

Revelation

*Part Three
A Kingdom of Priests
(Revelation 1:5b-6)*

With Study Questions

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To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, ⁶ and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Revelation 1:5b-6).

Introduction

According to one of the more popular versions of end-times, after the church is raptured the 144,000 from the seventh chapter of Revelation will become super evangelists. “They are going to be 144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams turned loose on this earth.”¹ The presentation of such a scintillating concept leaves most of us feeling a bit side-lined. We look at these evangelists the way many look at the government. With the government, and its massive budget, taking care of the sick, poor and disenfranchised, what need does this system have of me?

Yet we should not read Revelation as mere spectators or predictors of when the world will end. As we have said, the theme of Revelation is the victory of Christ over all evil. What we must recognize is one of the means by which that victory takes place is through the faithful. As we move through this book, we will encounter geological phenomena, celestial battles, strange horrifying beasts and more. How can you and I hope to contribute? What possible chance do we, as mere carbon-based lifeforms, have when it comes to the monsters of Revelation?

It is precisely here that the book becomes overwhelmingly ministerial. For if we are equipped for the type of battle we read of on these pages, the boilerplate, run-of-the-mill, pedestrian battles of our normal routines will pale in comparison. If you’re prepared for a marathon, a walk around the block should be manageable.

¹ Lindsay, *Late Great Planet Earth*, p.99

Equipped for Battle

How are we equipped? How can we enter the ranks of those receiving this letter, and so many throughout history, who heeded to charge to **“be faithful unto death” (Revelation 2:10b)?**

First, as we have discussed, we must live our lives with a clear view of who sits upon the throne of history and eternity—all authority in heaven and on the earth (Matthew 28:28). In the sixty-three times the word *throne* is mentioned in the New Testament, forty-seven of those are in Revelation. It appears there is a point being made!

For all the difficult, obscure and cryptic signs and language in the book, Revelation is demonstrably revealing something. In Revelation there is a perspicuous revelation. It is revealing the spiritual reality behind human experience. One thinks of that wonderful story of the servant of Elisha who arose early (probably before coffee) to find the vicious king of Syria had surrounded the city. **“Alas, my master! What shall we do” (2 Kings 6:15b)?** He asked.

So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them.”¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, and said, “Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:16, 17).

The prayer was not to change things, but to open eyes. Revelation should, as with this servant, open our eyes.

Of course, when we read the Revelation, it's not as if it just a matter of knowing something. Elisha, for example, still had work to do when it came to engaging the Syrians. Yet we should ever pause and fix our eyes upon Him who sits on the throne. As we seek to run with endurance, we are to ever be...

...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2 NASB).

But something must happen to us in order for us, with Isaiah, to utter the words, **“Here I am! Send me” (Isaiah 6:8b)**.

Second, we are to rejoice in the knowledge that the One on the throne is not merely some distant deity, some tribal god or fickle member of the Greek or Roman pantheon, refusing to be approached. He is the One who, loving us **“washed us from our sins in His own blood,”** or as another translation, **“released us from our sins by His blood” (NASB)**.

I enjoyed how Matthew Henry expresses this love, which produced an action which I mere human lead lines are incapable of plummeting. What could produce in God, this unfathomable love that He would send His only begotten Son to rescue us through His own suffering of wrath in our place? Henry called it, **“pure disinterested affection.”**² By that he did not mean that God was not interested in us. As if we were some ‘by the way’ of His providence.

What Henry meant was that the love of God was not a matter of self-interest. God was not cajoled into loving us. He was not seeking to fulfill some emotional or spiritual vacancy in His own existence. And He certainly was not loving us due to our inherent loveliness, Paul so aptly expresses when he writes that God’s love is demonstrated to us while we were yet sinners, i.e. His enemies (Romans 5:8). No, God’s love for us has no assignable cause. Perhaps here a more extended definition might be of value.

Speaking of God’s love, we learn that...

...it was not drawn out by any excellency in its objects, Rom. 5:8. It was an exercise of the Divine will in deliberate choice made without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself cp. Deut. 7:7, 8.³

Let us learn from the love of God. For we are called to love one another in a similar fashion (1 John 3:16; 4:11). It is difficult, yet noble, to extend love when we see no advantage to ourselves. But it is precisely there that it is a godly love.

Keeping in mind that we are being equipped for the battle ahead, we now look at the action and product of this love. The action is the work of redemption. God’s love is not, as we so often observe, some static, motionless expression of affection. He sent His Son to pay the deepest of debts with His own blood. Let us be mindful that the reference to blood *haimata* does not mean that Jesus had magic blood like we see in the movies.

² Henry, M. (1994). [Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume](#) (p. 2464). Peabody: Hendrickson.

³ Vine, W. E., & Bruce, F. F. (1981). [Vine’s Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words](#) (Vol. 2, p. 21). Old Tappan NJ: Revell.

By blood, John means death. And by death he does not mean non-existence, nor does he mean that which was afflicted on Him by the Romans and the Jews. We need not be washed from our sins in relation to other men and women. The washing was that we might be holy before God. And the death is not the first death but the second death (Revelation 20:14).

And it is much worse than the first death. It is the death of eternal judgment-the infinite wrath of God. Little wonder why in a couple of verses we will read that Jesus is the “Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 1:8. Also 1:17). For it was necessary that our Mediator, who is Christ, be truly Man and truly God, as taught in the Westminster Larger Catechism, Q 38:

It was requisite that the mediator should be God, that he might sustain and keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God, and the power of death;

In a culture which has been so won over by a sort of blind ecumenicism that extends well beyond Christian church distinctions, there is still no answer to this religious problem. How can a sinful person stand and be approved by an omnibenevolent (all good) God? Christ and Christ alone can pay this debt. There is no other answer, nor is one even offered!

Marching Orders-A Kingdom of Priests

We must now move on from this loveliest and most redemptive of statements to the marching orders. As said earlier, Elisha was no mere observer of those chariots of fire. If one reads on in the story, we see that he was an active participant in overtaking the Syrian armies. Though it was David and David alone who defeated Goliath in the Valley of Elah, it wasn't as if the armies of Israel and Judah remained on the rim of the hill. They **“arose and shouted, and pursued the Philistines” (1 Samuel 17:52).**

Similarly, though Christ and Christ alone is capable of washing us from our sins, we are not to remain idle. We are now equipped and have been commissioned. We have been made **“kings and priests”** or **“a kingdom of priests”** (ESV). This is an anticipated designation found in Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 61:6. It is used to describe the church by Peter in 1 Peter 2:9. It is also part of the new song where Christ is worshiped in chapter five.

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9, 10).

A kingdom of priests who reign with Christ (Revelation 20:6) is a monumental statement. Much can be said but we must treat it briefly here. First, as part of the “priesthood of all believers” we have, through Christ, direct access to God. The veil has been torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51) and God bids us to **“come boldly to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16)**. The pastor does not have a superior access to God than does the laymen.

A priest is also one who comes before God on behalf of others, as Christ, our High Priest comes before God on our behalf (Hebrews 7:25). This must ascend highly in the job description of the kingdom of priests. But it extends further still. Notice where Peter brings this:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

As David Chilton explains:

God’s people are a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6), chosen to bring the light of the Gospel into a world darkened by sin and the curse.⁴

Of course, to some, the idea of reigning with Christ might sound megalomaniacal. As if it is a power grab. But this proceeds from a twisted and worldly understanding of what it means to reign or to lead or govern. True and godly leadership is, as we see in Christ Himself, wise and sacrificial servanthood.

Now, perhaps we see, that a kingdom of priests washed from their sins in the blood of Christ provide an equally powerful image as 144,000 Billy Grahams. The readers of the Revelation are to know how well armed they are

⁴ David Chilton, Paradise Restored, p. 46.

as the world which surrounds them, and even their own vulnerable flesh, pounds away, seeking to dissuade them from fighting the good fight and enduring to the end. As a kingdom of priests, let us know of the victory that awaits us and run with endurance the race that is before us (Hebrews 12:1). **“To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”**

Questions for Study

1. What is the overall theme of Revelation and what, in part, are the means by which it comes to pass (page 2)?
2. How many times is the word ‘throne’ mentioned in Revelation and what does that tell you (pages 3, 4)?
3. Discuss how the story of Elisha and his servant is similar to the Revelation (page 3).
4. Where should our eyes ever be fixed in order to find peace in our difficulties (page 3)?
5. How is the love of God different than love as generally expressed? From what or where does the love of God come (page 4)?
6. What is the great example of God’s love and what does it achieve (pages 4, 5)?
7. Expand on what the “blood of Christ” actually means (pages 4, 5).
8. Discuss the roles and responsibilities behind being a kingdom of priests (pages 5, 6).