

## STUDYING THE BOOK OF REVELATION THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST (1)



### REVELATION 1 John on Patmos

#### Revelation 1:1-3 King James Version (KJV)

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:

2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

## Interpretation

Revelation, or the Book of Revelation of Jesus Christ, is the last book of the Christian Bible. The word 'Revelation' means something revealed or shown to us. **Yet many people** say it can't be understood, which is not true.

It is the only apocalyptic book in the New Testament of the Bible. As is characteristic of apocalyptic books, Revelation is filled with vivid, highly symbolic imagery. The book reasons to reveal revelations given to John the apostle by Jesus Christ. **Modern scholars** claim that the book was written by **John of Patmos**, a different John than the author of The Gospel of John and the three Johannine letters. The book was written at about 96 CE.

- ❖ **Understand** that our Lord Jesus is the **great trustee of divine revelation**; it is to him that we owe the knowledge we have of what we are to expect from God and what he expects from us.
- ❖ This revelation Christ sent and signified by his angel. **God gave it to Christ**, and **Christ employed an angel to communicate it to the churches**. The angels are God's messengers; they are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. They are Christ's servants: principalities and powers are subject to him; all the angels of God are obliged to worship him. **The angels signified it to the apostle John**. By way of the angels are the messengers of Christ, the ministers are the messengers of the churches; what they receive from heaven, they are to communicate to the churches. **John was the apostle chosen for this service**.

(a.) Some think he was the only one surviving, the rest having sealed their testimony with their blood. This was to be the last book of divine revelation; and therefore notified to the church by the last of the apostles. John was the beloved disciple. He was, under the New Testament, as the prophet Daniel under the Old, a man greatly beloved. He was the servant of Christ; he was an apostle, an evangelist, and a prophet; he served Christ in all the three extraordinary offices of the church. James was an apostle, but not a prophet, nor an evangelist; Matthew was an apostle and evangelist, but not a prophet; Luke was an evangelist, but neither a prophet nor an apostle; but John was **all three**; and so Christ calls him in an eminent sense his servant John. John was to deliver this revelation to the church, to all his servants. For the revelation was not designed for the use of Christ's extraordinary servants **the ministers only, but for all his servants, the members of the church**; they have all a right to the oracles of God, and all have their concern in them.

- ❖ The evangelists give us an account of the things that are past; prophecy gives us an account of things to come. These **future events** are shown, **not** in the clearest light in which God could have set them, but in such a light as He saw most proper, and which would best answer his wise and holy purposes. Had they been as clearly foretold in all their circumstances as God could have revealed them, the prediction might have prevented the accomplishment; but they are foretold more darkly, to precipitate in us reverence for the scripture, and to engage our attention and excite our enquiry. We have in this revelation a general idea of the methods of divine providence and government in and about the church, and many good lessons may be learned hereby. These events (*it is said*) were such as should come to pass **not only surely, but shortly**; that is, they would begin to come to pass very shortly, and the whole would be accomplished in a short time. **For now** the last ages of the world had come.
- ❖ **It is a privilege** not only to read the scriptures ourselves, but to hear them read by others, who are qualified to give us the sense of what they read and to lead us into an understanding of them. It is not sufficient to our blessedness that we read and hear the scriptures, but **we must keep the things that are written**; we must keep them in our memories, in our minds, in our affections, and in practice, and we shall be blessed in the deed. The nearer we come to the accomplishment of the scriptures, the greater regard we shall give to them. **The time is at hand**, and we should be so much the more attentive as we see the day approaching.



#### Revelation 1: 3 - The Beatitude

*Blessed is anyone who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed those who hear them, if they treasure the content, because the Time is near.*

The first of **Seven Beatitudes** to be found in the book (*the other six occurring in 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14*). The fact that there are precisely seven of these pronouncements is probably coincidental, **not stemming** from John's allure with the number seven. John's use of the **beatitude form** shows familiarity with the written or oral traditions behind the Gospels, if not with the Gospels themselves (see, Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23). The beatitude found here corresponds to one attributed to the risen Jesus in *Revelation 22:7*: "*Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.*" Both recall the saying of Jesus found in Lk 11:28: "*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*" The difference is that in Revelation the beatitude refers to a written document. The blessing, therefore, is first on the one who reads the words of this prophecy (*that is, aloud to a Christian congregation*), and second on those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it (*that is, the congregation to whom the letter is read*).

- ❖ It is easy to forget that among the early Christians almost no one owned any portion of what is now considered Scripture. Even whole congregations were fortunate if they owned more than one of the Gospels. The only access that ordinary Christians had to the Gospels and letters that now make up the New Testament was public reading in worship services. The public reader therefore performed a ministry to the congregation far beyond what is normally the case today (**compare** *1 Thess 5:27; Col 4:16*). The beatitude here is the author's way of saying, "*Make sure you have this prophecy read in your worship assemblies! Make sure you listen and pay attention to your reader! And above all, make sure you act on what you have heard!*"



**T**he urgency of the implied command is emphasized by the critical statement that **the time is near**. Almost at the end of the book, the same phrase points up the contrast between this *prophecy and the book of Daniel*: the words given to Daniel were "*closed up and sealed until the time of the end*" (*Dan 12:9*), while the words given to John are not to be sealed "*because the time is near*" (*Rev 22:10*).

- ❖ For John and his readers the lateness of the hour demanded that his letter not be a closed book but a disclosure, an actual revelation open for all to *read, understand and obey*. With the passage of nineteen hundred years, it is tempting to assume that the time came and went long ago and nothing happened, or that the time is far off and the book is sealed up again, like Daniel, until some distant "**last day**."

In either case, the book of Revelation becomes irrelevant and, like most irrelevant things, is left to "**experts**," whether we define them as professional biblical scholars preoccupied with a distant past or as confident television preachers preoccupied with an imminent, yet somehow theoretical, future. It is time to reclaim the book of Revelation for those who read it and for those who hear it read in church, and above all for those prepared to take its message to heart.

Only in the conviction that somehow "**the time**" is as near as ever can John's letter still be read as larger than life and vivid in its sights and sounds..... *to be cont'd.*



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