

## Series Revelation

### This Message #1 Revelation 1:1-8

Today we begin a series of messages from Revelation, the last book of the New Testament. One part of me is eager to dig into this book because there is promised a special blessing for individuals who study the material. On the other hand, I am hesitant to enter into this study because there are already many many interpretations of the information, and not just a little controversy among commentators about which interpretation is best. No matter what I say in the weeks ahead, there will be critics who will question my opinions.

There is an important reason why believers should study this book. It was written to provide comfort and hope to believers, especially to those who find themselves in a struggle against the oppressive forces of evil. Evil is increasing on our planet. There is more and more rebellion against God, and the Church is becoming more and more restricted in its activities. However, this situation will not continue indefinitely. The book of Revelation makes it clear that Jesus will return to earth to complete His work of bringing all things under the authority and control of Almighty God.

The overarching theme of our study is **“The Victory of Christ and His Church Over Satan and the World.”**

The theme verse we will use is from chapter 17: “They (the forces of evil) will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers” (*Revelation 17:14*).

### Read Revelation 1:1-3

The first three verses of Chapter 1 are the Introduction. The title of the book is given in the first verse, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” The word “revelation” is a translation of the Greek word “apokalypsis,” which means the unveiling or uncovering of something that has been hidden or secret. As stated in verse 1, God was going to “show his servants what must soon take place.”

God has given an incredible amount of information to His followers throughout human history. In fact, the purposes of God began to be revealed in creation itself<sup>1</sup>. God's plan for redemption and atonement began to unfold in Genesis chapter 3. From Genesis 12 we learned about God's plan to raise up a unique people group which would represent Him before all the Gentile people groups on earth. Other chapters in the Old Testament describe the system of substitutionary sacrifices leading to Jesus as the perfect sacrifice. Other passages reveal to us that the One who would be victorious over evil would be a Prophet like Moses, a Priest like Melchizedek, a King like David, an obedient Servant, a Son of Man, and the Son of God. In the New Testament the Church is given the responsibility to make the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ known throughout the world.

All of the major theological themes of Scripture have been revealed to us in progressive ways. Slowly and systematically, through the centuries, God has given us in His Word all the information we need to understand who He is, who we are, and how we can live in relation to Him. The Book of Revelation completes the picture of how God will bring human history to a close.

According to verse 1, the content of the book concerns "what must soon take place." The phrase, "what will happen," or "take place," is found in another biblical book concerned with the future, the book of Daniel. In the second chapter of that book, Daniel had the opportunity to explain and interpret the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar<sup>2</sup>. Daniel began his explanation by stating, "There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the days to come" (*Daniel 2:28*). The dream to which Daniel referred was an overview of the long range plan of the sovereign God of heaven. In the book of Revelation, God revealed the concluding events of that plan. God wanted the servants of Jesus to know details which would "soon take place."

Notice that it was God the Father who initiated the revelation. It was given to Jesus so that He in turn would make the information known to His servants. The information from Jesus was conveyed through a mediating angel to one particular servant, John, and that servant was responsible to make a written account of "everything he saw." The chain of communication was from God the Father to Jesus to an angel to John and to believers.

John “testified to everything he saw.” Information was given to him by means of visual pictures and signs and symbols, as well as through spoken words. The visions John saw were based on “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Most likely “the word of God” is a reference to statements made by the Old Testament prophets. They frequently spoke about the end times, and there are many references in Revelation to what they said. “The testimony of Jesus Christ” would include the New Testament gospel accounts and letters which had previously been written by the apostles.

Many people who attempt to read and study the book of Revelation give up quickly because, they say, it is impossible to know for certain the meanings of the symbols. However, if we keep in mind that the pictures in Revelation are based on identifiable Old and New Testament passages, we can figure out the meanings. The symbols were to be “shown” to the servants of Jesus so that they would be “blessed,” not frustrated. If believers throughout the centuries were to be blessed, then the visions seen and described by John had to be understood by believers in the first Century as well as by believers during the past 1900 years, and by us today. This is possible if we know our Old and New Testament Scriptures.

The words given to Daniel in the 500s B. C. were to be "closed up and sealed until the time of the end" (*Daniel 12:9*). In contrast, the words of John were not to be sealed; rather, they were to be openly read, shared, and obeyed "because the time is near."

The phrases, “because the time is near,” and “must soon take place,” indicate that the events described by John, were, for him, both future and imminent. In eschatological writings the future is always viewed as imminent. John uses the two phrases to indicate that, from the standpoint of prophetic revelation, the next significant event will be the revelation of Jesus Christ. In other words, the next phase of God’s program for the earth will be the events described in this book. From our standpoint, the events in the book of Revelation are still future and imminent.

The Church for 1900 years has lived with the expectancy that the consummation of all things could happen in its day. When people assume that life will go on forever, one day often blurs into another, but when believers are reminded that life has an end, and that all the wrongs of life will be set right, and that they will someday be with God, then every moment and every activity can come alive and be filled with hopeful anticipation. The promise in verse 3 is that believers who read, hear and take to heart what is written in the book of Revelation will be blessed. The announcement that "the time is near" creates a kind of jubilant anticipation about what God is going to do.

### **Read Revelation 1:4-8**

Revelation is presented to us in the form of a very long letter. John followed the conventional style of letter writing in his era: first, he identified himself as the author; second, the recipients of the letter are identified (the seven churches in the province of Asia); third, there is a greeting introduced by the words "grace" and "peace."

Notice that the source of "grace" and "peace" is the Trinity: Father, Holy Spirit, and the Son. The Father is identified by the description "who is, and who was, and who is to come." This is a paraphrase of the words spoken by God in Exodus chapter 3 when Moses asked God to identify Himself (*Exodus 3:14-15*). It was the name which appeared throughout the Old Testament as "YAHWEH." The words represent the timelessness of God and His unchangeable nature in relationship to His covenant people.

"Grace" and "peace" also comes from "the seven spirits before his (God's) throne." The phrase can also be translated "the sevenfold Spirit." In the Bible, the number "seven" is associated with perfection, fulfillment, and completeness. After the ascension of Jesus to heaven, the Spirit was given to believers as proof that God was living within them, and to empower and guide believers as they served Jesus Christ in the world and in the Church.

In verse 5 we read that "grace" and "peace" is also granted by Jesus Christ. John does more than just mention Jesus, as he did in the case of the Father and the Spirit. He ascribes three titles to Jesus in order to focus attention on Jesus' person and work. Jesus is "the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." These titles correspond with three stages of Jesus' saving work, from His obedience and death on the cross to his resurrection to His present position at the Father's right hand.

As we can see, the information in this book is presented as coming from the three members of the Godhead, Father, Holy Spirit, and Jesus the Son. However, the overwhelming focus in the book is on Jesus — who He is, what He is doing, and will do at the end of the age. Jesus is the One who will come to judge the living and the dead, and to rule over all creation.

In verses 5 and 6, John does something unusual: he adds a doxology to the salutation of the letter. This was his way to draw the attention of his readers to the fact that Jesus will be at the center of all the activities he will write about. John looks back on what Jesus had accomplished on behalf of His people — accomplishments which have on-going benefits: Jesus “loves us” and “has freed us from our sins,” and “has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.” The love of Jesus was unmistakably revealed in his atoning death, by which he purchased our release from the captivity of sin. His power has been revealed in his ability to transform individual lives through his “blood.” Those individuals who place their faith in Jesus are inducted into the kingdom of God.

In the Old Testament, it was said of Israel that they would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation if they obeyed the commands of God (*Exodus 19:6*). In the same way that the ancient Israelites were redeemed from bondage in Egypt, John reminds his readers that they had been redeemed and called by God to be His priestly servants. As “priests” of God, believers have both direct access to God and the task of serving the One who is both God and Father to Jesus. The point here is that we have been called to represent God to the world. All believers are members of a collective priesthood, but each individual believer is expected to be a ministering priest before God, the same God and Father that Jesus serves.

The doxology concludes with the words, “to him (Jesus) be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen!” “Glory” refers to the honor and renown which rightly belong to Him. This would include our love, praise, submission, and worship because of who He is and what He has done. “Power” and “dominion” rightly belong to Him. The word “power” can be translated “authority” and “sovereignty.” “For ever and ever” — what Jesus accomplished during His time on earth has eternal benefits. With these words, John both concludes what has been said about the past work of Jesus and introduces what he is about to say regarding Jesus’ return.

In verse 7 the emphasis shifts from past to future. What Jesus will do in the future is summed up in the announcement: “Look, he is coming.” His return is the climactic event in everything that “must soon take place.”

Jesus’ coming back to earth will be supernatural (“with the clouds”) and, in some manner, will be open and recognizable to every person, even to those who “pierced” him (put him to death). “Those who pierced him” included Pilate, the Jewish Priests, the Jewish leaders who demanded His crucifixion, and the Roman soldiers. Just how these people might be able to see Jesus is not known. The next phrase is even more astounding: “all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.” The “mourning” of the peoples might be the result of their shock and sorrow for their neglect of and rebellion against the Son of God, but more probably the mourning will be caused by their fear of the impending judgment to which they will be subjected.

Verse 7 introduces what will happen to non-believers. Verse 8 gives assurance to believers. The Lord God is the speaker in this verse, and His statement is like His imprimatur (signature) on the letter to be written by John. In verse 8 God the Father vouches for the truthfulness and certainty of the coming of Jesus.

There are four names of God in verse 8, names that reveal His character and authenticate His actions. He is “the Alpha and the Omega.” The letters “alpha” and “omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. They have the meaning of “First” and “Last,” and “Beginning” and “End.” God is described in Scripture as the source of all creation and as the One who will bring human history to its conclusion, as the One who existed before creation and who will continue to exist after the physical creation is terminated. Therefore He is the “Lord God” over all.

The statement, “who is, and who was, and who is to come,” describes His eternal existence, and this means that He is always present as far as time is concerned. The title, “the Almighty,” is a description of His sovereignty. It means that He “has his hand on everything” and everything is under His control.

Both verses 1 and 8 indicate that it was God the Father who initiated the visions which were given to John and through John to the Church. When Jesus was explaining His return at the end of the age to His disciples, He stated, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (*Matthew 24:36*). John cannot give us a date for the return of Jesus, but he gives us the assurance that it will be the next significant event in the Father's program for His creation, and that it will be soon. John, like Jesus, wanted believers to be ready.

<sup>1</sup> *see the series of messages entitled "Immanuel, God With Us" on the <proclaiming-gods-word.com> website.*

<sup>2</sup> *see the series of messages on the book of Daniel on the <proclaiming-gods-word.com> website.*