

The Revelation – Part 1

Our 3-year sprint through the Bible is at the finish line, the last of its 66 books. Now we peek into God's final unveiling of what He wants us to know about future events.

Have you ever picked up a book for the first time and turned to the last chapter to see how it ends? Revelation is God's Post-Game Show, giving dramatic details of the mega-events on God's To Do List that will consummate history.

Forget Star Wars, Gene Roddenberry, My Favorite Martian, Mork and Sigourney Weaver. Revelation's epic spectacle comes to life on the universe's main stage, making Hollywood's wildest special effects look like a walk in Jurassic Park. It outdoes IMAX, UFO's, every starship in the galaxy, and the heartburn of a billion tacos.

Take all the road rage, every war's bloodshed, every sci-fi plot ... and Revelation's carnage and majesty overshadow them all because it, not Star Trek, is the payoff of ... The Greatest Human Adventure.

The Bible, "the world according to God," reveals what He's done, is doing and will do throughout Time. It begins in Genesis with creation. God places Adam and Eve, our first parents, in a sinless, innocent paradise -- free of pollution, crime, hate or disease -- and given the power of choice!

Satan, author of sin, appears as a snake, tempting Eve to taste the one fruit God put off-limits. When she does, SIN enters the world, creating a dilemma that continues to infect us all.

Because each of us is born as a sinner, alienated from God, we have *nada* hope of getting back to "the Garden," into God's favor. While He loves us to the max, God is also just, righteous and holy -- and *will not* look on sin. Ergo, we can't know Him personally.

Because He loves us, He opts to buy back each of us from what we deserve, i.e., eternal punishment and separation from God in an ugly 'hood the Bible calls hell. Paying our sin debt is the Bible's major plot. To do that, God dispatches His Son Jesus to earth *twice*.

The first time He came was 2,000 years ago, specifically forecast by many prophets we met in the Old Testament's 39 books.

We examined Christ's "first advent" in Matthew, Mark and Luke, the first three batters in the New Testament's 27-book lineup.

Christ is born in Bethlehem to Mary, a teen virgin. She and hubby Joseph then figure out how to have other kids like *we* do, raising Jesus (100% God, 100% man) in a humble carpenter's home.

At about age 30 Jesus is publicly outed as God's Son by his cousin John the Baptist -- and by God Himself whose voice from heaven is heard while John baptizes Jesus. For three years Jesus roams that tiny region, teaching and doing miracles to validate His claim to be the Jews' long-sought Messiah whom the prophets had promised.

Palestine was occupied by Caesar's troops, so the Jews hoped their Messiah would smash the invaders and set up a mega-kingdom. ("Jews rule!") While this would *eventually* come true, the Jews were ticked that Jesus had another idea. He told them His kingdom was *not* of this world, that it was *within*!

This becomes a lose-lose for Jesus, scoring him no points among the religious bigs who want a Messiah/Jewish juggernaut. Conversely, the locals fear that this Jesus freak will make Rome nervous, forcing Caesar to rush in his elite guard to quash a coups.

This leads to Jesus' arrest, trials and crucifixion, fulfilling to a "T" many O.T. prophecies. It seemed for Jesus' inner circle the end of their dream for personal power.

But just as He'd predicted, Jesus bursts forth from His tomb three days later and is seen by 500 witnesses, confirming His audacious "I will return!" His resurrection sets Jesus apart from every man-made religion hatched by eons of fakes and fakirs.

For His *next* act..(drum roll)..He's promised to return to take to heaven with Him those who've accepted, by faith, God's free, undeserved gift of forgiveness, which Christ paid for on the cross. We learned about this return trip, this "rapture," from Paul in his first letter to Christ's followers in Thessalonica, Greece.

This brings us to symbol-rich Revelation, the grand climax of the Bible's redemption story -- God's blueprint for the "last days," history's last hurrah.

If you think this "end-times" stuff is some cocaine-induced haze, ask Turkey, Athens and Taiwan if their world didn't change in a flash recently. What seems permanent suddenly vaporizes!

Now hang on for The Tribulation, Armageddon, The Second Coming of Christ, Judgment Day, and the *new* heavens and the *new* earth. They're spelled out in Revelation, and

"You've Got Mail!"

Who can answer life's big questions? George Lucas? Leonard Nimoy? Carl Sagan? Roger Clinton? Having gotten *their* answers, how do you evaluate them?

Worldviews must address three basic elements: creation, the fall and redemption. **Creation** is about origins: How was the universe born? Where did we come from? The **Fall** asks, "Where did we go wrong? Why are there evil, pain, poverty and death? **Redemption** defines the remedy for our hurting world.

Revelation, the book of *endings*, completes what God began in Genesis, the book of *beginnings*. In Revelation we see the eternal consequences of both The Fall and Redemption. For those who have, in repentance and faith, accepted Christ's free, no-strings gift of forgiveness, this book is a turbo-Triple-A map. For those who choose not to follow Christ, this is a blood-curdling account of what they *must* and *will* face en route to everlasting torment.

But the *good* news is that NOT ONE of us *HAS* to live through the agony of Revelation, God's punishment of Israel for rejecting their Messiah 2,000 years ago. Each of us has a choice. God doesn't want one soul to be destroyed. Thus, He sent His Son Jesus from heaven to earth to die on a cross to permanently erase your sins and mine.

Parents know how opposite kids can be. Our three-year-old grandson willingly heeds a gentle word. But his eight-year-old sis is like Wendy's; she does it *her* way!

Some respond easily to God's loving invite to follow Christ. Others, it seems, need to hear about hell's raging lake of fire, described in the Bible. Millions have stubbornly refused God's call, died physically, and are, as we speak, serving out their awful, indescribable, *eternal sentence*. Those who trusted in Christ and have already died are now enjoying their *eternal reward*, living in God's presence in heaven where, the Bible says, there's no death, sorrow, crying, pain or sin. Seems like a no-brainer, doesn't it?

Revelation: The Rest of the Story

For months I dreaded diving into this most puzzling book in the divine library. It has conflicting reputations ranging from "It's fantasy/bunk" to "It's THE handbook for interpreting events in today's newspaper" to "It's God's key to unlocking the future of the world."

After living with Revelation this month, my dread has turned to excited awe. But it's still too heavy to unfold as clearly as I'd like.

M.R. DeHaan demystifies this amazing book by assuring us that it's not hopelessly encased beyond interpretation, that you don't need to totally understand it in order to gain a deeper knowledge of it, that it's best to interpret it literally except where the context frames it as a symbol or sign, that we need to approach it with an open mind, and that God's Holy Spirit has infallibly inspired the writing of this book. He is the One who can illuminate it for us, not the greatest minds of men.

Time is a drop in *Eternity's* ocean. From Creation's Day One, Time is winding down. When Revelation's timetable has taken place, time will end. And Eternity will, for us, begin. The *only* question worth asking is, **"Where will I be at that moment?"**

As the Jews were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses told them, ".... I've set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life..." It's *your* choice; it's *my* choice. If you have never purposely chosen *life with Christ*, please do it today.

In AD 95 or so John, Jesus' half-brother who wrote the Gospel of John and 1st, 2nd and 3rd John was in exile on Patmos, a volcanic rock in the Aegean populated by criminals and political prisoners. For preaching about Jesus he was banished there by Domitian, the first Roman emperor to demand to be worshiped. John was likely the last survivor of Christ's twelve disciples, the only one *not* martyred.

It's Sunday, John's worshipping God, and an angel drops by -- as angels appeared to many of the Bible's prophets. This celestial Fed Ex guy delivers (without going through Memphis) the contents, direct from Jesus, which John jots down error-free (in the original manuscript). These coming attractions, once they begin, will take place in rapid succession. Oh yes, no further events need occur -- except the Rapture -- in order to set off the Revelation agenda. Christ could return for His gang (the Rapture) at any moment.

This final Bible book to be written was to (a) assure its readers, who were facing brutal religious persecution, that Christ will ultimately defeat sin, to (b) challenge believers not to live apathetic, compromising lives and (c) to give us a list of end-time events.

John sees Earth as the center of a massive spiritual conflict between Satan (a fallen angel) and God. After Christ's return in the clouds to take believers from the Earth, a charismatic leader appears who wins the hearts of the world for the first three-and-a-half years of what the Bible calls The Day of the Lord, or The Tribulation. Powerful and adored, this dude demands to be worshiped by everyone. He comes out of the closet and is recognized as the dreaded anti-Christ who mercilessly declares war on any who side with God.

During this Tribulation 144,000 Jews (12,000 from each of the 12 Jewish tribes) realize that Jesus *is* their Messiah. Having read the Bible and discovered the Gospel, they choose to follow Jesus and take His message to the ends of the earth, facing unprecedented persecution, but finding many who turn to Christ. Without God's miraculous protection, these missionaries would be wiped out.

Things get so mean that all the armies from every nation converge at Armageddon in the valley of the ancient city of Megiddo in northern Israel. Here history's final, supernatural battle for world supremacy will be waged, about ten miles from Nazareth, Jesus' boyhood home.

With the bloodiest of all wars raging, Christ arrives from heaven (the *Second Coming*) with His armies. They crush Satan and his demonic forces and imprison them for a 1,000-year period (the Millennium) during which Christ sets up His long-awaited Kingdom on earth.

Next comes the Great White Throne Judgment when the worst possible thing you can imagine takes place. Rev. 20:15 puts it this way: **"And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire."** The writer of Hebrews (9:27) says, "It's destined that each person dies only once, and after that comes judgment." Sadly, most folks think hell is an expletive you say when your wide receiver decides to hold out for more bucks. But Jesus said there'll come a day when He'll send angels "to remove from my Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil, and they'll throw them into the furnace and burn them. There'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 13:41-42) When Christ returns to earth, it's too late to choose Him.

Revelation assures us that He *is* coming back to earth. Chances are it won't be long from now, although....who knows? Revelation concludes with **Jesus Himself saying, "Yes, I'm coming soon."** With His track record, it's probably wise not to bet against Him.

This same loving God doesn't want ANYbody to experience hell's living, eternal death. That's why He's giving us one more day today in which we can say to Him:

"Dear God, I believe You're serious about hating sin and loving sinners. I admit I'm a sinner for whom Your Son Jesus died. Thank You for pardoning me of ALL my sin and giving me the sure hope of ETERNAL life with You. Please enter my life now, knowing that once You do, You'll NEVER leave. Thank You. I offer this prayer to You in the name of Jesus who died for me. Amen."

At the Great White Throne Judgment Christ's final act is to take Satan, Satan's angels and all who refused Jesus' invitation -- and throw them into hell's lake of fire to burn *forever* ... but not *up*.

Next, Jesus, who created the heavens and the earth, creates a brand *new heaven* and a totally, permanently *sinless earth* where those who've followed Christ in faith will live and reign with Him forever.

Revelation is divided into three parts, and all who study it are guaranteed a blessing, the Bible's only book to make that offer.

Its outline is in chapter one: "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." Part One, is what John *saw* -- past tense. **Let's read ch. 1.**

Part Two is "What Is Now." This is a letter Jesus instructed John to write to seven of the many believer groups scattered around the Mediterranean in the late 1st century. These seven were in present-day western Turkey. Please note the characteristics in them that Christ praised and those He didn't. **Let's read chs. 2 and 3.**

Part Three, "What is to come," begins in ch. 4 as the scene shifts from earth to heaven. Heaven may not be light years from where we're sitting. Since there are many dimensions, only a few of which we experience now (height, width, depth, time, etc.), heaven might be right here surrounding us, in another dimension, one that's more *real* than what we're experiencing now with our senses.

In his prophetic vision John sees into heaven. There, on His throne is Almighty God the Father who controls all. Standing before Him is a Lamb with its throat cut, symbolizing Jesus, God the Son. The Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes, portraying the seven-fold work of God the Holy Spirit. The Lamb is holding a scroll which He alone can open. Revelation reveals its contents and its seven seals, each disclosing a new force at work on the earth. Next are seven trumpets and seven bowls of God's wrath, similar to the plagues God unleashed on ancient Egypt to persuade wicked Pharaoh to release from bondage His people, the Jews. **To get the sweep of this grand drama, let's read chs. 4-6.**

Next time we'll wrap up Revelation and its closing notes of triumph and hope. Remember, those who know Christ prior to the rapture will NOT live through the rubble of Revelation. That's why Paul calls the rapture our "blessed hope."

His Deal
www.HisDeal.org
george@HisDeal.org
Copyright © 2022. George Toles. All Rights Reserved.

