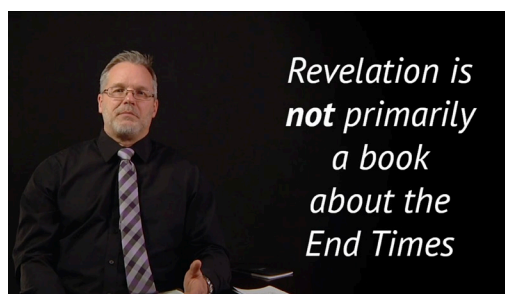
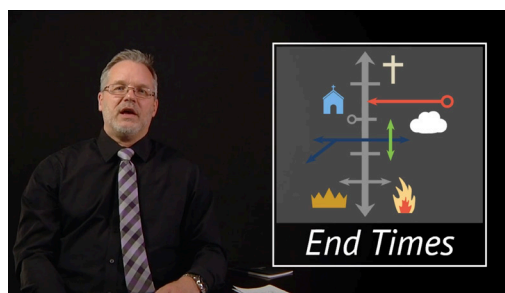


How Should We Apply Revelation Today?



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The last question I want to raise about Revelation to help us to read more sensibly is, How should we apply the book of Revelation? We've already gotten some hints. We've seen that Revelation has a lot to tell us about who God is and what it means to follow the Lamb, Jesus Christ, in obedience. It has a lot to tell us about who Jesus is. The book of Revelation has some of the strongest statements and indications of the deity of Christ anywhere in the Bible. It has a lot to tell us about who God is, who Christ is, and what they have done for us, their people. When we think of applying the book of Revelation, we usually limit it to Revelation's teaching about eschatology; and often we see Revelation as giving us information and ammunition to construct some end-time chart.

So we can have our curiosity satisfied as to exactly how the end-time events will unfold, and we can see how close we might be to the end. We often read Revelation with the book of Revelation in one hand and the morning newspaper in the other, and then we draw connections and correspondences as if that's what John was really seeing. And we conclude, "We must be near the end. The second coming of Christ must be just around the corner." However, hopefully we've said enough now that you figured out Revelation is not primarily a book about the end times. It's not giving us the kind of information so that we can satisfy our curiosity about what the end times will look like.

It's not trying to give us ammunition and data to construct end-time charts. Again, we've already seen the primary purpose of the book is to exhort God's people to follow the Lamb, Jesus Christ, in obedience and to maintain their faithful witness no matter the consequences. So how should we apply Revelation? If we're not meant to read it to construct end-time charts and to speculate about how close we are to the end and, worse, to set dates; if we're not meant to read it to try to figure out exactly how things are being fulfilled and how close the second coming must be and

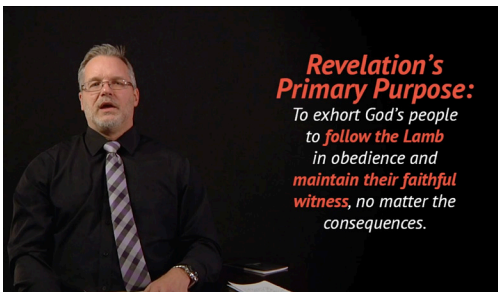
whether we're the last generation or not; if that's not how we're meant to use it, then what do we do with it? How do we apply the book of Revelation?

There are a lot of things I could say, but I want to highlight three things I think are clearly intended by John the author and clearly found in the text of Revelation that guide God's people—whether in the first century or twenty-first century—for how we should apply the book of Revelation. First of all, Revelation provides a message of hope.

We've already seen that Revelation ends with this vision of God's people on a new creation, a creation where God and the Lamb are living in their midst, a creation stripped of all the effects of sin and evil and death and oppression and injustice. Revelation provides us with the kind of world we long for today. We often talk about ending injustice and oppression. Revelation envisions that kind of world, but it will come not through our human effort, but through the new creation that God Himself will bring. Again, I find it interesting that Revelation does not end with God's people going to heaven. Revelation ends with God's people on a new earth. Yes, it's new. It's been transformed and renewed and redeemed, but it's an earth. It's still an earth, nevertheless, in the same way that our resurrection bodies will be new and redeemed, yet they will still be physical bodies.

And now we find a physical creation for God's physical, bodily people with God dwelling in their midst. That should provide us hope in a world full of oppression and injustice. Revelation's vision of a new creation is not an escape from this earth. It's not an escape to the heavenly realms. It's a renewal, a transforming of this earth, getting rid of everything that was wrong with it in the first place, recreating it as God intended it to be from Genesis 1–2 before sin entered the world. Revelation provides hope. I have to confess, I'm not sure I want to go to heaven, to float around in the clouds in a robe and play a harp for eternity. But that's fine because that's not what Revelation tells us. Revelation ends with the hope of God's people being on a new earth.

We're God's people in a new creation with God and the Lamb dwelling in their midst. That's the first application. The second application is that Revelation should be a call to worship. We've already said that passages like Revelation 4–5 have inspired the lyrics of hymns and worship songs past and present, will continue to do so, and should continue to do so. Did you know Revelation is



primarily a book about worship? One of the questions Revelation raises is, Who is worthy of our worship? Who is worthy of our allegiance? Who is the sovereign ruler of all the creation who is alone worthy of our worship? Is it Caesar, the emperor, or any other human being? Or is it God and the Lamb alone? In fact, not only chapters 4–5, but if you skim through the book of Revelation notice how many hymns are sung and songs are sung by different persons in different groups.

It's full of singing. It's full of worship. Revelation is primarily a book about worship. It's a call for God's people to worship God and the Lamb, no matter what the consequences. To worship anyone or anything else is idolatry. Revelation 4–5 presents God and the Lamb as exclusively worthy of our worship, because God is the Creator of all things. But through the Lamb, he's also our Redeemer. And it's for those reasons that all of heaven worships God and the Lamb. And that's why we should worship Him today. I mean, sometimes I think we go to church for the wrong reasons. We go just because that's what you do on Sunday; or maybe you go because you think, well, God is kind of lonely. He's been, for six days, He's kind of been by Himself and now we come and we finally worship God and the Lamb; or maybe you go because that's where you get your spiritual batteries recharged.

But Revelation 4–5 helps reorient our object of worship. We worship God and the Lamb not because they need it and not because we need it, but because God and the Lamb are worthy and because they deserve it. We worship God because He's the Creator of all; and through the Lamb, He is the Redeemer of all. That's why they worship Him in heaven. And whenever we worship God, we join in heaven. A little bit of heaven comes down to earth when we worship God and acknowledge who He is, acknowledge His sovereignty and the work that He has done in redemption through the Lamb, His Son, Jesus Christ.

Third, Revelation is a call to faithful witness and obedience. We saw that that was the issue with the seven churches in chapters 2–3: whether they would maintain their faithful witness, whether they would obey or whether they would compromise with the pagan empire. And we remember, chapter 1, verse 3 begins, "Blessed is the one who hears the words of this prophecy and who keeps it." Revelation is a book that's meant to be obeyed. Again, if we use it just to satisfy our curiosity about the end times or speculate about how close we are to the end or what everything's going to look like, we're off on the wrong foot to start with, and we've



done an injustice to the book. Revelation is a book that's meant to be obeyed. It's meant to call the church to faithful witness. To a world that contests God's Word, to a world that contests God's sovereignty and the gospel, the church is to be a faithful witness to the truth of the gospel, to the truth of who God is and who the Lamb is and what they have accomplished.

One of my favorite verses in Revelation that I think summarizes this part of the book is 14:3–4. And in this vision of God's people portrayed as 144,000, it says they follow the Lamb wherever He goes. That's what Revelation is about. It's about getting us to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. And you know by the life of Christ, but also by reading Revelation, that He went the path of suffering. He was the ultimate faithful witness to who God is, to the gospel, but it cost Him His life. And we follow the Lamb wherever He goes by following the path of suffering, but by following the path of faithful witness.

