

THE END OF THE BIBLE

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I well remember my father jokingly stating that his Bible stopped at Jude. That was his humorous way of acknowledging the difficulties and dangers associated with studying the Book of Revelation, the true last book of the Bible and the end of God's revelation to man. The figurative language in the book does make it hard to understand. And many people have erred greatly by disobeying the warning at the conclusion of the book to not add to or take away from its words (Rev 22:18-19). Nevertheless, the book promises that those who read it and keep its sayings will be blessed (Rev 1:3). Without weighing into the difficult symbols and figures found in Revelation, and without trying to twist it to our own destruction, let us consider some of the major lessons of this wonderful book.

To him that overcomes

Perhaps the most important and vital lesson taught in the book of Revelation, or what might be viewed as its theme or major thrust, is that of overcoming. The Greek word for this is *nikao*, which literally means "to subdue" or "to conquer." This word occurs 28 times in the entire New Testament, and 17 of these are found in the book of Revelation. A great promise is given by the Lord in each of the letters to the seven churches in Asia in Revelation chapters two and three. Each of these seven promises is given to "him that overcomes." Remember that this book was written to Christians who were suffering or about to suffer terrible persecution for their faith in Christ. The book was written to them (and also to us) as an encouragement to endure the afflictions and to overcome the temptations. Revelation clearly points out the great eternal reward that awaits us in the next life if we overcome in this life, but also warns us against the great eternal punishment that awaits those who do not overcome. Jesus is the ultimate example of overcoming. He suffered for righteousness' sake to the point of dying on the cross, but overcame every temptation and never disobeyed God no matter how severe the sufferings and temptations were (Php 2:5-8; 1 Pet 2:19-25). Revelation 3:21 reminds us that Jesus overcame and was rewarded with an eternal throne, and if we overcame as he did, we will sit with Christ in his throne. Revelation 12:11 points out *how* we overcome: by the blood of Christ, by the word of God, and by loving the Lord as our Master above even our own lives. Revelation 15:2 gives a picture of the redeemed in heaven and it is emphasized that these are the ones who had overcome Satan and his devices. Revelation 21:7 sums it all up by saying, "*He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I*

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(continued)

will be his God, and he shall be my son.” No matter how much we suffer in this life, look at the great inheritance that awaits us in eternity! But the inheritance is ours only if we overcome. Heaven is not for quitters. That is why Revelation stresses that we should be faithful (Rev 2:10), hold fast (Rev 2:13,25; 3:11), and keep God’s word (Rev 3:8; 14:12) even to the point of dying.

Repent or else

Another important lesson which is found throughout the book of Revelation and which is certainly a precursor to overcoming is repentance. Five of the seven churches were literally told to “*repent or else*” (Rev 2:5,16,21-22; 3:3,19). The plagues of the seventh seal were designed to bring about repentance (Rev 9:20-21). The seven vials containing God’s wrath were poured out upon the unrepentant (Rev 16:9-11). Related to this is the message of the necessity of purity of doctrine and living among Christians if they are to be saved (Rev 2:14-15,20; 3:4,18; 4:4; 7:13-14; 14:3-5; 19:8). True repentance is a change of mind which will bring about a change in one’s actions. Christians must be repentant and conform themselves to God’s will and believe, teach, and live the truth. This is a great part of what it takes to overcome (Rev 12:11).

Blessed are they

Finally, the book of Revelation is noteworthy for the great eternal blessings which are offered to the righteous. We have already mentioned the great promises given in the book to those who overcome. All of those promises pertain to the reward that will come in the next life. Revelation also gives us pictures of heaven (especially in chapters 21 and 22) unlike any other book in all the Bible. This view of heaven should give us strength and courage as we face trials and tribulations. In addition to all of this, Revelation contains seven specific blessings (Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14). Blessings are in store for those who hear and do what is in the book (Rev 1:3); for those who die in the Lord (Rev 14:13; for those who watch and keep their garments (Rev 16:15); for those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9); for those who take part in the first resurrection (Rev 20:6); and for those who keep the sayings of Revelation (Rev 22:7) and keep God’s commandments (Rev 22:14). These blessings include the rewards of heaven and escape from the punishments of hell. Even if we never thoroughly understand all of the symbols and figures in Revelation, we can all appreciate and benefit from these important points that are emphasized in the book.