

Revelation's Rhapsody: Listening to the Lyrics of the Lamb

Prepared by

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“Even on earth, who that sings or plays well on an instrument knows not the joy of waking music? Merely to listen often-times moves to tears, to light-heartedness, to longings, to feelings one would not or could not utter. What will it be in heaven to be singer, musician, listener, to be one voice in a harmony, yet as individually listened to, approved, commended. . . . Heaven is revealed to earth as the homeland of music.”

--Christina Rossetti

The opening words in Revelation, “The revelation of Jesus Christ . . . “ invites us to listen to the lyrics given to John. The word “listen” means more than hearing; the verb beckons us to hear and obey the lyrics given *by* Jesus and *about* Jesus. If we are to understand the lyrics found in Revelation, we can only appreciate their content if we follow six principles.

I. Listening to the Lyrics: The Scriptural Stage

A. The Revelation does not sound a discordant note when compared with the other books of Scripture.

B. The Story that John sings fits in with the other sixty-five compositions; indeed, it relies upon most of those compositions and their stories to communicate its message.

C. The Revelation provides a grand, symphonic finale to the Bible.

II. Listening to the Lyrics: The Storied Setting

- A. The Revelation was written against the backdrop of persecution and cultural seduction.

- B. The Story that John sings fits with the other sixty-five compositions; indeed it mirrors the trials God's people have always faced.

- C. The Revelation is a timeless word for the period of "the great tribulation," the time between Christ's first coming and His final coming.

III. Listening to the Lyrics: The Style

- A. The Revelation was written in a style—uniquely combining prophecy, apocalypse, and letter—that would have sounded familiar to its first recipients.

- B. The Story that John sings complements the other sixty-five compositions written in genres familiar to the recipients.

- C. The Revelation uses genres that wed privileges and responsibilities of God's people from the first coming to the final coming of Jesus.

IV. Listening to the Lyrics: The Sources

- A. The Revelation uses most of the Old Testament writings to tell its own Story in light of those previous Stories.

- B. The Story that John sings recycles and reapplies well-known Stories drawn from other books of the Bible.

- C. The Revelation shows both the timeliness and the timelessness of God's Word that has always comforted and challenged his people.

V. Listening to the Lyrics: The Symbolism

- A. The Revelation uses symbols to tell its Story.

- B. The Story that John sings uses symbols familiar to the recipients.

- C. The Revelation uses images that are not the reality, but rather they point to a deeper reality.

VI. Listening to the Lyrics: The Structure

- A. The Revelation uses an intricate structure that enhances its message.

- B. The Story that John sings makes repeated use of repetition and recapitulation, strategies well-known to the ancients.

- C. The Revelation uses a non-linear approach to reinforce its message so that God's people dare not forget what God has revealed.

*"We have heard enough when God ceases to speak, and have learned enough when we have learned His will."
--Christina Rossetti*

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"Dancing is the only art of which we are ourselves are the stuff of which it is made."

I believe that the metaphor of dance describes the disciple's life. As followers of Christ we are called to be embraced by Christ, to embrace him, and to dance with him. Indeed, the dancing we do in this life foreshadows the dancing that will be done by the Bride and the Bridegroom for age upon age.

I. A Call to Dance with the End of the Dance in Mind

A. Where does John do this?

B. Why does John do this?

II. A Call for the Bride to Dance Only with the Bridegroom

1:1-8 Prologue

- A. The Disciples' Community in Christ (1:9-3:22)

- B. The Disciples' Security because of Christ (4:1-8:1)

- C. The Disciples' Witness in the Name of Christ (8:2-11:19)

- D. The Disciples' Conflict on behalf of Christ (12:1-14:20)

- E. The Disciples' Vindication by Christ (15:1-20:15)

- F. The Disciples' Union with Christ (21:1-22:6)

22:7-21 Epilogue

III. A Dance Built around Four Sets of Seven (Part 1)

A. The Seven Churches of Revelation 2:1-3:22 (God's Church—Our Calling)

B. The Seven Seals of Revelation 6:1-17; 8:1 (God's Sovereignty—Our Security [7:1-17]).

C. The Seven Trumpets of Revelation 8:2-9:21; 11:15-19 (God's Purpose—Our Proclamation [10:1-11:14]).

D. The Seven Bowls of Revelation 16:1-14, 16-21 (God's Wrath—Our Watchfulness [16:15]).

IV. A Story Built Around Four Sets of Seven (Part 2)

A. The Seven Churches of Revelation 1:9-3:22

Before John offers a variety of descriptions of evil in our world through the centuries, he stresses the importance of the faithfulness of God's people. God

issues a call to Christ's disciples to be overcomers as they face evil both within and outside the church.

B. The Seven Seals of Revelation 6:1-7; 8:1

As John offers a description of evil at work in our world through the centuries, he stresses the permissive will of God ("was given" in 6:2,4{2},8,11; see 7:2; 8:2-3; 9:1,3,5; 11:2-3; 12:14; 13:2,4,5,7,14,15; 17:17): God permits evil forces to carry out their work.

The interlude of Revelation 7 stresses the security the disciples have on Judgment Day.

C. The Seven Trumpets of Revelation 8:2-9:21; 11:15-19

As John offers a description of evil in our world through the centuries, he stresses the reformatory purpose of God: God desires for people to repent of their self-sufficiency, pride, idolatrous, and rebellious ways, and yet they do not (9:20-21; see also 16:9,11,21).

The interlude of Revelation 10:1-11:14 stresses the responsibility of the disciples to witness no matter the response or the cost.

D. The Seven Bowls of Revelation 16:1-14, 16-21.

As John offers a description of evil at work in our world through the centuries, he stresses the retributive justice of God: In granting permission to evil forces to carry out their work and as a result of people refusing to repent, God proclaims, "It is done!" (16:17; see also 21:6).

The interlude of Revelation 16:15 stresses the call of disciples to be vigilant and faithful.

V. A Dance Filled with Pauses.

A. A Dance Filled with Preparation Pauses.

1. Revelation 1:9-20 prepares us for 2:1-3:22.
2. Revelation 4:1-5:14 prepares us for 6:1-8:1.
3. Revelation 8:2-5 prepares us for 8:6-11:19.
4. Revelation 12:1-14:20 prepares us for 15:1-20:15.
5. Revelation 15:1-8 prepares us for 16:1-21.
6. Revelation 21:1-8 prepares us for 21:9-22:6.

B. A Dance Filled with Reflection Pauses.

1. The reflection pause between the sixth and seventh seals: Rev. 7:1-17 shows us that the sealed can stand before God when the Judgment comes.
2. The reflection pause between the sixth and seven bowls: Rev. 10:1-11:14 shows us what John and the Church should be doing when mankind refuses to repent, namely, witness.
3. The reflection pause between the sixth and seventh bowls: Rev. 16:15 shows us that the Church should be mindful and moral when combating the forces of evil.

"You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!" Psalm 30:11-12

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OLD TESTAMENT ALLUSIONS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION*

Revelation

- 1:1 Dan. 2:28-30, 45-47
- 1:1-2a Isa. 48:6; Dan. 2:28, 29, 45
- 1:2 Dan. 2
- 1:3 Dan. 12:4
- 1:4 Gen. 1; Ex. 3:14; Lev. 26:18-28; Is. 11:2; 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12; Zech. 3:9; 4:2-7, 10
- 1:5 Ex. 24:8; Lev. 16:14-19; Ps. 2:7-8; 89(88):27, 37; 130(129):8; 2 Sam. 7:13-16; Isa. 1:16, 18; 40:2; 55:4; Jer. 42:5
- 1:5-6 Ex. 24:4-8; 29:10-21
- 1:6 Ex. 19:6; Deut. 28:9; Ps. 89(88):19-32; 89:28; Isa. 43:10-13; 51:6; 61:6; Dan. 7:22, 27; Zech. 4:11-14
- 1:7 Isa. 40:5; 52:10; Dan. 7:13-14; Zech. 12:10, 12
- 1:8 Ex. 3:14; Isa. 41-48; 41:4; 44:8; Am. 3:13 (LXX); 4:13 (LXX)
- 1:10 Ezek. 3:12
- 1:10-11 Ex. 19:16, 19-20; Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 11:1; 43:5
- 1:11 Ex. 17:14; 34:27; Isa. 8:1; 30:8; Jer. 36:1; 37:2; Hab. 2:2
- 1:12 Ex. 20:18-19; 25; 37; 40:4; Num. 8; 1 Kings 7:48-49; Zech. 4:2, 9-10
- 1:13 Ex. 25:7; 28:4, 31[27], 39ff.; 29:5, 9; 35:9[8]; Lev. 8:7; Isa. 22:21-22; Ezek. 1:26; 8:2; 9:2, 11; Dan. 3:25; 7:13; 8:15; 10:5-6, 16, 18; Zech. 4:2, 11-14
- 1:13-15 Dan. 7; 10
- 1:14 Dan 7:9; 10:6
- 1:14-15 Dan. 10:6
- 1:15 Ezek. 1:7, (LXX) 24, 27; 43:2; Dan. 3:24-25; 10:6

1:16 Ex. 34:29; Judg. 5:31; Isa. 11:4; 49:2; Dan. 10; 12:3, 6-7; Zech. 4

1:17 Josh. 5:14; Ps. 90:2; Isa. 41:4; 44:2 (LXX), 6; 48:12; Ezek. 1:28; 3:23; 43:3; 44:4; Dan. 8:17f.; 10:5-7, 8-12, 17-19, 20

1:18 Deut. 32:40; Job 38:17; Isa. 22:22; Dan. 4:34; Hos. 13:14

1:19 Isa. 48:6 (LXX); Dan. 2:28, 29, 45

1:20 Dan. 2:29, 45

2:4 Jer. 2:2; Ezek. 16:8; Hos. 1-3

2:5 Ex. 25:30-31; 40:4; Num. 8:1-4; 1 Kings 7:48, 49; Zech. 4:2-8

2:6 Ps. 139:21

2:7 Gen. 2:8 (LXX), 9; 3:22, 24; Prov. 11:30; Isa. 6:9-10; Ezek. 3:27; 28:13 (LXX); 31:8, 9 (LXX); 47:1-12

2:8 Isa. 44:6; 48:12

2:8-9 Dan. 1; 3

2:10 Gen. 24:55; 31:7, 41; Num. 14:22; Job 19:2-3; Dan. 1:12-15, 19; 5:3-4; 7

2:12 Isa. 49:2

2:12-13 Ps. 89:37; Isa. 43:10-12

2:13 Ps. 89:37

2:14 Num. 22:1-25:3; 31:8, 16; Deut. 23:4; Josh. 13:21-22; 1 Kings 16:31-32; 2 Kings 9:22; Neh. 13:2; Ps. 106:39; Isa. 47:10; Nah. 3:1-4

2:16 Isa. 49:2

2:17 Ex. 16:13-15, 31, 32ff.; 28:9-12; Num. 11:7; Ps. 78(77):24; Isa. 11; 49; 62:2; 63; 65:15

2:18 Ps. 2; Dan. 3:24-25; 7:9-13; 10:6

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2:23	1 Sam. 16:7; 2 Kings 10:7; Ps. 7:9, 10; 26:2; 62(61):12; Prov. 17:3; 21:2; 24:12; Jer. 11:20; 17:10; 20:12
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2:26-27	Ps. 2:8-9
2:28	Num. 24:14-20; Ps. 2:7-8; Isa. 14:12
2:29	Ps. 115:4-8; 135:15-18; Isa. 6:9-10; Ezek. 3:27; 12:2-16
3:1	Isa. 11:2; Zech. 3:9; 4:10
3:4-5	Dan. 11-12; Zech. 3:5-6
3:5	Ex. 32:32-33; Ps. 69(68):28; 139(138):16; Isa. 4:3; Ezek. 13:9; Dan. 7:10; 12:1-2; Mal. 3:16
3:7	Job 12:14; Isa. 22:22
3:8	Isa. 45:1
3:9	Ps. 86:9; Isa. 43:4; 45:14; 49:23; 60:14; 66:23
3:9-10	Ps. 24:1; 33:8; 49:1; 72:9; Isa. 24:17; 43:4; 45:14; 49:23; 60:14; Hos. 4:1; Joel 2:1
3:12	Isa. 56:5; 62:2; 65:15; Ezek. 48:35
3:14	Gen. 1:1; Ps. 89(88):28, 37; Prov. 8:22; 14:25; Isa. 43:10-12; 65:15-16
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3:18	Ex. 20:26; Job 23:10; Prov. 27:21; Ezek. 16:36; 23:29; Nah. 3:5; Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:2-3
3:19	Prov. 3:12

- 3:20 Song of Songs 5:2
- 4:1 Ex. 19:16-19, 20, 24; Num. 10:1-3; Josh. 6; Judg. 7; Isa. 27:12f.; Ezek. 1:4; 2:9; 8:2, 4, 10; 10:1, 9; Dan. 2:28-29, 45; 7:2, 6-7, 9; Jer. 4:23-26; Zech. 2:1; 4:2; 5:1, 9; 6:1
- 4:1-5:14 Ezek. 1-2; Dan. 7
- 4:2 1 Kings 22:19ff.; 2 Chron. 18:18; Ps. 11:4; 47(46):8, 9; 103:19; Isa. 6:1ff.; Ezek. 1:26-28; 10:1; Dan. 7:9
- 4:3 Gen. 9:13; Ex. 24:10; 28:17-20; Ps. 104:2; Ezek. 1:26-28; 28:13; Dan. 7:9c
- 4:4 Num. 11:16-17; 1 Kings 8:1; 2 Kings 23:1; 1 Chr. 24:3-19; 25:6-31; 26:17-19; Ezra 5:5, 9; 6:7, 14; 10:8; Isa. 6; 24:23; Ezek. 1; 14:1; 20:1; Dan. 7:10b
- 4:5 Ex. 19:16-20; Deut. 5:22; Ps. 18:7-15; 29:3-9; 77:18f.; Ezek. 1:4-12, 13 (LXX), 14-28; Dan. 7:9d-10a; Zech. 4:2-3, 6, 10
- 4:6 Gen. 1:8; Ex. 14:16; Ps. 74:12-15; Isa. 6:1ff.; 51:9-11; Ezek. 1:5, 18, 22, 26, 28; 10:1; 32:2; Dan. 7:2-3
- 4:6-7 Ezek. 1:5-10; 10:14
- 4:6-8 Ex. 25:17-22; 37:6-9; 1 Kings 6:24ff.; 2 Chr. 3:13; Isa. 6:1ff.; Jer. 3:16-17; Ezek. 1; 10:12-15, 20-22
- 4:7 Ezek. 1:10; 10:14
- 4:8 Ex. 3:14; Ezek. 1:18; 10:12; Isa. 6:1-4; 41:4; Hos. 12:6; Am. 3:13 (LXX); 4:13 (LXX); 5:14-16; 9:5-6; Nah. 3:5; Zech. 10:3; Mal. 2:16
- 4:9 1 Kings 22:19ff.; 2 Chr. 18:18; Ps. 47(46):8; Isa. 6:1ff.; Ezek. 1:26-27; Dan. 4:34; 6:26; 7:9; 12:7
- 4:10 1 Kings 22:19ff.; 2 Chr. 18:18; Ps. 47:8; Isa. 6:1ff.; Ezek. 1:26-27; Dan. 4:34; 6:26; 12:7
- 4:11 1 Chron. 29:11, 12
- 5:1 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chr. 18:18; Ps. 47(46):8; Isa. 6:1; 29:11; Ezek. 1:26-27; 2:9-10; 3; Dan. 7; 12:4, 9

- 5:2 Dan 4:13-14, 23; 7:10
- 5:3 Ex. 20:4; Ps. 146:6; Isa. 29:11, 12, 18; Ezek. 2:9f.; Dan. 7:10; 8:26; 12:4
- 5:4 Isa. 29; Dan. 7
- 5:5 Gen. 49:9-10; Isa. 11:1, 10; 29; Jer. 11:19; 23:5; 33:15; Dan. 7:10; 12:4, 9; Zech 3:8; 6:12
- 5:6 Gen. 22:10; Ex. 12:3, 5, 6; Lev. 1:10ff.; 17:5; Deut. 33:17; 1 Kings 22:11; Ps. 89:17; Isa. 11; 53:7-9; Jer. 11:19; Dan. 7:7-8:24; Zech. 3:9; 4:2, 10; 6:5
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- 5:10 Ex. 19:5, 6; Isa. 61:6; Dan. 7:22b, 27a
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- 5:13 Ex. 20:11; 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chr. 18:18; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 47(46):8; 146:6; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26-27; Dan. 2:38; 4:37
- 6:1-8 Ex. 7-11; Deut. 32:24-25; Ps. 77:18; 144:6; Isa. 5:28; Jer. 4:29; 6:23; 50:14, 29; Ezek. 5:16-17; 14:12-23; Dan. 7-12; Hab. 3:8-11; Zech. 1:8-15; 6:5-8
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- 6:8 Deut. 32:23-27; Lev. 26:18-29; Job 17:13-16; 33:22; Ps. 6:5; 49:14-15; Prov. 2:18; 5:5; Song of Songs 8:6; Isa. 28:15; Jer. 14:12-18, 19; 15:3; 16:4-5; 21:7, 9; 24:10; 29:17-28; 42:17; 43:11; Ezek. 5:12, 17; 6:11-12; 7:15; 12:16; 14:19-21; 29:5; 33:27; 34:28; Dan. 7; Hos. 13:8, 14
- 6:9 Ex. 29:12; 30:1-10; Lev. 4:7, 18, 30, 34; 5:9; 8:15; 17:11
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- 6:12 Isa. 13:10; 50:3; Ezek. 32:7, 8; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15; Amos 8:8; Hag. 2:6
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- 7:2 Ex. 12:23; Ezek. 9:4f.
- 7:2-3 Gen. 2:8; Ex. 12:7, 13, 22-28; 19:6; 28:11-21, 36-38; Isa. 42:6-7; 49:6; 51:4-8; Ezek. 9; 14:12-23; 43:2-4; Dan. 3-7
- 7:3 Ezek. 9:4
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- 7:9-17 Isa. 11; Mic. 5
- 7:10 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chr. 18:18; Ps. 47(46):8; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26-27; Jonah 2:9-10
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*Sometimes you will see a number in parenthesis. English Bibles will sometimes have a slightly different chapter or verse division when compared to the Hebrew Bible. For example, Psalm 89 in the English is Psalm 88 in the Hebrew text. In the list above I show the Hebrew reference in parenthesis after the English reference. For example, this is used in the Revelation 1:5 citation of Ps. 89(88). Second, "LXX" is a symbol for the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament.