

Revelation 1:1–20 (ESV)

Prologue

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, **2** who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. **3** Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

Greeting to the Seven Churches

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, **5** and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood **6** and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Vision of the Son of Man

9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. **10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet

11 saying, “**Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum**

and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

What have I done????

I hope I haven't bitten off more than I can chew. I have just created so much work for myself. You know that when I begin preaching a new series on a book of the Bible, I won't stop until I finish... Well, as I speak to you now, I have just begun a new series, on “Revelation”.

As you probably already know, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” is the very last book in the Bible. And if you’ve ever read it, you will **also** realise that it is a **very** difficult book to study.

- I don’t believe there are many who would debate that it is the most difficult book in all of Scripture, to understand.
- It is the favoured haunt of just about every religious nut; cult; and those who are certifiably crazy.
- False prophets draw out of its words, just about any prediction that takes their fancy
- There have been many hours of study and much ink spilled over these pages, to produce every kind of crazy interpretation that anyone could possibly contrive...
- There’s images of creatures with more heads than are natural
- A Lion that is a lamb
- A dragon who uses his tail like a windscreen wiper, to wipe the stars from the sky...

It isn’t any wonder, that many Christians, and in fact, entire churches, never read it. They certainly never study it (except maybe, for a few nice, “feel-good” paragraphs).

Now, if there is **one** book of the Bible, that the Devil doesn’t want you to read, it’s this one. Satan **hates** this book. Do you know why? Because when disciples of Jesus Christ read this book, it reminds us, that we’re on the winning side, and Satan will meet his doom... And Satan will do anything that he can, to stop us from reading it. Because he wants us to be scared of him...

The only power that Satan can have over us, is fear. But when we read Revelation, it reminds us, that **we're** on the winning side; **Jesus Christ is victorious.**

At times it may **seem** that everything's out of control, and Satan's getting the upper hand, but we are reminded here, that God is **always** on His throne, and through all the events of human history, the world is moving through to God's ultimate plan and purpose.

And the Devil doesn't want you to know this, and so he'll do everything that he can, to prevent you from reading it.

In 2008, I was running a Men's Bible Study, and somebody asked if we could study Revelation, and I was a bit reluctant because I knew there would be a lot of work in the preparation, but I agreed to do it. And do you know how far we got? We got to the end of Revelation chapter 3. The person who asked for it, I think only came to 1 or 2 of the studies...

But another person turned up. As soon as this person heard we were studying Revelation, he wanted to be in it. And so he turned up with his tattered exercise book, and his bible... And I think that he'd spent most of his 70 years, writing in his bible, every note that he could find, from every nut-case who'd ever said a word on Revelation...

And he insisted that it was so clear, that this particular verse is talking about aliens coming from outer space....

And he just wanted to take over, and share his “wisdom”.

And he ruined that study. We had to stop. And I'm going to give you warning now – Satan will do whatever he can, to prevent you from reading and studying the book of Revelation.

So, if it's all so hard, why are we beginning this study at all? Why did I choose the book of Revelation for our next series???

Well, I'll give you 4 reasons:

- Firstly because somebody has asked for it
- Secondly, because I know **I** will benefit by studying this book, and getting it clear in my head
- Thirdly, because “Revelation”, is the **greatest** encouragement for the persecuted church, **and** the greatest **preparation** for a church that is about to meet persecution.

And with the rise of Islam all over the world, and with the rise of anti-Christian ideologies (even in our own country), I can see a time (and I don't believe it's so far away) when the Christian church in Australia will be persecuted. And we need to be prepared for it.

- And the fourth reason we're going to be studying it, is because I'm a blessing Junkie.

This is the only book in the Bible, that pronounces a blessing on those who **read** it, and a blessing on those who hear it **being** read. It's also the only book in the Bible, that

pronounces a curse on those who add to the words, or take away from them.

So, the blessing: in ^{1:3} **Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.**

Today, there's a blessing for me. And there's also a blessing for you. The NIV translates it "**Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy**", But the NRSV and the ESV are a more correct translation, by saying **Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy...**

And that's what we're going to be doing here – We're going to be reading it aloud. And that's exactly what Jesus intended. The Revelation, was a revelation given by Jesus Christ, to John... And John's task, was to write it down, so that it could do a circuit around 7 churches in Asia. (modern day Turkey)

It would go to Ephesus; and Smyrna; and Pergamum; and then on to Thyatira; and Sardis; and Philadelphia; and then finally to Laodicea... It was a revelation of Jesus Christ, and it was to be given to these 7 churches. It was to be read **aloud** in these churches. And the one who would do the reading would be blessed. (I was blessed this morning).

And those who hear, would also be blessed. But only if they keep what is written in it...

So, you and I will be blessed, as we study this book. But only if we follow what it says.

In addition to this, being the preacher here, I must **not** ignore the warning of the curse in Chapter 22.

¹⁸ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book (Oww, it's **not** only the preacher who's being warned – it's a warning for you as well "anyone who **hears** the words of the prophecy of this book"): if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

My role as a preacher, is (with God's help) to try and help you to understand what Jesus Christ is telling us in His revelation.

And I'm going to be right up front... There's going to be **many** times during this series, when I will say the words "I don't know what this means".

Many bible teachers will have you believe, that they **do** know what everything means – that they have it all nussed out, and that they will be able to tell you exactly, what everything in the Revelation means...

I just want to say, if you ever come across anyone like that, be **very wary** of them. You see, throughout the last couple of thousand years, many people have claimed to know exactly

what everything means, and yet very rarely do any two of them agree.

Even if you just take a look at one well-known cult (the Jehovah Witnesses) Based on Revelation and Daniel and other Scriptures, they have had many failures at prophecy, and yet they just won't give up. 1874; 1878; 1881; 1910; 1914; 1918; 1925; 1975; and 1984, have all been marked as times of eschatological significanceⁱ ... (By the way, I'm not a big user of big words, but I do want you to learn the word "eschatological". It means to do with end times.

- The "eschaton" = "the end times"
- "eschatology" = "the **study** of end times"; and
- "eschatological" = "relating to end times" ...

It's just that I don't know any other word to use. And out of those 3 words, "eschatological" is the one that I will use most. So, we could say that the book of Revelation, is seen by most people as "an eschatological book" – It is seen by most people, as being a book that relates to end times.

OK, so have we all added "eschatological" to our vocabulary????

Where was I? Ah yes, *the Jehovah's Witnesses. Have made so many failed predictions, surrounding:*

- *when the last days begin, and*
- *when Jesus comes back, and*
- *when the world will end.*

And of course, as those dates pass, they just keep changing them.

So, please be very wary of anyone who tells you, that they've got it all figured out.

I'm telling you now, "**I don't have it all figured out**". And I will not be adding to this book.

And **nor** will I be taking **away** from it.

Not many modern "feel good" preachers will ever venture into Revelation. If they do, they tend to just concentrate on the nice bits, where Jesus will wipe every tear from their eye... or the picture of the throne room of heaven....

But let me warn you now, if you have a picture in your mind of a "gentle Jesus, meek and mild", you're going to have that image ripped to shreds, when you hear about Jesus, and His wrath, and his judgment... – We won't be leaving those bits out... Cursed are those who do.

Well, I've racked my brain to think "What do I include in the introduction?" and "What do we leave for the study itself?"

And I reckon I'd better share with you, the 4 different categories that most interpretations fall into:

And I know I promised you that I wasn't going to use a lot of big words, but I'm about to use some. But you don't have to remember these ones (You just remember the word "eschatological")

Alright, so the 4 views on how to understand "Revelation":

1. Preterist

The first view, is what's called the "Preterist view". And a preterist believes the Revelation was written **about** and **for**, John's generation. They believe that he uses "veiled language", to describe events that happened, in John's day...

What was it like in John's day? Well, it was pretty tough. Christians were being persecuted, and it was an age when Christians were set apart from everybody else, because they wouldn't bow down and worship the Roman Emperor...

You've heard about Christians being fed to the lions in the Coliseum. Christians were tortured to try and get them to renounce Jesus, and bow down to Caesar. Their homes and their property were confiscated; there was a great deal of pressure upon them.

And so the Preterist believes that the Revelation was written about and for, John's generation. That John was recording what he could see happening.

2. Futurist

The second view, is what's called the "futurist view". And the futurist believes, that the revelation is a prophecy of things to come.

3. Historicist

The third view, is what's called the "historicist view". And the historicist believes, that the Revelation, is a chart of

history, from Jesus' first coming, to His second coming.
(maybe some branches of dispensationalism may fit here)

4. Idealist

And the fourth view, is what's called the "Idealist view". And the idealist believes that the Revelation doesn't deal with historical events at all (whether they be past; present; or future). Rather it deals with **principals** that are always valid in Christian experience. Alright, so (in their view) it doesn't point specifically to any part of history – it just contains principals that we can learn to apply in Christian discipleship – no matter what era we live in.

So, at this point, you're probably wanting me to tell you which one of those 4 are right, hey....

Well, I'm probably going to disappoint you, because I actually believe there's elements of truth to all 4 of them.

v19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

Alright, so there's no doubt about it. V19 tells us that it's historical "write down those things **that are**". But it also tells us that it's looking to the future "write down those things **that are to take place after this**".

And it seems to me, that the Revelation of Jesus Christ, is like much of **Old** Testament prophecy – in that it seems to have a double fulfilment.

Yes, Revelation was speaking about events in John's day and shortly thereafter. The church went through terrible tribulation... But has Jesus come back yet? No, He hasn't. And so it continues to look forward to the future.

But **also**, I believe that if we read revelation as it is, we have to understand that severe persecution is yet to come. The great tribulation will be reminiscent of the tribulation experienced by the 7 churches in Asia (Turkey).

The great tribulation will be reminiscent of what Christians are experiencing today, in *North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Eritrea*.... (that's the top 10 places of Christian persecution, according to the 2017 Open Doorsⁱⁱ world watch list).

So, it **is** looking to the past; It **is** looking to the future; And no matter what era we live in, it **does** deal with principals that are always valid in the Christian experience. From the time Jesus ascended into heaven, we have been living in the last days. And whether it be 5 days until Jesus returns, or whether it be another 5000 years, disciples of Jesus must be ready.

But I'm pretty sure you'll soon realise that I believe the Revelation of Jesus Christ, is primarily preparing us for the future, And so I guess I'm more of a "futurist".

Righto: I set for myself that as part of the introduction, I would cover vs1-3 today. (and we've already done most of that). But I haven't looked at the very first word.

The very first word in the book, is the one which gives it its name: Ἀποκάλυψις (apokalypsis) which means “unveiling” “revelation”. It means that something was hidden, but **now** it’s been revealed.

The book of Revelation, is **not** meant to hide God’s purpose – it is meant to **reveal** it..... It doesn’t reveal **every** single event, and it doesn’t tell us when it’s all going to happen... But when we **do** see these events unfolding in history, we’re going to have some “aha!!!” moments – “Jesus revealed this was going to happen” – and what else does it reveal? That God is on His throne. God is always in control.

So, if God has given us this revelation, how did it get to us?
Well:

- God gave the Revelation to Jesus
- Through an angel, Jesus made it known to John
- John wrote it down
- And the Revelation got sent to the churches
- And here we are today – I’m reading it, and you’re hearing it.

I do want you to know though, that there is one thing which John heard, which we will not.

In Revelation 10:4, the seven thunders sounded. And John says that he was about to write down what they said, **but I** heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.”

Alright, so a small part of this revelation, remains hidden for us.

The book of Revelation, is what's known as "apocalyptic literature". It means it gives its message in images. And in this day and age of icons and emoticons, we're probably re-discovering the use of images in communication. But the thing with an image, is it's meant to convey a message. It does not paint a picture of exactly what we will see.

Eg: If you see this sign, (and I'll just describe it for those who are listening to the audio) *It's a yellow background, with a black silhouette of a lady with a late 60's style short dress and bob haircut, holding the hand of a child.* Now, if you saw this sign on the side of the road, would you expect to see a lady from the sixties, holding the hand of what I think is a little boy?

No. What is the sign telling us? (children are likely to be crossing the road up ahead)

Alright, what about this sign? And once again for the audio, *Yellow background. Black silhouette of a car. And the skid marks of the car cross from the left to the right, and the right to the left.* Now, is that sign telling us that we will see a car, where the wheels have swapped sides – It's had a tyre rotation in mid transit? No. What does it tell us? (Slippery when wet). If it rains, the road could be slippery just here.

What about this one? *(It's a grey cog [or gear] with 3 spokes, and there are 2 other gears meshing with it.* And if you saw this on your phone or your computer, what do you think it means? Is it telling us to expect to see gears in mesh??? Is it warning us not to get our fingers stuck???? No. What does it mean? (preferences – or settings you can change).

Alright, it's giving a message with images. And apocalyptic literature uses images in exactly the same way. And so when the Revelation talks about a dragon, we shouldn't expect to see a literal dragon – it's telling us something about Satan. When it's talking about a lamb that was slain, we're not going to see an actual lamb – it's talking about Jesus.

And as we work our way through it:

- Some of the signs will be obvious
- Some of them are explained within the revelation itself
- Some of them we can recognise from other parts of the Bible
- And some of the signs, we don't know. We can have a bit of a guess. But we don't really know. But I reckon when the time comes, we **will** know what it means.

OK.... I think we've gone far enough for today. I'm about to go on holidays, and I'm not going to be preaching again for another 3 weeks. So I **was** thinking of not giving the introduction this week, and just doing something else. But I thought "No, let's have the introduction, and that would give everybody the opportunity that over the next 3 weeks, to read the Revelation of Jesus Christ."

How do you feel about a bit of homework? I would encourage you, to read it. You'll be blessed by reading it. And it might start forming some questions in your mind, that we might answer during the series.

So either read it yourself, or you might be able to read it together with your husband or wife. Or your family might

want to read it together. Just over a chapter a day will have it done in the 3 weeks.

Questions.

ⁱ Keener Craig S., The NIV Application Commentary – Romans. Zondervan: Grand Rapids. 2000. P.25

<http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/1800s.php>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.opendoors.org.au/persecuted-christians/world-watch-list/>