgiveness and freedom.

Confession/Prayer Time

We practice open communion, which means you don't need to be an Edgewood member to participate, but you do need to be a born-again believer.

Our deacons and pastors will distribute the trays by passing them down each row. When the tray comes to you, simply lift a cup straight out. You'll notice there are two cups stacked together. Give a little twist and hold one in each hand until everyone is served so we can partake together.

BTW, the bread we use is gluten free, and we use grape juice instead of wine.

Distribution of Elements

Forever family, before we take the bread, let's focus on these words from 1 Corinthians 11:23-24: ***“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”***

Before we drink from the cup, consider these words from 1 Corinthians 11:25-26: ***“In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”***

Closing Charge

I close with a charge from Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley from their post, “7 Lessons from the Book of Revelation.”

Therefore, Christian, do not allow Satan and his bestial persecutors and whorish tempters to draw you away from following Christ. Do not love your life as much as you love Jesus and His kingdom. Cling to the finished work of the cross and do not compromise your testimony to Christ. Press on, dear believer, in the pathway of faithful obedience to the Word of God, and you will find that all God’s promises are yes and amen in Jesus Christ. And when you feel that you are weak and wavering, look to the great overcomer, the Lamb of God, for the grace to endure. Amen.