

01. The Book of Revelation—1:1-5a

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Today we start a new study in the Book of Revelation—not the Book of ‘Revelations’ (plural) but ‘Revelation’ (singular).

One of the keys to understanding this book is found in the opening statement—**“The Revelation of Jesus Christ...”** It is the revelation of Jesus Christ not *“The Revelation of St. John the Divine”* as some Bibles introduce it.

The word **“revelation”** comes from the Greek word *“apokalupsis”* the word we get the English word *‘apocalypse’* from. The English word *‘apocalypse’* has come to mean *“the chaos and catastrophe associated with the final destruction of mankind.”* However, the Greek verb *‘apokalupsis’* simply means *“to uncover, to reveal, or to make manifest.”*

Think of an unveiling of a statue in a park somewhere. The statue is covered with a sheet causing limited perception of what is under it—until the moment of the unveiling when the sheet is pulled away and the statue has now been ‘revealed’ for all to see.

In this book, the Holy Spirit pulls back the curtain and gives us the privilege of seeing the glorified Christ in heaven and the fulfillment of His sovereign purposes on earth (His Kingdom).

This is contrary to what many teach, that the book is *‘beyond understanding’*, that the imagery is so far out that it is virtually impossible for anyone to comprehend what’s going on and therefore this book is best left alone, because it is essentially—a *sealed* book!

But that concept is in direct conflict with the very title of the book—**“The Unveiling of Jesus Christ.”**

Far from being a ‘sealed book’ that God never intended anyone to understand, something that is hidden from us—this book is something that God is opening to our understanding! He’s pulling away the ‘curtain’ so that we can finally see Jesus in all of His glory like never before!

In fact, this is the fulfillment of a prophecy which God gave to the prophet Daniel—

Daniel 12:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?" ⁹ And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end."

And then we come to the Book of Revelation, the Book of “Unveiling” or “Unsealing” where God opens to our understanding what Daniel wanted to understand but couldn’t because—those things were hidden from him. And yet, for the most part—churches don’t *teach* it and Christians don’t *read* it—because they believe that it’s a *sealed* book, when in fact—God wanted us to read and understand this book so much that He promised the reader a special blessing to those who read, hear and keep the things which are written in it. (Revelation 1:3)

I personally believe that part of that blessing is that in reading and studying this book, as we seek to understand and unravel all the symbolism and imagery—it will take you into every other book in the Bible! The golden rule of hermeneutics (the study of Bible interpretation) is that Scripture is always best interpreted by Scripture.

The reason this book is so difficult for many to understand is because they don't have a real command of the Old Testament. The reason people stumble and get confused when they read the Book of Revelation is because—all of the imagery and symbology is rooted in the Old Testament.

Scholars have pointed out that there are over 400 direct references (I've heard some teachers claim that there are as many as 800 direct references) to the O.T. in the Book of Revelation. That means that the Book of Revelation is the key to the O.T. that unlocks our understanding of it like no other book in the Bible!

Augustine said, "In the Old Testament you have the New Testament *concealed*; and in the New Testament you have the Old Testament *revealed*!"

Jesus said, "*The volume of the book (O.T.) is written of Me...*" (Ps.40:7; Hebrews 10:7) and Revelation is the lens through which the O.T. comes into focus—where we can really see Jesus in every type, shadow and symbol.

Luke 24:27 (NKJV)

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

The 4 classic views or interpretations of the Book of Revelation

1. Preterist View

The **preterist** approach views Revelation not as future, predictive prophecy—but as an historical record of events in the first-century Roman Empire (**preterist** means 'past' or 'fulfilled'). The preterist view thus ignores the book's own claims to be a prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18–19).

The preterist view requires that one see the words about Christ's second coming as fulfilled in the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70—even though He did not appear on that occasion, nor is there any persecution in the first century that fits the description of the horrific events depicted in chapters 6–19.

2. Historical View

The **historical** view finds in the Book of Revelation a record of Church history from apostolic times until the present. Those who hold to this view often resort to allegorizing the text in order to "find" in it the various historical events they believe it depicts (e.g., the fall of Rome to the barbarians, the rise of the Roman Catholic Church, the advent of Islam, even the French Revolution).

Like the preterist approach, the historicist view ignores Revelation's own claims to be a prophecy.

3. Idealist View

The **idealist** approach sees depicted in Revelation the timeless struggle between "*good and evil*" that is played out in every age. According to this view Revelation is neither an historical record nor a predictive prophecy.

“Like the first two views, not only does the **idealist** view ignore Revelation’s claims to be a prophecy—but it also, if carried to its logical conclusion, severs Revelation from any connection with actual historical events—thus, the book is reduced to a collection of myths designed to convey spiritual truth.”

4. **Futurist View**

The **futurist** or *prophetic* view sees in the Book of Revelation (chapters 4–22)—as a *prediction* of events and people (like the Antichrist and False Prophet) that were future to John’s day (the one who recorded them)—and, in fact, are still future to our day (although getting very near!).

Those who hold to one of the first 3 views of Revelation are frequently forced to resort to *allegorizing* or heavily *spiritualizing* the text to support their interpretations.

The futurist approach, in contrast to the other three—does full justice to Revelation’s claim to be a prophecy.

And in case you haven’t already figured it out—I personally hold to the fourth view that chapters 4-22 are *prophetic* and yet *future* to the day in which we are living.

Now, it is pretty well accepted among evangelical scholars that the Apostle John wrote the Book of Revelation. John wrote Revelation about A.D. 95, during the reign of the Roman emperor Titus Flavius Domitian.

The emperor had demanded that he be worshiped as “*Lord and God*”—and that anyone (including and especially Christians) who refused to obey his edict to worship him as Lord and God—would suffer severe persecution and/or death.

Tradition says that it was Domitian who sentenced John to be boiled in oil for proclaiming Jesus as God, Savior and Lord—but upon having John thrown into a pot of boiling oil—the oil had no effect on him (which tells us that until God is through with us we are indestructible!).

Domitian then ordered John sent to the Isle of Patmos off the coast of Asia Minor—a barren rock that juts up out of the Aegean Sea which also served as a Roman penal colony where prisoners were sent to die. It was there that John received the greatest revelation in the Bible—the revelation that completed the New Testament and has changed countless lives over the centuries! After Domitian died in A.D. 96, John was freed and allowed to return to Ephesus where he lived out the remainder of his life and ministry and was buried.

The **outline** of the Book of Revelation is given to us by the Lord Jesus Himself in chapter 1:19, where He commanded John to— “**Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.**”

And so, the outline of the book is simply 3 main divisions:

- I. **Write the things which you have seen**—the vision of Jesus in chap.1
- II. **Write the things which are**—the things of the Church (ch.2 & 3)
- III. **Write the things which will take place after this** (‘meta tauta’ —“after these things”)

CHAPTER 1

Revelation 1:1 (NKJV)

¹ The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants--things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John,

So, God the Father gave this revelation to Jesus and in turn Jesus gave it to an angel to deliver to John who ultimately gave it to the 7 churches of Asia Minor—and eventually it made its way to the entire Church as the last book in the Bible.

Critics have jumped on the statement, “...things which must shortly take place” by saying that—John didn’t know what he was talking about.

He thought this was going to happen *shortly* and it’s been two thousand years—and they still haven’t happened! (Unless you hold to the preterist view—which they say this verse proves their position because these things did come to pass shortly—70 A.D.)

The word ‘**shortly**’ is the Greek word *tachos* which can mean “*in a brief time*”, “*rapidly*” or “*quickly*.”

It is the word we get our English word ‘*tachometer*’ from. A tachometer is something that measures RPM’s (revolutions per minute)—and if we’re talking about a car—how many times the engine’s crankshaft makes one full rotation every minute.

In other words, John is not saying that these things were going to happen *shortly* in the sense of chronology—but *quickly* or *rapidly* once they are set in motion.

The idea is that the things written in this book, once they start, are going to be so destructive, so cataclysmic and so horrific that they can’t be prolonged or dragged out—because it would mean the destruction of every living thing on the planet!

Matthew 24:22 (NKJV)

"And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [remained]..."

For example—in Revelation 6 we are introduced to the “*four horsemen of the apocalypse*” who in very short period of time—wipe out one quarter of the earth’s population! That is equivalent to the combined populations of South America, the United States, Canada, and all of Europe—all of these people are wiped out as war and other cataclysmic events break out on the earth.

And that’s why the events detailed in this book—must come to pass rapidly once the first event is ‘tripped’.

Think of the first domino, in a whole string of dominos (events in chapters 4-19) is tripped and how it begins a chain reaction that causes all the other dominos to fall in rapid succession.

Revelation 1:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants--things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John, ² **who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.**

John is telling us that he was an eyewitness of the things he is writing to us about.

Revelation 1:3 (NKJV)

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Notice John said, “**Blessed is he** (*singular—a pastor or elder*) **who reads** (*out loud—publicly*) **and those** (*plural—the congregation*) **who hear the words of this prophecy...**”.

Revelation was first read aloud in local church meetings by their pastors or elders and all were blessed as they keep those things written in it—but today many pastors won’t read or teach the book to the congregations for fear it might drive people from their churches. (Elaborate)

The Apostle Paul had sent 7 letters to 7 churches (Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica), and now John sent 1 letter/book to 7 different churches—a special message from Jesus to His Church.

Keep in mind that the churches in Asia Minor were facing persecution and it was important that they be in a right relationship (in close fellowship) with the Lord and to each other—which is of vital importance for us to be in our day as well.

The churches that John wrote to are pictured as 7 separate lampstands—each being a light in a dark world (Philippians 2:15; Matthew 5:14–16)—the darker the day, the greater the light must shine. Unfortunately, situations existed in at least five of these assemblies that required correction before their lights were going to be able to shine brightly.

John concluded his short introduction with the admonition—“**the time is near.**” The word “**time**” (*kairos*) refers to ‘*a period of time in particular*’—and here it’s referring to, ‘*the time of the end*’ or—“**the end times.**”

Revelation 22:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand."

How near?—the apostles really didn’t know—but the knowledge that He could come back at any time kept them looking every day for Jesus’ return and living holy lives—

1 John 3:2-3 (NKJV)

² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed [Rapture], we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope [Rapture] in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Jesus said an evil servant says, “*My master delays his coming.*”

One pastor said—

“You show me a church that doesn’t teach the Rapture of the Church and I’ll show you a church that is involved in carnality and immorality.”

Mark 13:32-37 (NKJV)

³² "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³

Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. ³⁴ *It is* like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to

watch. ³⁵ Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning-- ³⁶ lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. ³⁷ And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

"You Christians have been talking about Jesus' return for 2000 years—where is He?"

2 Peter 3:8 (NKJV)

⁸ But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Revelation 1:4 (NKJV)

⁴ John, to the seven churches which are in Asia:

Asia does not refer to Korea, Japan, or China—it's a reference to Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey.

The number '7' is prominent throughout the Bible—but especially in the Book of Revelation where it is found 54 times.

The number 7 in Scripture signifies *completeness* (not 'holiness').

When God wants to communicate that something is *complete* or *perfect* (not necessarily in goodness)—He uses the number 7.

Revelation 12:3 (NKJV)

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon ['Satan'] having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. [signifying complete evil]

Alright so why did Jesus choose these 7 churches to write this book to—and even singled each of them out in chapters 2 and 3 to dictate individual letters to? Certainly, there were other larger and more important churches than these that Jesus could have singled out like the church at Rome or Antioch or Jerusalem—why these?

It's because, even though these were literal churches, these 7 represent the Church symbolically throughout the entire history of the Church Age—from the Apostolic Age to the present day. And not only that, but they also speak to individual believers living during the Church Age of the various problems and pit falls we encounter as Christians—as a way to warn and correct us.

(We'll see this clearly when we get to Chapters 2 and 3)

Revelation 1:4 (NKJV)

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: **Grace to you and peace...**

It is always in that order in the N.T.—in other words, you'll never experience the peace of God until you first experience the grace of God! Of course, that would be the grace that brought us salvation (Eph.2:8-9)—but then would be manifested in many other ways in our Christians lives.

Grace means the undeserved favor of God and the strength that is needed to live the Christian life—day by day.

Peace is the resulting calm that enables the believer to face persecution, sorrow, and even death itself.

Revelation 1:4 (NKJV)

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace **from Him who is and who was and who is to come...**

This phrase, “...**from Him who is and who was and who is to come**” views God as being—in all 3 dimensions of time (past, present, and future) at once! Or in other words that He is eternal—the great ‘I AM’.

(Explain how God dwells in the ‘eternal present tense’—and liken this to us viewing events in time like we would look at a parade from ground level whereas God, Who is outside of time, sees it from a ‘helicopter’)

Only God never had a beginning and will never have an end—

Psalms 90:2 (NKJV)

Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You *are* God.

Revelation 1:4 (NKJV)

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,

This refers to God the Holy Spirit in His fullness—seven being the number of perfection and completeness.

Revelation 3:1 (NKJV)

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God...

I believe this is talking about the Holy Spirit because John goes on in verse 5—“**and from Jesus Christ**”

And so, John mentions the entire Trinity—

Revelation 1:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴...Grace to you and peace from **Him who is and who was and who is to come**, and from the **seven Spirits** who are before His throne, ⁵and from **Jesus Christ**.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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