



Getting into the Book of Revelation without Getting Lost

By Bill Medley

Many years ago, when I worked in the entertainment industry, the first TV commercial I did was a 15-second advertisement for 'Famous Grouse Whiskey'. If I had known one day I would be a Christian and a minister, it might not have been the best product to endorse, but it stayed in my memory being my first one. To film 15 seconds, it took from 8am to 9pm. Why so long? Because after 42 takes of me sipping that whiskey I thought I was filming a commercial on a merry-go-round at Luna Park, but I had a good time. And no, they didn't use cold tea. It was the real stuff. But I didn't actually get drunk. The real reason it took so long is because it is standard practice in the film world, especially with TV commercials, for directors to take a long time because of their attention to detail and long camera set-ups. There couldn't be a drop of whiskey on my lips as I sipped it for the close-up on the mouth. There were shots of the sip, the swallow, the reaction and the punchline joke from several angles to get the most out of the humour, so when you saw it on the screen it all came together as one package.

Now long before the modern film industry, the book of Revelation was written. It was given to us by the Master film director, Jesus himself. You the viewer, get the benefit of different camera angles in order to bring out all the detail. The first camera angle is the earthly perspective, that is, the letters to churches in Rev. 2-3.

Then the camera angle changes, and the second angle is the heavenly perspective. This happens at Rev 4:1 when John says 'after this,' and he is taken up in the spirit to get a look into heaven.

In the first angle we saw the ugliness of the earthly perspective. In the second angle we see the perfection of the heavenly

perspective. The key word mentioned 15 times is 'throne' (Rev. 4-5). The message is God is on the throne. He is sovereign. Those first readers from Ephesus and Smyrna, Pergamum, etc. didn't stop reading at Rev. 3. These chapters are for them too. It's a different camera angle, which they so desperately *needed* to see as they felt all the pressures from the one who claimed *he* was on the throne in their day, the Roman Emperor, Domitian.

But the vision is not just for those first readers in the seven churches. Seven is God's number of completion, so these letters to the seven churches are to all of God's church. The movie *Revelation* actually sweeps across the history of the church, up to the end of time. Blessed are *all* who read the words of this prophecy and take to heart what is written in it.

After that first movie scene where John saw the sorry state of the churches below, he is invited to *come up here* (4:1) to peek into the very throne room of the God of the universe. Here the scene changes from an earthly perspective, where we read of suffering, persecution, false teaching and lukewarmness, to the heavenly perspective of the Lord on the throne. Every creature is represented, with eyes all over, every direction, every action, bowing down under the control of the one on the throne. This is the message of Revelation. It might look like we are losing from below, but God is in control of all things. Jesus wins!

And like any good film, it's telling a story ... going forwards. John is told *what must take place after this* (4:1). So, this film reaches forward from his day to what comes to pass after John's time.

This sets the scene for the movie to move through the action of history, giving three major different camera angles, close ups,

zoom ins. The three main camera angles are symbolized in seals, trumpets and bowls.

The book of Daniel is quoted many times in Revelation and uses a strikingly similar method. Daniel also has three symbols. The statue, the beasts and horns all cover different camera angles, but the same period of history. They represent worldly kingdoms leading up to the *first* coming of Jesus. Revelation uses seals, trumpets and bowls describing different camera angles of the next period of history leading up to the *second* coming of Jesus.

Just as Daniel was written to God's people struggling under oppression, and gave them the big picture of the Sovereignty of God in history, so too the book of Revelation is given to John to give to the church for the same reason. It tells us how to cope and have patient endurance. This makes Revelation one of the most pastoral books of the Bible, while also the most evangelistic with its call to repent and believe before it's too late.

Right from the outset John tells the church that he is a fellow sufferer in the tribulation (1:9). He prophesies that faithfulness to Jesus will require patient endurance on the part of the saints (the theme is repeated in 13:10 + 14:12).

The drama unfolds centre stage, but Revelation also shows 'behind the curtain' scenes so the Christian can see who is making this movie happen. You thought people and governments were against Christianity (and they are), but behind the curtain there is another enemy revealed. And yet the main theme is not lost. Even this enemy is only operating under the control of the

author of the movie. Jesus Wins.

John is also told from the outset that this movie will be brought to you in signs or symbols.

From the first verse this Revelation is given to *make known* by signs and symbols. The single Greek word in the original language translated *made it known* specifically refers to *make known by signs or symbols*. There is another more widely used Greek word that means *make known* which doesn't carry the meaning of signs and symbols, but John chooses to *not* use that word because he wants us to know the genre of literature we are reading. And sure enough, through Revelation, we get these reminders that the images given are symbolic when occasionally the meaning of symbols are *explained*.

But the symbols which are not explained are not just a matter of guesswork. John the apostle was brought up going to 'Saturday school' and learned the OT Scriptures from childhood. Many of the symbols are drawn from the OT, but you will need John's OT knowledge to unpack them. Then we can explain the 1000 years, the mark of the Beast, the number 666, and the Rapture. Where *does* that Rapture fit in? Unfortunately we don't have space to explain all of the symbols here, because this is just the movie trailer.

Bill Medley is the author of Jesus Wins The Series. (The book of Revelation explained and explored.)