

The Book of Revelation: Fiery Warning or Glorious Vision of Hope?



As we step together into the hope, joy, and celebration that Easter offers us, we also begin a new chapter in our worship life. The white banners that represent baptism fill our sanctuary, we get to sing “Alleluia” once again, and the Paschal candle is lit every Sunday to remind us of the light of Christ in our midst. We’ll be reading different parts of the Bible, too—throughout this season we will be hearing readings from the book of Revelation, one of the most misunderstood books of the Bible.

When you think of the Book of Revelation, what do you think of? If the answer is violence, destruction, fire, and end times, you are not alone—many people associate this book with terrifying images and fearful prophecy. There have been huge industries (like the *Left Behind* novels, video games, and movies) that have marketed this image of the Book of Revelation, using it as a timetable for the end of the world. In that way, it might seem strange that we’re hearing this read aloud during a season that is supposed to spark new life and hope among us!

This book is a confusing one, filled with strange numbers and symbols that we often don’t understand, so no wonder we jump to conclusions about its meaning. When we don’t take the time to understand the context and imagery of this book, it seems like bad news for us and for our world. But that’s not the message that the Book of Revelation is intended to carry for us. Most of all, in fact, the message of this book is one of hope.

The message of hope that this book brings has sustained Christians throughout the centuries who have experienced persecution and oppression, and it speaks to us today as well. As *Revelation* scholar and ELCA pastor Barbara Rossing says: “*Revelation* takes us on a journey into the heart of God’s own dream for our world. A journey of radical hope and transformation, *Revelation* takes us back in time 2,000 years to get to know the struggling churches in the bustling cities of the Roman Empire. This journey ultimately leads us, through a series of visions, to the throne of God.” (Rossing, *Journeys Through Revelation: Apocalyptic Hope for Today*, 3.)

Filled with songs of praise to God and Jesus, this book has inspired many of our favorite hymns (including Handel’s “Hallelujah” chorus). It reminds us over and over again that God alone is worthy of our allegiance and praise, and that Jesus has come to live among us and usher us out of oppression and injustice to the river of life and the foot of God’s throne. Revelation ends with a beautiful vision of God living among us on earth in the midst of a renewed creation. The nations have been healed, our pain has been washed away, and we have been strengthened to live in love with one another. What a hope-filled vision indeed!

Curious about Revelation and want to learn more? Join us at Bible Study after worship on Sunday mornings throughout Easter (May 12, May 19, and May 26) as we talk about this dynamic and beautiful vision of God’s dream for us. All are welcome!

Peace,
Pastor Marissa Becklin