

REVELATION

Every Knee Shall Bow

Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. - Rev. 22:7

Revelation 1:1-3 The Stage Is Set

An Introduction

- A. God's final word to man by the complete revelation of His Son Jesus Christ that will bring to fruition all that God has promised and declared.
 - 1. There are many great themes in this book including the sovereignty of God, the worship of God by all of His creation as every knee bends...the arrival of the kingdom of God upon the earth and beyond, and the complete fulfillment of Bible prophecy.
- B. Who wrote the book and when?
 - 1. John the aged apostle who often referred to himself as the "one whom Jesus loved" wrote this as well as his Gospel and 3 epistles.
 - 2. The first wave of Roman persecution under Nero lasted until 68AD and claimed the lives of many, including Peter and Paul. The second wave under Domitian (81-96AD) left John the apostle exiled in Patmos (Rev.1:9) off the coast of Ephesus.
 - 3. The emperor Nerva replaced Domitian and brought John back from exile to Ephesus where he died at nearly 100 years old, buried near the church he had pastored for so long.
- C. How can I understand it?
 - 1. The dangers of interpretation that is both subjective and misleading. God seeks to reveal Himself and so we need only come to this book as we do the 65 others.
 - 2. The difficulty reflects more upon our spiritual well-being than God's intention. He began the use of parables in Mt.13 to both highlight spiritual truths for the hungry while hiding it from the hard hearted (Mt.13:11-15; Mt.13:34).
 - 3. From (1Co.2:14) to (Jer.29:13) the issue is to seek God with a hungry, willing heart. All study requires faith (Heb.11:3,6); prayer for wisdom (Ps. 119:18,169); a holy life (Ps.66:18); a heart of obedience (Ps.119:100) and a willingness to study (Acts 17:11, 2Ti. 2:15).
 - 4. This book focuses on Jesus the author and its subject (Rev.19:10).
- D. Some models of study put forth for this book by men are:
 - 1. Preterist view
 - 2. Historical view
 - 3. Symbolic or idealistic view
 - 4. Futuristic model
- E. The golden rule of interpretation
- F. God desires we know Him and as such this final book brings finality to all things: as Genesis began the account, Revelation finishes it and they are bookends to God's Word.
 - 1. Of the 404 verses found in Revelation there are over 300 Old Testament quotes and references. Without the book of Revelation, those verses would lose most of their significance.
 - 2. So the book of Revelation brings to an end all things: the end of sin, the world system, false religion, the devil and his lying angels, heaven and earth...resulting in glory or damnation for all of eternity for every man.
- G. The outline for the book is found in (Rev. 1:19) with (ch. 1:1-19) being that which John "had seen"; (ch. 2-3) the church age being those "things that are" and (ch. 4-22) those "things that shall be"

hereafter.

Verse 1

- A. Revelation means unveiling; quite the contrary to those who believe this book is shrouded in mystery and hidden from view. It is the unveiling of Jesus that is shortly to come.
 - 1. (Dan. 12:4,8-9) What Daniel was told and what John was told tell us of the urgency of our day (Rev. 22:10). In (Heb. 1:1-2) Paul declared God has spoken in these last days through Jesus Christ.
 - 2. There are various revelations of Jesus found in the Bible. In the Old Testament prophecies and the appearance of the “angel of the Lord” we meet a Lord who is said to both suffer and yet will come to rule. Though in His 1st coming Jesus’ full glory was hidden (Php. 2:8), that will not be so in His 2nd coming.
 - 3. Soon the King of Kings will return, the Lord of Lords! The bridegroom for the bride!
 - 4. One key to understanding this book well is to remember this verse: The book of Revelation focuses on revealing Jesus Christ! True of the entire Bible (Jn. 5:39, Heb. 10:7) but particularly this prophesy!
 - 5. We’ll see Jesus as Priest and King (Ch. 1-3); Lamb of God ruling (Ch. 4-5); Judge (Ch. 6-19) and Bridegroom (Ch.20-21).
- B. Not just the revelation of Jesus but the one given to Jesus who gives it to us. In His humanity Jesus willingly limited Himself (Mk. 13:32, Acts 1:6-7); yet now in glory Jesus is given this revelation for us (Rev. 22:16).
- C. Shortly take place: The Greek suggests this means that once it begins it will quickly move to its fruition. Additionally, all of those words speaking of soon and very soon, quickly, shortly etc. speak of God’s point of view, even used when we are asked to wait a long time (Rev.22:7).
- D. Signified to John: The word signify is to give as a sign and John gets many in this Book. Sign-ify is a clear definition.
- E. Why signs?
 - 1. To reveal to the hungry and hide from the hard hearted.
 - 2. Because signs convey a greater thought and feeling than simple words.
 - 3. Because signs do not change as quickly as words in their usage and meaning.
- F. And as with all prophesy, it proves God is God! (Isa. 48:5, Isa. 41:23, Jn. 14:29) Over 300 prophecies were fulfilled when Jesus came the 1st time and an equal amount await their fulfillment as He comes again.

Verses 2-3

- A. The Word of God and the testimony of Jesus are one and the same thing for Jesus is God!
- B. John will faithfully report what he saw using words like “I heard” or “I saw” some 60 times to describe 44 separate visions from God.
- C. The blessings of reading, hearing and keeping the words of this Book are available to us all! Let’s look up for our redemption is drawing near.

All right. Let's open our Bibles this evening to Revelation 1:1. I encourage you guys to come to the breakfast. The church is buying breakfast for everyone on this first men's breakfast. So you should take advantage of it. Come hungry, and bring someone with you.

Tonight it is our intention to begin what I think is going to be 42-weeks' worth of study through this final book of the Bible, which, with vacation and holidays and all, might very well take us through the year. But what a book it is to start a new year with - the final word from the Lord about you and me, the world, and His plans, and the completeness or the fulfillment of everything that He has promised to do. This is the final disclosure of Jesus Christ. It is the final revelation of God to you about His plans for you, what He is planning to do and what He has promised. It is an important book. You should understand it well. And especially living in the last days, as I think that we are, Jesus ends this book by saying to John, "Surely I am coming quickly." And I know if you hear that, you say to yourself, "Hmm. Not quick enough." But John said, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" And really that's where we're at tonight.

There are several themes to this final manuscript. There is the sovereignty of God because, in the end, He is the One who is over all. His word will be the final word. There'll be no other word than His. The worship of God is found that everyone joins in; not today, but then - His angels, all of mankind, His enemies. In fact, all of creation will bow down before Him at the arrival of God's kingdom upon the earth. There is the fulfillment of literally hundreds of Old Testament prophecies found in this book, and the sequence of events is important to learn: the glory of the Church Age; the rapture of the church; the 70th week of Daniel or those seven years of Tribulation that are coming to try men's hearts; the return of Christ with His saints to rule and to reign; the 1,000-year Millennial reign of Christ; the new heavens and the new earth. You should know this book well because it'll help explain, literally, chapters and chapters in the Bible. Without this reference, you'll be left hanging; through the prophets, through the symbols, through the analogies, you really won't know where to turn. But this will open up for you the Scriptures. Through it all, the focus remains just upon one Person - upon Jesus. Really nothing else matters to this book but His glory and His name and His rule.

It is the only book that comes with a built-in promise, and you're going to be blessed having come tonight. I know you want to get into all the action, so I'm only going to do three verses. (Laughing) But hang in there. Better you have a good foundation to get started than we just run ahead and dive in. We trust that you're going to be here with us each week.

We know who wrote the book - John the apostle did - because he tells that to us three times in this first chapter (in verse 1, in verse 4, in verse 9 as well). He mentions himself again several times in chapters 21 and 22. No doubt about that. It is the apostle John's fifth book in the New Testament; he wrote the gospel that bears his name, he wrote 1, 2 and 3 John towards the end of your Bible. By the way, all of them written to third-generation Christians. By the time John begins to write, the early church is gone; the second generation, for the most part, gone; and a third generation, who was not there as eyewitnesses or even there as first-generation people who heard from those who were there, are much alive anymore. And then he writes this book. And this young man - now an old man - who referred to himself often as "the one whom Jesus loved" was chosen by the Lord to reveal these final things to us. He's the only apostle that was not martyred for his faith. He outlived them all, though they tried to kill him. History tells us that they put him in hot boiling oil, and he survived. The Lord was with him. So he writes this document. He is probably 95 or 96 years old when he writes it, and it was probably written about 95 or 96 A.D. So, towards the end of the 1st century; certainly all the other apostles are long gone, and John is still around.

When was it written? Well, the first major persecution against the church arose from Rome during the reign of Nero. Nero reigned from 54-68 A.D. Until then, or before then, there were local skirmishes with the church. A lot of it came from the Jews. Rome kind of stood by and watched. If they got involved at all, it was under the (kind of) encouragement of the religious communities. But when Nero came to power, he was threatened by the church, and literally thousands upon thousands of Christians were put to death by this man's regime - including Peter and Paul; they both were taken out by Nero.

The next wave of persecution came under the reign of Emperor Titus Flavius Domitian. He came to power in 81 A.D., would rule for fifteen years, through 96 A.D. And it is he who really turned up the heat against the church. In fact, his words were he wanted to ethnically cleanse the world of the church, and he murdered many upon the earth. He demanded public worship as God. He

slaughtered in the most atrocious ways those who didn't believe him or follow him. If you've ever had a chance to look at the reference book called "Foxes Book of Martyrs," there are plenty of historical references to this man's rule. It is he who, in just a four-month time, killed 40,000 believers. Most of them others were jailed or exiled. It was he who took John, though, an old man, and he placed him out on the island of Patmos (chapter 1:9), a Roman penal colony 32 miles off the coast of, today, Ephesus. Ephesus area is called Kusadasi today. We took our group a couple years ago on the "Footsteps of Paul" (tour) and visited Ephesus as well as Patmos. It is in the Aegean Sea. The city of Ephesus is called Selcuk today. It is in the Izmir province of Turkey. It was called Anatolia for a long time, if you read any kind of an old history. But John was taken there in his 90's, just left there to die; this is the way you just get rid of people. And he was influential; he was a pastor of the church in Ephesus at the time. And so they exiled him, hoping that he would starve and die; and he did neither. Instead, God isolated him so that he might bring this word that we might have before us to him. Like I said, you can still visit Patmos today. It's an interesting place. It was once very isolated. It now has become a religious retreat of sorts run completely by the Catholic Church. In fact, when we did our services in the little chapel in Patmos, the fellow running the place - Gerard will tell you - brought out the vestments of a priest to me and said, "Here you go, father. You can wear these." I said, "Yeah, I'm not one of those guys." (Laughing) And he said, "Ah, put it away then." But we still had a good service there. The island, I think, does explain why John so often uses the word "sea" - twenty-six different times he mentions it or uses it as a comparison. I suspect that's all he saw was the sea around him. John lived there until Domitian died in 96 A.D.

He was replaced by a fellow called Emperor Nerva, who was at least a little bit more sympathetic for a while to the church. John was brought back to the mainland. He went back to pastoring the Ephesian church. By then, the book was finished, and John spent the last few years of his life pastoring the church there. He was buried there in Ephesus. One of his disciples named Polycarp - if you had any church history for yourself - took over the pastorate for John at that point. So this was written about that time, at the end of the 1st century.

There are many folks who approach the book of Revelation with great hesitation. There are plenty of churches that will not teach it at all, or they'll just stay away from it altogether. They'll claim that it cannot be misunderstood. Isn't it interesting a book called "The Revelation of Jesus," they go, "Yeah, I don't get it."

They say it's too difficult to interpret, sometimes it's just a mystery, and they are put off by the symbolic nature of it or the fulfillment of the Scriptures and just being able to put them together. I should tell you I don't think it's the hardest book in the Bible. I think there are more difficult theological books than this book. Does that mean we have all the answers? We don't. And I will be happy when I run into stuff and go, "You know, I can't make an argument for this at all, and I'll be happy to refer you to people who can. I won't agree with them, but you can go read them for yourself."

Here's my intention. I have no intention of interpreting this book for you. But rather, if we study God's Word, then we should allow the Bible to interpret itself. And I think that the symbolism you find here, the allusions that you find here, the illustrations that you find here are all in common usage by the Lord over centuries of time. So if you want a biblical definition for a symbolism, you can usually find it in the Scriptures. In fact, over half of this book's symbolic nature is defined in the text itself. So you don't have to be confused. If someone says to you, "What are those seven stars that Jesus holds in His hand?" just keep reading. He'll tell you what they are. Or, "What are these seven spirits of God?" Just keep reading. God will define them for you so you don't have to scratch your head and go, "I wonder what that means!" No. You'll be able to tell. Interpretation without the rest of the Scriptures is extremely subjective and absolutely misleading. You don't want me to get up here and tell you what I think it means without a scriptural basis for that. For example, if I say to you, "Mary had a little lamb," we might very well begin to interpret that in a hundred different ways. How did Mary get a little lamb? And how did she train him to follow her wherever she went? Well, you get the picture. We can't just arbitrarily go running after these things and just decide that this is what it means. And you would be surprised at how many books you will read that do just that. You'll say, "Well, where did you get that?" and they'll....like they're the authority. I'm not an authority. I only know the Bible and that God wants me to know His Son. So I'm going to use the Bible and try to help you to come to biblical conclusions based on the evidence that we have. And that's all I know to do.

In reality, the very fact that this book is called Revelation would tell us God intends to make things clearer, not muddier, not cloudier. The word itself means to take something that is hidden and to make it known. The idea that we would have sixty-five books of the Bible that would say, "Come and know the Lord, draw near to Him," and then He ends the book with saying, "Haha, see if you can find Me

now!" is ridiculous. Not God's heart, not God's intention, certainly not God's way. It's inconsistent. He doesn't want you to arrive at book sixty-six and say, "Oh, this is too mysterious. God has thrown me a curve ball." "Good luck finding Me."

Jesus began, in Matthew 13, with the crowds, using parables. He defined them for us there. In fact, when He was questioned by the disciples there in Matthew, "Why are You talking to us in these stories, in these parables?" Jesus answered, and He said, "For you it has been given to know the things of the kingdom, but to them it has not been given. So whoever has, to him even more shall be given to them. But he who does not have, even that which he does have will be taken away." And the Lord went on to explain that very thing - that God used illustrations, parables, stories; stories that were physical in nature so that you could cross the divide to the spiritual and have understanding of spiritual truth. He used parables to help the believers clearly see what He meant. But there were also people in the crowd that didn't want to believe Him. And so the parables did something else - it hid the truth from those that were unbelievers so they wouldn't end up more culpable to the Lord than they already were. So Jesus used storytelling to highlight, to help us understand spiritual truths that we wouldn't otherwise have a basis for understanding. But He also used them to hide the truth from those who don't want to hear anything from Him. So even that which they have becomes, if you will, taken away from them. "Jesus," it says in Matthew 13:34, "spoke to the multitude in parables, and without a parable He did not speak to them." So, at some point, He just kind of hid all of the truth from the unbeliever so he wouldn't find himself more guilty, but He used them always to illustrate truth to the disciples that He loved.

So, to those who are hungry and seeking and want to know the Lord more closely and with greater clarity, you'll find the answers here. If you're a life of hard-heartedness towards the Lord, and you really don't believe much about Him, don't seek to walk with Him, you might find great confusion here. You might pull your hair out and go, "Oh, my goodness. Where am I going with all of this?" But that has always been God's way. To know His Word only requires that you are born again, filled with the Spirit, and seeking His face. Paul said to the Corinthians, "Spiritual things are spiritually understood or discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Jeremiah wrote, in chapter 29:13, the LORD saying to the people, "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." So I fully expect you to learn more of Jesus by going through this book. I expect you to get closer to Him as a result of coming. This book is given to God's people to reveal

Jesus and His plans for you and me, for the church, for Israel, for the earth and beyond. But it isn't brain surgery. It really is down-at-the-bone level or down at the ground floor. It's consumable. It's reachable. It's approachable. I think it was J. Vernon McGee who used to say, "God is interested in feeding us as sheep. We're not giraffes." And then he said, "So just teach the Bible simply. You'll get all that God intends for you to have." And certainly God's Spirit, I think, prefers that over the academics of those with.....and there're a lot of books written on the book of Revelation by people that aren't even saved. You can find them everywhere. Everyone's got an opinion. But the greatest concern that you should have if you're not a Christian isn't what Jesus writes here but is what He said in John 3:18; that if you don't have Him, you don't have life, and if you don't believe in Him, you're condemned already. Forget about Revelation. Get right with Jesus first. And once you do that, He can certainly lead you through this book.

Like any other book in the Bible, approaching God's Word requires faith. Hebrews 11:6 mentions that to us very clearly, that "without faith it is impossible to please Him. If we come to God, we must believe that He is, that He's a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." I think, like every other book of the Bible, you've got to pray for wisdom. "God, speak to me. God, open my mind. Help me to understand what You're wanting me to learn." The psalmist wrote in Psalm 119:18, "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law. Teach me." He wrote a hundred verses later, "Let my cry come before You, O LORD; give me understanding according to Your word" (Psalm 119:169). So pray that prayer. I mean, God help us to understand what He's wanting to teach us. And then I think there has to be a willingness to search the Scriptures, and I hope that'll be your commitment. You know, you should have a reason for the hope that lies within you. You should have answers for why you believe what you do. And I think this book will certainly provide those for you. The Berean Christians, according to Luke, "were more noble even than those in Thessalonica, they received the word with all readiness of mind, and then they searched the Scriptures daily to see whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). Paul would write to Timothy, his young pastor who, by the way, was the pastor of Ephesus before John (2 Timothy 2:15), "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." So you're going to have to kind of put your head to the grindstone, so to speak, and get to work. This book focuses on Jesus. When John, in chapter 19:10, falls at the feet of an angel to worship, he is told to get up. "I'm a fellow servant as you are. But this is the testimony of Jesus. So worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Or, if you

will, prophecy points to Christ. And really this is the book.....if you walk away from this book without talking about Jesus, you've missed the main emphasis. He's the Author of the book, He's the subject of it. Don't become distracted with other things around you that draw you away from that fact personally. Because that's what.....you've got to walk away from this book saying Jesus is amazing. I can't wait to stand before Him. We wait for Jesus to come. We look for Him in this book and in our lives and in the clouds. We will find Him no longer in this book as a man acquainted with grief. He now comes as He truly is. In fact, this is the only book that presents Jesus as He is today - full of glory, coming soon, ready to gather you together.

There are many models of interpretation - if you begin to read books about the book of Revelation - that you will encounter. I think only one is biblical, but there are many others that are presented. And usually, when you learn what someone's methodology is for study - the Bible as a whole, this book in particular - you also learn right away about where they're coming from.

One of the most well-embraced models is called the preterist view. Preterists believe that all that is written in this book was fulfilled in the past. And, because of that, that either it is the overthrow of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. or it is the fall of the Roman Empire in the East in 476 A.D. that you can find in these pages. It is artfully written. I believe it is a very heretical view, but it is received and embraced in even a lot of Bible schools. It steals away from you, the true believer, the hope of Jesus' coming. It removes the imminence of His return. You don't have to look for Jesus because this has all been taken care of already; that isn't your hope. It is dangerous because it denies predictive prophecy. By that, I mean that God, in prophecy, proves that He is God. It removes the final book of the Bible where everything is fulfilled that is yet to be fulfilled. It leaves everything kind of hanging. It denies a global judgment. It denies the reality of Jesus' biblical bodily return to the earth. It sets aside God's promises of a new heaven and a new earth. And it steals from you the hopefulness that God wants you to have as John would write (1 John 3:2-3), "We don't see Him yet, but when we see Him, we're going to see Him as He is, and we're going to be like Him. And if you have this hope, you're going to purify your life." So the preterist view kind of writes this off as being non-prophetic at all. And, like I said, it's widely accepted to this day.

There are those who take the position that the revelation of Jesus has a historical view. And the historical view of looking at this book basically says that most of the events of Christian history from John's time to the second coming of Jesus have already been lived out. In fact, Revelation 2:19 is indicative of the experience of the church through the ages, and they will leave it up to you to determine what portion of the historical view is applied to those chapters there that are explained. And when the history doesn't match, then they begin to make imagination and invention to fill in the blanks. The Seventh Day Adventists believe in the historical view. You might remember David Koresh from Waco; that was his position on this book as well. It was developed very late in the game, about the 12th or 13th century. It came out of the fight against the papacy, and so they began to try to discredit the papacy through their historical view. This view turns exegesis - the proper interpretation of the Bible text by context - into kind of an artful play of ingenuity. They make things up as they go. You read the historical view and go, "Where did you get that?" "Just shut up and keep reading. I'm the scholar, you're not." And it's not very popular today, to be honest with you, but it is still out there.

There are some who hold that the book of Revelation is just idealism or symbolic in nature, which declares it's just a volume of allegories, that this isn't intended by the Lord for you to take it seriously or even literally; it is a bunch of spiritual truths that shouldn't be taken literally; they are broad statements from God about the perennial struggles between good and evil. They set aside every future aspect of the book; they tie everything to history. And they kind of make it a devotion, where they pass it along to succeeding generations to say, "Well, you know, look, we learned this. Now you should learn it as well." So they, again, make things up as they go.

There's really only one model that works biblically, and that is this is a declaration of God about the future; or, if you will, call it the futuristic model of biblical interpretation. It sees this book as prophetic. It sees this book as unfulfilled. It sees that this book needs to be taken literally. What is written down should be literally received unless there is an indication in the text itself to do otherwise. You start running across metaphors or similes - words like "as" or "like" - well, all right, those are illustrations. But until you have those kinds of indicators, the approach of the Scriptures should always be the same. We believe God means what He says, says what He means. Now you probably know people who, if you say, "Hello," or if they say "Hello" to you, you wonder what they mean. But that's not

the Lord. He means what He says. He wants you to know Him. And go into this book with this understanding: God wants you to know Him better. He doesn't want to hide from you. If He wanted to hide from you, that would have been easy; you wouldn't have known Him. But He wants you to know Him.

The golden rule of interpretation is when the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, and take it as primary and ordinary and usual and literal unless the facts of the immediate context would indicate otherwise. So, you just stick with what it says until you are told otherwise. Easy enough. And that's what we should do with every Scripture.

God desires you know Him. And, in this book, you will come to the last things that God has fulfilled or is going to fulfill. Genesis begins the revelation of God and man. This book brings it to a close. Genesis and Revelation are the bookends, if you will, of God's story. It is futuristic, it is prophetic, it is understandable in light of the context of the Scriptures. There are 404 verses in this book. There are 300 Old Testament Scriptures. So, without this book, much of the Old Testament references are going to lose their significance and remain unfulfilled. You're gonna read chapters in Hosea and Isaiah and Jeremiah, and you're gonna go, "Where are they gonna go?" and you go, "I don't know." "When is this gonna happen?" "I don't know." "Will this ever take place?" "I don't know." If you take all those other models, you just go, "I don't know. I don't think it'll ever take place." You can start crossing chapters out of your Bible. But they are fulfilled. Without this book of Revelation, we would have the beginning of sin in Genesis without the end of sin. We would have the fall of man without his full redemption. We would have a Savior who rose and ascended but never came back as He's promised. We would have a church left behind forever with promises they could not rely upon. If this book isn't for real, your faith is in vain. Yet God has given this to us to reveal the things to come. It is the ultimate end result of man's sin, the end result of the world system, the end result of false religion, the end result of the devil and his ways, the end of this heaven and this earth. It is the final thing that will result for ever man in eternity, whether glory or judgment. It's the end of things.

The outline of this entire book is concisely stated in one verse: you can look at verse 19 (of chapter 1). We won't get there this week or next; the third week, probably. It says this, "Write the things" (John) "which you have seen." That would be the vision of Jesus as described prior to those verses. And then "write the things which are" (present tense, which you will find in chapters 2 and 3). The

things that are is the Church Age and the letters that the Lord will write to those churches that were in existence at the time. And then, thirdly, and then "I want you to write the things which will take place after this." After what? After the age of the church. In fact, in chapter 4:1, you will read the words "after these things." The Greek words are "*meta tauta*," after this. After what? After this Church Age. John writes what he had seen presently, the age of the church, and then, beginning in chapter 4 through chapter 22, the things which shall be. And I really believe that after 42 weeks of study together, you'll have a concrete, solid handle on the book, and you'll be blessed to know what God wants to do.

So let's get our feet wet tonight. I know we're almost done here. Verse 1 says this, "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." As we said this word "*apokalypsis*," a revelation, means to unveil or to disclose or to take off the wraps. Contrary to saying this is some hidden, mysterious book, God declares by the pen of John that this letter is designed to reveal, to take off the wraps, more fully, of His Son. And John is given this revelation by Jesus Himself so that he can take and show us, the servants, the things that must shortly take place. Already that's a pretty good, exciting start, I think. Here's what God wants to do.

Seven hundred years before Jesus came upon the scene, the prophet Daniel was ministering. And the Lord, in chapter 12:4, 8-9, said to Daniel, "Daniel, I want you to shut up the words that I have spoken to you and put them in a book until the end. Many will run to and fro, and knowledge will increase." And Daniel said, "I didn't understand. When will these things be?" And the Lord said, "Daniel, put the words away, close up the book, seal them. They'll be understood" (literally) "at the time of the end." So seven hundred years before, Daniel is given all kinds of prophecies about the coming of the Lord, and we're going to look at those as we go through the book. And then he's told, "Put 'em away," and Daniel goes, "I don't get 'em," and He goes, "Yeah, you're not supposed to get 'em. It's not for you. It's for later. Put 'em away."

And then you come to this book, Revelation 22:10, and the Lord said to John, "Don't seal up this book of prophecy. The time is here. The time is at hand. Lay it out there. Let everyone see what's coming." Thus the change from the Lord's heart, from Daniel until these final days, the last days, as Hebrews (1:1-2) calls that time that comes and starts with the coming of the Lord. We are in the last days.

Throughout the Scriptures, we are given various revelations of Jesus. In the Old Testament prophecies, you get lots of pictures of the Lord in the offerings that are made. In that term "the angel of the Lord," you've probably run into that in the Old Testament, when Jesus shows Himself before He is incarnated to the Old Testament. We meet a Lord that is willing to suffer and die for the sins of the world who will one day come to rule and to reign. In the gospels, His first coming has His glory shielded in human flesh, but one day He's going to come unglued and unshielded, and He's going to come again - His glory being revealed. He's not going to come as a lamb that was slain; He's going to come as the King of kings, as the Lord of lords, no longer in His humiliation.

So we're going to come to know the Lord who now comes to rule. And it is at that end of the book of Revelation that all is given to us to see Jesus in the future tense, to know that every man who's ever lived, that our relationship to Jesus will either leave you with Jesus as your Lord or leave you as Jesus your Judge. If you don't know Him personally, that is what I would be concerned about. For it is God's will that you know His Son.

So, if you want to know the first key to understanding this book, here's the first verse: and it's the will of God that Jesus is revealed to you. It is literally the testimony of the entire Bible. Jesus said, in John 5:39, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me." Right? These religious guys, they were all.....they could quote verses, but they had no relationship with God. And Jesus said, "You think in them you have eternal life, but they talk and they testify and they point to me." It is especially true here in the end, especially in these end times. If we lose sight of that truth, it is easy to become sidetracked. I'm amazed - when people ask about Revelation - the things that they want to know, and it usually has nothing to do with Jesus. They want to talk about all the ancillary things - and we'll cover them as we go because they're important to be here - but you should understand that this book is only interested in you knowing Him better.

So what kind of titles do you find of the Lord in this book? Chapter 1:5, He's "the faithful witness, He's the firstborn from the dead, He's the ruler over the kings of the earth." Verse 8 says He's "the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, He is who is and who was and who is to come, He is the Almighty" (in verse 8 of chapter 1). He is the First and the Last. He is the Son of Man. He is the One who lives. He holds the seven stars in His right hand. He walks in the midst of the

seven golden candlesticks. He has a two-edged sword in His hand, chapter 2:12. He's called the Son of God in chapter 2:18. He has eyes like flames of fire, His feet like fine brass. He has the seven spirits of God. He is holy, we are told in chapter 3:7, He is true. He has the keys of David. He opens and no one shuts, He shuts and no one opens. He's the Amen, the Faithful, the True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, the Lamb, the Lord God Almighty, the King of the saints, the Word of God, the Bright and Morning Star. He's the Lord Jesus. Go through. Make a list. The names that He picked so that you might know Him better. And isn't He the One that you really want to know? He's the focus, He's the centerpiece, He's the message, He's the glory. You'll find Him ruling and reigning and victorious and powerful. And let's face it, He's been waiting for this to come and make you know Him. This is what He's been waiting for.

In chapters 1 and 2 and 3, it's Jesus the Priest and the King. In chapters 4 and 5, it is Jesus the Lamb of God reigning from His throne. In chapters 6-19, it is Jesus the Judge over all of the earth. And then, in chapters 20 and 21, it is Jesus the Bridegroom and reigning Lord of lords and King of kings.

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants - things which must shortly take place;" which God gave to Jesus to give to His servants. Not only is this the revelation of Jesus Christ, but is the revelation to Jesus Christ and to us through Him. Remember when Jesus emptied Himself and He became fully man, and He lived by the power of the Holy Spirit, when the disciples asked Him about those days, He said, in Mark 13:32, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Now that would be hard for you if you didn't know that Jesus was true God and true man and that, when He was here, He emptied Himself of the privileges that He owned. He didn't keep, if you will, that relationship as Son of God in terms of power. He becomes our example, so we have to live like He lived - by the power of God's Spirit, by the power of God's Word. We have to rely upon Him. And Jesus, as fully man, and like we, we don't know the day or the hour. And so He clearly said that, "I don't know the day or the hour." In Acts 1:6-7, right before He is ascended into heaven, " 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.' " So, while He was with us, Jesus was in the same place we are; He had emptied Himself. We don't know, either, the day or the time, but we're to be ready as we know the times and the seasons. In glory, though, Jesus was given

the details. Obviously He is God, and He is able to set those aside and pick those up. Can't explain that to you. I just know that's what the Bible declares. And then He passes them along to His servants. "I, Jesus," Revelation 22:16, "have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." So, He knows now.

So it was given to Him, and now He gives it to John, who passes it along to us; these "things which must shortly take place." I want you to notice a couple of words. The word "must" would guarantee that it would take place. "Must." Because "the Scriptures cannot be broken." And if the Lord said, "This must happen," then you can count on it. This is going to happen. "The Scriptures cannot be broken," John 10:35. The words "*enginoma*" in Greek mean quickly but not in the sense of "it has to happen right now." It is mostly written in the sense that when something begins, it will quickly be finished. So the words "*enginoma*" mean when it starts, it doesn't last a long time, or once the process begins, it will be finished. All of these words in this book that speak of the nearness of the Lord or the soon coming of the Lord or very soon or shortly or quickly, they all denote the closeness of time from God's perspective. Remember a thousand years are to the Lord like a day that's passed (2 Peter 3:8). To us, twenty minutes is a long time if we're waiting for lunch. When you get to the end of the book, and it says, "Behold, I come quickly," (Revelation 22:7, 12, 20) again, you are confronted with that, "When?!" And I know for us it seems like forever. But God has a plan for the church that will be carried out, and the threads of prophecy found throughout the Scriptures are pulled together in this book, and it'll make like a quilt; but in short order, He will really carry forward everything that you find here so that, for the most part, except for that Millennial reign, when the church gets taken away, within seven years this is all going to be over with. Right? And then there's really just stuff at the end - chapters 19, 20, 21. So, much of this book will take place in record time once it starts. And it might start tonight. Who knows? Whenever the Lord decides to come. I know when we feel we're waiting for the Lord, soon and very soon isn't soon enough, but it'll be soon enough once it starts.

Notice that "He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John." The word "signified," "*semaino*" in Greek, means to give a sign to or to make something known by an indicator. You could almost instead of signify call it sign-ify. Sign-ify. When Jesus said to the disciples (John 12:32-33), "If I be lifted up from the earth, I'll draw all men to Myself," and then it says, "This He sign-ified by which death He should die."

So, being a prophetic book, verse 3, and the unveiling of the soon-coming events from the Lord, we would suppose that there would be symbols and signs, and you are right. There are more signs and symbols in this book than all of the other books put together. A form of the word "signify" - and that's why I guess I'm stopping on that - is often used by John in the gospels; one of his favorite words. John, if you know John's gospel, picked seven miracles of Jesus and built his case that Jesus was God around those seven miracles. He explains them, he surrounds them. He adds the words "by this that you'll know that I am." You've seen that phrase, right? The "I am's" of God. There're seven of them in the book of John (chapter 6:35,41,48,51; 8:12; 10:7,9; 10:11,14; 11:25; 14:6, 15:1,5); seven arguments, if you will, and they are all used by John as signs to signify. And so John translates this word "miracles." He translates this same word "signs and wonders," as he writes about the proofs found in the work of Jesus that sign-ifies, signifies, who He truly was.

Lest you worry about how do we sort out the signs, like I said when we started, 50% of all of the signs and symbols in this book are defined for us in the book itself. Literally 38% of the others are found in common usage in the Old Testament. So that puts you to near 90% before we ever even wonder about the other 10%. So, we'll take what the Bible clearly defines in the context. We'll go hunting for those examples used by the Lord constantly in the Old Testament so that we're on the right footing and we're not just kind of out there "Mary-had-a-little-lamb" approach, and we'll stick with what we know. And I think we'll be just fine in determining what the signs mean. Even the numbers that are used, which are important in this book, and their usages, are clearly defined for us. And so we'll see what the number seven means because there're a lot of number sevens in this first chapter. Why seven? Why not six? Why not twelve?

Why are there so many signs? Well, I'll give you a couple of reasons why I think, and I'm just giving you my opinions here. Number one: certainly as the parables, signs tend to make things clearer to those who want to know the Lord, and they tend to hide things from people that don't care. So, God is gracious. He doesn't want you to be more guilty of all that you are already guilty of. Signs and wonders, I think, convey greater insight and emotions and are clearer than just words. You might read the word "dictator," and you get one sense of things. But if you read, "he's a beast, and he destroys," you go, "Oh, I get it. That's far more descriptive to me than a word is." And God goes out of His way to paint color pictures, not just draw in black and white. Signs and their applications usually don't change as quickly

as words do. Words tend to lose their meaning. I had a fellow one time.....well, we used to use the Old King James a lot - but there's a Scripture in the Old Testament that says that we shouldn't lease. Now the word "lease" in the Old Testament, at least in those days, means to lie. Well I was leasing a car, and he came to rebuke me and showed me this verse. "Hey, bro, you're not even supposed to lease. Look, it's right here." And I said, "Wow! What do you think that meant to David? He leased a chariot, you think, or somethin'? I don't know." (Laughing) But the word had changed its meaning. It doesn't mean the same thing. And yet symbolism doesn't change with usage of words. They tend to maintain their longevity. So if you go to 1 Thessalonians (we just went through that a while back), chapter 4:15, there's a word "prevent." And as we know the word "prevent," it means to keep back. But if you go to the 1611 King James Version, prevent means to go before or to go first; absolutely a different word. So words tend to get lost in cultural exchanges. Signs and wonders oftentimes do not. And I suspect that's why this last book, that it has to maintain itself through generations, is filled with those kinds of examples so that we don't lose the integrity of what God wants to teach us. So God gives to us these signs and wonders that will, I think, more clearly mark out for us His Word, His will.

He came to John, notice, "by His angel," "signified it by His angel." Doesn't tell us who this angel is. My guess is - and, again, using the Scriptures - that it is Gabriel. He seems to be the post office guy from the heavens. He seems to be good at delivering messages. He went to Daniel in chapters 8 and 9, he went to Zacharias in Luke 1, he went to Mary in Luke 1, he went to Joseph in Matthew 1. He seems to show up a lot of times with information. That's my guess. I don't have any other proof of that other than I have five other places where God sent messages, and He sent them through the same angel, and I have no other name of any other angel in the Bible that delivered messages on any kind of a regular basis. So, extrapolation. Let the Bible have the last word.

John is called by the Lord, here, a "servant," "to His servant," notice, verse 1. The word "servant" is the word for "*doulos*." I know that if you've been around for a while, you've heard that word before. The word "*doulos*" describes a slave who has come to a place in his slavery relationship with an owner where he is allowed to go free. But, because he loves the owner and wants to serve him, he chooses now not to leave but to become a servant of him by choice. It was marked out by having a gold hoop put through his ear. Everyone that saw him realized he was someone that had chosen to be a slave for life. It becomes a great word of description for

you and me as far as God's servants; we choose to serve the Lord. It is a choice that we make. We line up with Him. We yield ourselves. A good place to be. If you want to hear from God, it's good to have a hoop through your ear. You want God to speak to you, it's a good thing to be His servant. And so God spoke to this very faithful, nearly-100-year-old guy.

As with all prophecy, God uses it to provide assurance that He is God. So I mentioned it to you earlier, but if you read Isaiah 48:5, the LORD said through Isaiah to the people, "Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you." And so He makes the argument that if you want to know if God is true, then listen to what He says before it happens. A lot of people can tell you what they think, but if God's always right, if He's 100% right, at some point you have to be convinced, "Man, maybe He knows what He's talkin' about!" In Isaiah 41:23, "Show the things that are to come hereafter," He says, "that we may know that you are gods." "Show me the things that are coming later, and then I'll know, and then I'll believe in you," said Isaiah to the false prophets. So, the Lord has always used His Word to identify who He is. In John 14:29, the Lord said to the disciples, "And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He." Over 300 prophecies were fulfilled when Jesus came the first time. There is literally an equal number of prophecies that will be fulfilled when the Lord comes the second time. I'm not going to argue with you that there're three or five, four or ten, in either direction, but they're pretty close in terms of what we're waiting on. In Isaiah 44, God challenged the false prophets to do as He had done in declaring something before it came to pass, and they kind of turned away. And in chapter 45 of Isaiah, if you've read it, the LORD calls for a fellow named King Cyrus. He calls him that by name. He calls him that 175 years before he was born. And it was later, when he was born, that everyone went back and said, "Wow, man, the LORD knew. You've got to listen to what Isaiah has to say." So, God tells us in great details what is coming to prove yet again that He is God and can be trusted.

So, "The Revelation of Jesus, which God gave to Jesus to show His servants - things which must shortly take place. And He sent" (and He sent signs and wonders) "by His angel to His servant John," verse 2, "who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw." John bore witness, the word "*martureo*," the word "martyr." That's what this word is. It doesn't usually mean to die, although that's the way we use it. It means to bear witness or to testify. He uses that word, I think, three times in this chapter

(verses 2, 5, 9). John is here to bear witness. To what? "To the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus." By the way, those are the exact same things. Since Jesus is God, this is the Word of God from Jesus the Son. And all that John saw and was shown about this, John would record. He was a faithful recorder. In fact, the words "I saw" and "I heard" are written by John sixty times in forty-four separate visions in this book. So, John's going to tell you a lot. "I saw one of these, I saw one of those." You know, you'd think he'd lost his mind if it wasn't for the fact that the Lord had come to speak to him.

And then, finally, verse 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." Now we are told in many places of the blessings that come from studying the Bible or knowing God's Word or believing what He has to say or obeying Him. But here's a special blessing expressly promised to those dealing with this book: the testimony, the prophecy of Jesus, the Word of God. A blessing. Not confusion. But a blessing to know what is here. This is the first - and you can mark them down for yourself - of seven "blessed is he" declarations in this book; that God says, "Hey, you are blessed," and then He will add or fill in the blank. Declarations of interest. And it's interesting that a book so often set aside and ignored by so many has this accompanying promise of blessing. So I said there're six others - blessings - in the book of Revelation. One's in chapter 14, one's in chapter 16, one's in chapter 19, one's in chapter 20, two are in chapter 22. You can find those for yourself if they're not written down. But here's the deal. Notice, in verse 3, that the blessings are dependent upon three present-tense participles. Blessings are promised to those who continue to read, continue to hear, and continue to keep because that's the way that it is written in Greek. So it's a matter of.....it's not just reading it or hearing it or keeping myself in it, but it's to continually surround myself with these promises of God, the character of God, the nature of God, the coming of the Lord. It is going to bless your life over and over and over again if you'll stay in that place. And notice what he says, "the time is near." The word "*kairos*" is the word for time here. It is a period of time as opposed to "*ora*," which is hour, or "*chronos*," which means an exact time. The period when all of these things shall take place is nearby, is close, is almost upon us. And, again, it is first and foremost in God's terms of thinking. In other words, God sees all that is coming as just there. Right? It is coming right here. Whatever He's waiting for, however long He is patiently waiting for the last fruit, in God's point of view, this - what we're reading - is right here. Right? It is near to Him, it is near to us.

So it should be our hope as well. The furniture that is Bible prophecy - He puts it on the stage, and the curtain's about to go up. I love the book. I'm excited to go through it with you. I don't think you'll be confused. I hope we'll give you the answers that you're hoping for, to understand. I'll be happy to take on the challenging things that you might be confused about. I'll be happy some Wednesday nights to just take questions if that's what you want to do. But I want you to know the book well, and I want you to walk around with your Bible, going, "I know this book because the Lord's coming. Ask me anything." It would be the best. Amen? (Congregation responds, "Amen.")

Next week we're going to go to verse 8. We're going to really pick up the pace. The "Greetings to the Church." And then the third week we're going to go through one-third of this chapter - from verse 19, "what you have seen" - as John is going to be given a vision of the Son of God, and we're going to call that, "Face to Face With Jesus," from verse 9 through verse 20. Those are the first three weeks of introduction. And then we'll start each week - for the next seven weeks after that - looking at one letter to the churches and how they apply to us today. So that'll be our next nine weeks. Don't miss it. Let's pray.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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