

Revelation

Escape the Coming Wrath!

Lesson 1

Chapter 1:1-8

The vision of His Glory!

Introduction:

The late British Prime Minister Winston Churchill once described the former Soviet Union as “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” Many Christians view the book of Revelation in much the same way. Bewildered by its mystifying symbolism and striking imagery, many believers (including some pastors, who never preach through Revelation) avoid serious study of the book...Such shortsightedness deprives believers of the blessings the book promises those who diligently read it (Revelation 1:3; 22:7).

Those who ignore Revelation deprive themselves of a rich treasure of divine truth. Revelation takes a high view of God’s inspired Word. It claims divine inspiration for itself (1:1, 2), and it has been estimated that 278 of its 404 verses allude to the inspired Old Testament Scriptures. Revelation reveals God the Father in all His glory and majesty, describing Him as holy (4:8), true (6:10), omnipotent (4:11), wise (7:12), sovereign (4:11), and eternal (4:10). Revelation details the depths of man’s depravity. Despite experiencing the final outpouring of God’s devastating wrath and judgment on sinful mankind, people will nevertheless harden their hearts (like Pharaoh before them; I Samuel 6:6) and refuse to repent (9:20-21; 16:9, 11). Scripture contains no clearer summation of the doctrine of redemption than that of Revelation 1:5, which declares that “Jesus Christ...loves us and released us from our sins by His blood.” The ministry of angels also figures prominently in Revelation, which contains one out of every four references to angels in Scripture. Revelation warns the church of the dangers of sin and compromise with the world (chapters 2-3), and teaches it how to properly worship God (chapters 4-5)...

Far from being the mysterious, incomprehensible book many imagine it to be, Revelation’s purpose is to reveal truth, not to obscure it. The fact is evident in its title, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1), primarily in His second coming glory. *Apokalupsis* (“Revelation”) could be translated “an uncovering,” “an unveiling,” or “a disclosure”...*Apokalupsis* describes something (or someone) that was formerly hidden, but now becomes visible. Revelation unveils truths only hinted at in the Old Testament and other New Testament books...¹ (See A-6)

The book of Revelation is the ultimate action thriller. Anyone who loves books filled with adventure and excitement will certainly love this book. The amazing Revelation contains drama, suspense, mystery, passion, and horror. It tells of apostasy by the church. It speaks of unprecedented economic collapse, and of the ultimate war of human history—the war that will truly end all wars. It describes natural disasters rivaled in intensity only by the worldwide Flood of Noah’s day, as God will pour out His **wrath** on the sin-cursed earth. It speaks of the political intrigues that will lead to the ascendancy of the most evil and powerful dictator the world has ever known. Finally, and most terrifying of all, it describes the final judgment and the sentencing of all rebels, angelic and human, to eternal torment in hell. The book of Revelation is thus a book of astounding drama, horror, and pathos. Yet, amazingly, it is also a book of hope and joy with a happy ending, as sin, sorrow, and death are forever banished (21:4; 22:3).

¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Revelation 1-11*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999). 1-3.

It will take some time for the drama to unfold, so, like any good writer, John gives his readers a preview of what will come later in the book. By so doing, he reveals the theme of the book of Revelation: It is a book about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.²

1. Read verses 1-3 and answer the following questions:
 - a. What does the word “revelation” mean?
 - b. Who is the central theme of this book?
 - c. Who is the source of this divine book (II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:20-21)?
 - d. Who can understand it (I Corinthians 2:14; II Corinthians 4:3-4)? Who makes it known and how does He make His Word known (II Corinthians 3:14-16)?
 - e. Why do you think John uses so much symbolism throughout Revelation?

In understanding John’s symbolism, however, we must be careful not to allow our imaginations to run wild. Biblical symbols are consistent with the whole of biblical revelation. Some symbols are explained (Rev. 1:20; 4:5; 5:8); others are understood from Old Testament symbolism (Rev. 2:7, 17; 4:7); and some symbols are not explained at all (the “white stone” in Rev. 2:17). Nearly 300 references to the Old Testament are found in Revelation! This means that we must anchor our interpretations to what God has already revealed, lest we misinterpret this important prophetic book.³

- f. To whom is this book addressed? In other words, to whom is John directed to show this revelation?
- g. What is promised to those who read this book? What do you think this means (James 1:22-25)? Read Psalm 1:1-6. Who is blessed according to Psalm 1, and how does he receive this blessing?
- h. What does the word prophecy mean (hint: it has two meanings)?

² Ibid. 27-28.

³ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 2* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1989), 567.

- i. What phrase reveals the urgency of reading this book (Revelation 22:20)?

Revelation is an open book in which God reveals His plans and purposes to His church. When Daniel finished writing his prophecy, he was instructed to “shut up the words, and seal the book” (Daniel 12:4); but John was given opposite instructions: “Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:10). Why? Since Calvary, the Resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, God has ushered in the “last days” (Heb. 1:1-2) and is fulfilling His hidden purposes in this world. “The time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3; 22:10).

John’s prophecy is primarily the revelation of Jesus Christ, not the revelation of future events. You must not divorce the Person from the prophecy, for without the Person there could be no fulfillment of the prophecy. “He is not incidental to its action,” wrote Dr. Merrill Tenney. “He is its chief Subject.” In Revelation 1-3, Christ is seen as the exalted Priest-King ministering to the churches. In Revelation 4-5, He is seen in heaven as the glorified Lamb of God, reigning on the throne. In Revelation 6-18, Christ is the Judge of all the earth; and in Revelation 19, He returns to earth as the conquering King of kings. The book closes with the heavenly Bridegroom ushering His bride, the church, into the glorious heavenly city.

Whatever you do as you study this book, get to know your Savior better.⁴

2. Read verses 4-8 and answer the following questions.

- a. Where are these seven churches located geographically (in what country today)?
- b. Can you identify the Trinity in verses 4 and 5?
- God the Father (See Revelation 4:8 and Exodus 3:14-15)
 - God the Holy Spirit (the phrase, the seven spirits, can be translated, the seven-fold Spirit—See Isaiah 11:2)
 - God the Son
- c. Give three phrases that describe Jesus and what do these mean to you (John 18:37; the greek word for firstborn, *prototokos*, does not mean firstborn in time sequence, but rather first in preeminence.⁵ Psalm 2:6-8; Matt. 2:2; John 1:49)?

⁴ Ibid. 566.

⁵ MacArthur, 25.

- d. What has Jesus done for us according to verses 5 and 6 (I Peter 1:18-20; 2:9-10)?
- e. What does verse 7 state will happen in the future (Matthew 16:27; 24-25; 26:64; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; II Peter 3:3-4)? Also, read Acts 1:6-11. What will people do who witness this (Zechariah 12:10-12)? Why?

The overriding theme of the Book of Revelation is the return of Jesus Christ to defeat all evil and to establish His reign. It is definitely a book of victory and His people are seen as “overcomers” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 11:7; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7). In his first epistle, John also called God’s people “overcomers” (I John 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:4-5). Through eyes of unbelief, Jesus Christ and His church are defeated in this world; but through the eyes of faith, He and His people are the true victors. As Peter Marshall once said, “It is better to fail in a cause that will ultimately succeed than to succeed in a cause that will ultimately fail.”

The statement in Revelation 1:7, “Behold He cometh with clouds,” describes our Lord’s return *to the earth*, and is amplified in Revelation 19:11ff. This is not the same as His return *in the air* to catch away His people (I Thess. 4:13-18; 1Corinthians 15:51ff). When He comes to catch away (rapture) His church, He will come “as a thief” (Rev. 3:3; 16:15) and only those who are born again will see Him (I John 3:1-3). The event described in Revelation 1:7 will be witnessed by the whole world, and especially by a repentant nation of Israel (Daniel 7:13; Zechariah 12:10-12). It will be public, not secret (Matthew 24:30-31), and will climax the Tribulation period described in Revelation 6-19.

Godly bible students have not always agreed as to the order of events leading up to the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom (Revelation 21-22). I personally believe that the next event on God’s calendar is the Rapture, when Christ shall return in the air and take His church to glory. Christ’s promise to the church in Revelation 3:10-11 indicates that the church will not go through the Tribulation, and this is further supported by Paul in I Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9-10. It is significant to me that there is no mention of the word *church* between Revelation 3:22 and 22:16.

After the church is raptured, the events depicted in Revelation 6-19 will occur: the Tribulation, the rise of the “man of sin,” the Great Tribulation (the wrath of God) and the destruction of man-made world government, and then Christ’s return to the earth to set up His kingdom. Daniel indicates that this period of worldwide trouble will last seven years (Daniel 9:25-27). Throughout the Book of Revelation, you will find measurements of time that coincide with this seven-year time span (Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5).⁶

⁶ Wiersbe, 568-569.

- f. Read Psalm 2:6-9, Isaiah 9:6-7, and Micah 4:1-5. What do these verses predict?

- g. Who does Jesus claim to be in verse 8 (John 8:23-30, 54-59)?

- h. Read John 1:1-3, 18. Who is Jesus? The purpose of Revelation is to reveal Jesus to us, that is, to make Him known. Do you know Him?