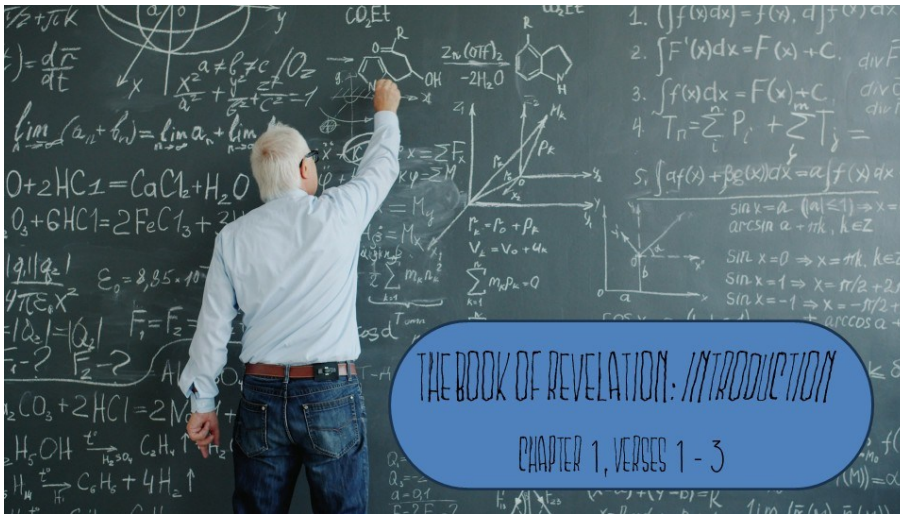




# “The Book of Revelation: *The Introduction*”

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in Menomonie, Wisconsin  
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***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. 3 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.***

Few, if any books of Scripture generate the interest and reaction that the Book of Revelation generates. There is intrigue, fascination, anxiety, curiosity, and loads of melodrama and extremism, all pouring forth from one prophetic scripture. And through it all, rarely do we find the book that we thought we would find. Underneath all the hype is a message to both the church today as well as the unbeliever who stubbornly insists that there is no God, no Messiah who came to redeem us, and certainly no king who will come back to get us!

Today we live in a time of heightened apprehension and unease, even bordering upon intense dread and worry. The pages of Revelation can be a bearer of doom and gloom for those who stand uneasy in that precarious gap between salvation’s rapturous exit and the coming wrath of God. Such should be the greatest of concerns in our present generation...no doubt one of the “last generations” wherein even those who attempt to wear the mantle of Christianity have attempted to reinvent what God made...what God *said*... into their own image. We want a Savior, but we reject a “Lord.” We regularly tell him “no” while at the same time somehow believing we are good in His sight. He calls us to *engage the lost and dying*...we say **no**. He calls on us to *participate in a local church community*, we say **no**. He calls on us to *give*, we say **no**. He calls on us to *serve*, we say **no**. He calls on us to *sacrifice, commit, surrender, humble ourselves, and submit*...we say **“no.”** Everything in our living screams that we are lost, but when we are called out, we say “no.”

Knowing the future is, *for mankind*, the “brass ring”: the elusive prize that drives us to purchase tabloid magazines that profess to hold the truth of what is to come. It is what draws us to the horoscope page in our local paper, the palm reader at the circus, the fortune cookie in the Asian food delivery. We publicly profess it to be ridiculous, but we can’t seem to help ourselves. It seems we are mysteriously compelled to any and every claim to be able to see into the “magic ball” of days to come. Mankind wants to know what is going to happen in the future. The inevitable end is like a monster under the bed. We’ve never seen it, but we’re sure that it’s there, just the same. We don’t want to meet it face to face, we would just like to see some photos. We believe

the monster is out there, we just want to know where and when, and when he is close, we will gear up and get ready. But until then, *well...we look for easy street.*

The announcement that a particular church is going to take on the daunting task of teaching the Book of Revelation seems to bring the curious to fill the pews more than any other topic or event. Our God, speaking through the apostle John, is not a weather forecaster on the evening news, nor is He a market analyst predicting the movement of the stock sales. In fact, He is not predicting anything, but rather stating, *clarifying*, the closing chapters of life on this planet as we know it. The ultimate author here...**our Lord**, is not a “Jean Dixon,” but rather the “I AM” that was there when it all started, and will indeed be there to see it finished. Even then...as He walked the earth in ministry, He saw clearly every moment that would pass in the history of humanity, culminating in man’s final defiance in the valley of Armageddon.

While astrologers, mediums, and modern “seers” and “prophets” fill the press and the airwaves, it is only the Word of God that remains standing to-date upon 100% accurate, two thousand year-old statements. Pages of text that hold not only glimpses of days to come, but hold that elusive “meaning of life” for each and every one of us...“*All things that pertain to life and godliness.*”

We must strenuously avoid all temptation to “read into” the text our preconceived or “hyped” theories that not only do a disservice to the ultimate author, but lose the very real message of God’s ageless grace, as well as His coming final judgment. What God wanted us to know about the future is written here and elsewhere in Scripture, and what He did not want us to know, He did not say, and neither should we.

The Book of Revelation is often a teacher’s undoing, in that legitimate, godly, and inspired writers will sometimes “unravel” when it comes to this book. They inexplicably will toss out all sound Scriptural rules of reason and interpretation, while at the same time quick to reject such a practice elsewhere in the Word. The problem is that to accept the Book of Revelation on face-value is, *for many*, simply too unbelievable or shocking in its obvious judgement of Creation. So much “out of control.” Thus we want to apply our own idea of its symbolism and analogies that are beyond the obvious and simplest understanding.

What WE must receive, *most of all*, is verse three of the first chapter, which reads in the New Living Translation: “God blesses the one who reads this prophecy to the church, and He blesses all who listen to it ...**and obey what it says**. For the time is near when these things will happen...”

Let us actually begin this study not here in Revelation, but rather back in the Book of Acts, chapter 1, verse 1.

- 1 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,
- 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen,
- 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.
- 4 And being assembled together with [them], He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," [He said], "you have heard from Me;
- 5 "for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,

11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This [same] Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

So all the way back to the Book of Acts, mankind has been standing and staring into heaven in wonder...hearing those words throughout the generations: "*Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!*" While believers throughout the ages may not have ultimate clarity as to the *how* and the *when*...we... as Spirit-filled Christians, have much understanding as to the *what*. This fact holds faithful to our present-day personal walk with Him, in that so often...when we seek Christ in matters of personal concern, we seldom are given the "how and the when," and his answers are generally illuminated via the *what*. Thus our God is certainly consistent.

We *do not* know when these events will play out...**when** He will return. Anyone who says they know, is immediately outed as a false prophet. Matthew 24 tells us this:

36 "However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows.

37 "When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah's day.

38 In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat.

39 People didn't realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes.

40 "Two men will be working together in the field; one will be taken, the other left.

41 Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be taken, the other left.

42 "So you, too, must keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming.

43 Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken into.

44 You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.

We *will not* ...and we *can not* ...know when He will return, Clearly, that is therefore not to be our focus. Ezekiel 33:10 grasps the potential despair of this reality, saying therein; "... *If our transgressions and our sins are upon us, ...and we pine away in them, ...how should we then live?*"

For us, in light of revelation prophecy...as well as all the ultimate judgment and final destruction, the question stands: *"How then shall we live?"* What should our living look like? THIS is the question we should be asking and the answer we should be searching for! This is the question that matters to us through the Book of Revelation, not the blind musings of black helicopters and the "Mark of the Beast."

This letter, *of course*, was written by the apostle John, who...at the point of its writing, was around 90 years old and was the "last man standing." The last living apostle. Man, the stories he could tell. The adventures he experienced. John had *lived*. Oh...not the kind of living many of us seek, with our penchant towards comforts, and possessions, and ease and stability. John didn't have any of those things, but *man*, he had a story! That's a fair trade from where I stand. John had been imprisoned on the island of Patmos because of his ministry endeavors. I find that pretty amazing too, wherein John was at an age where the majority of the rest of us are busy fishing and spending time with the grandkids, John was out "kicking butt and taking names." So much so that he got himself arrested. That's a mark for me.

**There are several different approaches to the Book of Revelation.** This, *no doubt*, is due to the varying levels of comfort it brings a person, or the lack thereof. You know... if what I read here makes me uncomfortable and I am still unwilling to stand down and give way, then I will simply try to change the meaning or approach to the text, relieving me of any undue responsibility and angst found in other understandings and approaches. This is a common and widely used practice out there in the world and sometimes here in the greater church. When we don't like the pastor's approach to a text, we simply... *albeit quietly and anonymously*... reject the stated premise and the personal insinuation of guilt towards us. *"I know what he said, but that's not me. I'm a Christian, no matter what he said..."* We do that more and more until, finally, we just have to get out of here and find another church because this one is freaking us out.

The approaches to understanding Revelation include "allegorical," "historical," and "literal"... *or "futuristic."* The **allegorical method** is basically that everything in Revelation is just symbolism: like good versus evil, etc...a way to comfort the church in a crazy world. But there are no prophecies or authentic future events and meanings. It's like a dream. Then there is the **historical approach**...and within that approach, there are actually 2 ways to look at it historically. The first is the **Preterist view**...which sees the Book of Revelation in a historical light, but only within the framework of the first-century struggle of the church against imperialistic Rome. These folks will tell you that John had to use these pictures...these "symbolic codes" to tell the story while protecting the church in a time of great persecution. The second historical path is the **"symbolic" view**. This view sees Revelation as a grand panoramic picture of the church's struggle from its conception in the Book of Acts through the modern age. It traces the church's struggle against the world and sin throughout 2000 years of history. This view sees Revelation as holding some prophetic aspects, but not distant and end-times aspects.

We, however, are going to approach the Book of Revelation in the final **"literal" approach** because we have no reason not to. There will always be those in the greater church...*and I use that term loosely there*...that will torture the text to make it say what we want it to say. There will always be those who have some scriptural interpretation that is interesting and curious, but one that no one...on their own...with nothing but a Bible and the Spirit of God as his or her guide, would ever come up with. 5 point "TULIP" Calvinism is one such idea. One that no one on their own with a Bible would ever find as Bible doctrine. One needs a Calvinist...with their "high secret knowledge" to "explain" it to them. Their take on scripture strikes me as a crazy idea about a God I absolutely do not know and don't think I want to. But anyway, these folks have existed and always will. But *we* are going to take the simple, clear approach... one that takes the position of the individual with nothing but a

Bible: *what would he or she find?* If God wrote this stuff in simple street-corner Greek and gave it to the common man to read, what will that common man find?

Furthermore, I base *my* position on this matter on verse 19 of chapter 1, where Jesus told John to “*Write the things which you have seen, ...and the things which are, ...and the things which will take place after this.*” That statement is going to effectively give us an outline of the whole book...and will do so in a literal prophetic method. “*What you have seen*” will be found in chapter 1... “*What the things which are*” will be found in chapters 2 -3, and finally the “*things which will take place after this,*” chapters 4-22.

## **Chapter 1**

***1 This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things which must happen soon, which he sent and made known by his angel to his servant, John,***

The word Revelation means “an uncovering” or “a disclosure.” We would be amiss right from the start to receive or interpret this book in any other fashion. This “disclosure” is from Jesus Christ Himself. Not from John the writer, for he is merely the delivery boy. It is from Christ, and even ultimately from God the Father, for it was the Creator who gave it to the Son to be delivered to you and me, His “servants.” And please note...it was given to *His servants*. Such does not include the monikers of “human”...or even church-goer, or believer. It was to speak to one narrow group of individuals: *his servants*.

It is that title, that designation, that will separate those who receive this “disclosure” with peace and joy, and those that are perhaps troubled by the things that they will find here.

This “revelation” was delivered unto John via an angel of God, and the events on its pages are herein stated to “shortly come to pass.”

***2 who testified to God’s word and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, about everything that he saw.***

John records that which was delivered unto him via God’s chosen angel. He will speak of the word of God, in light of the WORD of God. This is something that he knew well, having walked with the “living” Word for three years through all of the miracles, the learning, and the triumphs. The Word became flesh and lived among us. John will speak of the things he saw via the angel of God there on the island of Patmos, where he had been banished for teaching of Jesus Christ. And he would do so by the passion of the things he had already seen. “*That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we saw, and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life, that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us. Yes, and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*” (1 John 1:1,3)

***3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written in it, for the time is near.***

Certainly we cannot go into this book with some sort of idealist attitude that we are going to make sense of everything we read. Some of what appears here is for a progressive understanding as the pages of time unfold before us.

What we can do is receive the promised blessing through the reading, the hearing, and the heeding of this “revelation.” This does not mean we cannot gather from the words before us, an understanding of the events of the last days. But ...as servants...*if we are indeed in that category*...we ARE assured a blessing on any level, if we only just read and obey.

And today is the day to hear it. For “the time” is “at hand.”