

The Book of Revelation:
Summary in Retrospect

As I have been spending considerable time upon reflecting the content of John's book, it seems helpful to gather the salient take-aways as we conclude our study.
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1. My most poignant impression about the book, as a whole, is that conservative scholars in our tradition have treated it as either a timeline of the centuries or a lens into linear events that immediately conclude history (the assumption that we are living in more than the "Last Days, but in the Last of the Last Days). That is, they have seen the book with a greater futuristic perspective than a contemporary first-century perspective that is timeless, repeated across the generations of the conflict ("enmity") between the "seed of the serpent and the seed of the women (Gen. 3:15)." The timeless relevance of the book is that it offers insight and instruction to the church in every century; its conflicts and travails are endless until time shall be no more in the final triumph of Christ.
2. Unlike either narrative literature (the Gospels, Acts) or epistolary literature (Galatians, Ephesians), *Revelation* is visionary, apocalyptic. This suggests that *Revelation's* meaning is not to be found in searching out a stark literalism in its symbols, but in the overall impression. It is somewhat akin to how we read poetry; it teaches based on the solicitation of imagination; it is a book for dreamers, not mathematicians and engineers!
3. The design of the book is to provide comfort, instruction, and warnings to the people of God, the seven churches (2-3), that are struggling with varying degrees of success in a world that is hostile to Christian virtues and commitments. The "seven churches" are typical of the churches through the centuries so that the comfort, positive instructions, and negative warnings are always relevant. It seems to me that we neglect chapters 2 & 3 when we read 4-22. Instead, we should read 2-3 and 4-22 together, the former providing the context for the latter. Every church in every century should find comfort, hope, perspective, encouragement, and instruction from 4-22.
4. If 2-3 provides the context for 4-22, 4-22 is the solution. The solution to stressful times and unwarranted concessions is to be found in something of greater value and perceived importance that our distresses. It is called hope. *Revelation* is a book meant to engender hope in dark times by revealing the triumph of grace, mercy, and comfort. "He is risen! He is risen indeed!!"
5. What can we learn from the book to strengthen us in a near-future, that is and always has been uncertain, foreboding, and threatening? The devil is the "great red dragon (12:3)" who has two accomplices to carry out his schemes, the destruction of all that is good, the political system ("the beast [13:1]") and false religions ("the false prophet [13:11]"), collectively the "godless trinity."
 - a. That the darkness of evil will not prevail; God will judge all that is contrary to His divine character.

- b. That however threatening our adversaries may appear, there is nothing to be gained by concession to momentarily alleviate our distresses. Such is foolish since evil will not always prevail and our triumph will be forever!
- c. That the profound hope we have is because God the Father has given Jesus Christ (4-5) the authority to judge their adversaries and false religion and to gather His children to Himself in the great "Marriage Supper of the Lamb," our foyer to His loving presence forever. Jesus, the suffering servant, has become the triumphant Lamb fulfilling God's design to make a dwelling place with Him forever. Thus, we should not fear what mankind can do to us; Jesus instructed us to fear only He who is sovereign over our souls, not our mere bodies!
- d. This dwelling place is just our temporal home; it is blighted and lacks consistency with the character of God. We should not become engrossed or enameled with the glitter of this world and live in the light of the world to come.
- e. Evil will not always prevail. Since God is both righteous and just, He will punish all that is contrary to His character. To make the point the angels of God revealed to John three instances of the crushing of the "evil trinity" and the demons that inspire geopolitical forces and false religions (the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls).
- f. The destiny for those who possess the tag of ownership by God have an indescribable destiny, the "New Garden."
- g. What God wants of us is that we follow the example of His son, realizing that pain and disappointment in this broken world is actually the path to glory. Jesus was given the right to crush God's enemies because He accomplished the will of God in submitting unto death so that the "New Garden" would triumphantly be inhabited by all the nations of the earth. The path to glory was what the "seven churches" sought to avoid, suffering.