

Seeing Clearly

The drama's done. Why then here does any one step forth?— Because one did survive the wreck. It so chanced, that after the Parsee's disappearance, I was he whom the Fates ordained to take the place of Ahab's bowsman, when that bowsman assumed the vacant post; the same, who, when on the last day the three men were tossed from out of the rocking boat, was dropped astern.....for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirlgelike main. The unharmed sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks. On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan.

That is an excerpt from the classic book Moby Dick. It doesn't make a lot of sense does it? Well it might, if you had read the story from beginning to end. In fact, if you have been along on the journey from the start, this paragraph makes not only a lot of sense but is a fitting ending to the story.

The same is true of the Book of Revelation. It makes no sense unless it is in the context and understanding of the preceding 65 books of the Bible. You see the story of God opens in the book of Genesis and then closes in the book of Revelation.

Those who try to read and understand the Book of Revelation without first reading and understanding the Bible find themselves confused and bewildered. It is only in the context of the Biblical story that this book makes sense and to those with that understanding it is a relatively easy book to understand.

The story of God that we call the Bible is about real people who lived in real places and come to us through real history. The Bible in its finished and final form, though written over 1500 years by at least 40 different authors, is a unified work of literature.

Between the first words of Genesis and the last words of Revelation there is a linear story that runs throughout. The main character is God, the conflict is Sin, and the theme is redemption.

The Book of Revelation is one of the easiest books of the Bible to teach provided that you have read all of the books leading up to it.

You would never pick up a 2000 page novel, read the last chapter, and expect to understand the story. In the same way, you can't isolate Revelation and think you will be able to understand it.

The Bible claims to be the inspired word of God. We didn't make that claim about it. God made that claim in it. You can't read the Bible without understanding that God claimed this book to be uniquely special and He literally breathes in it and through it.

You may not believe that to be true, but you can't engage the text without accepting that claim as being inherent in the text.

The Book of Revelation is rooted in the Old Testament. It contains more than 500 allusions to the Old Testament, and 278 of the 404 verses in Revelation (that is almost 70%) make some reference to the Old Testament.

It is the culmination of the story of God. The first time Jesus came He claimed to be God....some believed some did not. The second time there will be no doubt. Everyone will know and still some will reject Him. This book is the ultimate unveiling of who Jesus truly is.

So it is not surprising that Satan has worked very hard to keep believers from studying, teaching and more importantly apply the truths that are in Revelation.

Satan hates the Word of God but particularly the Books of Genesis and Revelation. In the book of Genesis Satan's doom is prophesied and in the Book of Revelation it becomes a reality.

In Genesis we see the creation of the heavens and the earth. In Revelation we see the creation of the new heavens and new earth. In Genesis we see the first Adam reigning on earth. In Revelation we see Jesus, the last Adam, reigning in glory. In Genesis we see an earthly bride brought to the first Adam. In Revelation we see a heavenly bride brought to the Lord Jesus Christ, the last Adam.

In Genesis we see the beginning of death and the curse. In Revelation the Savior brings us to a state where there is no more death and no more curse. In the Book of Genesis man is driven from God's face in sin. In the Book of Revelation we see God's face in glory. In Genesis, Satan appears for the first time. In Revelation he appears on earth for the last time.

This is the story of the Victory of God.. The story of every promise throughout the entire bible coming to pass. Exactly as promised down to the greatest detail.

This book answers almost every question that the previous books asked. It answers definitively what believers need to know about their future, their mission and the role in the future.

Things that were unclear become....Revealed. It is beyond me that believers don't know this book better than any of the others with the exception of perhaps the gospels.

It is the ultimate season end.....but it is not a cliff hanger. At the end of this book you are not left wondering what else is to be revealed. You know as a believer all that you need to know.

I often state that I believe that every story of the Bible is about Jesus. If you read the Bible and don't see Jesus everywhere, you need to reread it. He is the central character and the star of God's show. This book has for its subject Jesus, the Messiah the Lamb of God.

The promise of a Savior Messiah is first mentioned in Genesis 3. Throughout the rest of the Scriptures the central focus is on this Messiah. Everything in the Old Testament

points to His arrival. Everything in the New Testament is about His life and His promised return. It is a single story from beginning to end.

Jesus clearly claimed to be God. He did things only God could do. From His birth to His death and resurrection, He partially revealed who God is and what God is doing to save those He loves.

He stated that one day everything would be revealed and we would see Him as He is and without a veil. This is that story.

In fact the last book of God's story is called The Revelation of Jesus Christ. Not Revelations. One single Revelation of one single hero and Messiah.

The Greek Word for Revelation is the word that in English is Apocalypse. It literally means an unveiling. To reveal what is hidden. To see what has not yet been seen.

What is being unveiled in Revelation is Jesus Himself.

What God is revealing to us, or unveiling for us, is that the second coming of Jesus will be much different than the first.

The second coming of Jesus will be so different from His first coming when His glory was veiled. He came the first time to a crucifixion; He is coming again to a coronation. He came the first time in shame; He is coming again in splendor. He came the first time to a tree; He is coming again to a throne. He came the first time and stood before Pilate; He is coming again, and Pilate will stand before Him to be judged. He came the first time as a servant; He is coming again as a sovereign.

IF you wanted to put it in current terms, Jesus is coming back and the gloves are off. You will see and know exactly who He is....exactly what He is going to do....and you will know instantly exactly where you stand.

But you don't fully understand these things by reading the Book of Revelation. You understand these things by starting in Genesis 3....watching the themes develop through the Jewish nation....through the Prophets...through the Gospels....through the letters....and then you will understand the Book of Revelation.

When you study the book of Revelation you end up spending a lot of time in the other books of the Bible. In fact, almost no one in the book of Revelation is new. If you think about the idea of revealing it is not the idea of introducing. Revealing is taking what is already there and showing it to you in a new way or a better way so that you can gain understanding and purpose.

In addition, objects symbols and references are almost never introduced in the book of Revelation. These things are usually seen in other part of Scripture. Let me show an example.

Revelation 1:12–17 (ESV) — 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.

What are these lampstands? Well God tells us in Revelation 1:20

Revelation 1:20 (ESV) — 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.

One like the Son of Man? Who is this character? Well we have seen Him before....

Daniel 7:13–14 (ESV) — 13 “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Throughout the Bible Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man, in fact it is that claim that gets Him crucified. Jesus is the only person who uses that term about Himself. He is taking it and making the claim that He is the one referred to in Daniel 7.

Matthew 26:63–66 (ESV) — 63 But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” 64 Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” 65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. 66 What is your judgment?” They answered, “He deserves death.”

If Jesus is not the person of Daniel 7 then His claim is on the highest order of blasphemy and worthy of death.

So you see without the backdrop of the entire Bible you will have a very hard time understanding the Book of Revelation. In fact, you would come up with some of the most bizarre interpretations imaginable. But honestly it is a very simple book. So...lets get to it.

Revelation 1:1 (ESV) — 1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.

The Revelation. The Greek is apokalupsis meaning to unveil. To take the veil off. So Revelation is not meant to be confusing, it is not meant to be a problem to work through or solve, it is not meant to hide something.....it is meant to be an unveiling. It is meant to reveal something to us that God wants us to know.

What is God unveiling? Jesus Christ. He is the One who have been veiled. Just like a bride is unveiled at her wedding to reveal herself to the groom, Jesus is unveiled to us in Revelation to show us who He really is.

1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV) — 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

So the purpose of this book is for Christ to unveil and reveal to us events in order to show us what will happen in the future. And in the process we will see Him as He really is. That is the purpose of this book.

From the outset, we are given the most important truth about the Book of Revelation. This book shows us the Antichrist, it shows us God's judgment, it shows us calamity on the earth, and it shows us Mystery Babylon in vivid detail. Most of all, it is the Revelation of Jesus Christ to us. If we catch everything else, but miss Jesus in the book, we miss the Book of Revelation

Note that this revelation belongs to Jesus, it is about Jesus, and He is the one doing the Revealing

Which God gave Him to show His servants: This is an important reason why God gave this Revelation of Jesus Christ. He gave it to show His servants. God gave this revelation that it might be shown, not hidden. This is an apocalypse—a revelation, not apocrypha (something hidden).

God is unveiling who He is and at the same time showing us our future.

Why is He being revealed? For what purpose? Why is God showing us this new view of Jesus? "To show his servants the things that must soon take place"

The revelation is to show His servants. To show His followers. To show believers. To understand the unveiling of Christ you must have the Holy Spirit present in your life and you must be aware of the story of Jesus....the other books of the Bible.

He showed His servants what must soon take place.....Shortly or soon is the ancient Greek phrase *en tachei*, which means " 'quickly or suddenly coming to pass,' indicating rapidity of execution after the beginning takes place. The idea is not that the event may occur soon, but that when it does, it will be sudden.

And since it is a revelation and God wants us to know the future.....it should be crystal clear and easy to understand for those with the Holy Spirit who truly want to know.

So if Jesus is revealing Himself to His followers, how did this information get to us? Did John just make this stuff up? He was quite old when this happened. How do we know that these are not the ramblings of a confused man with dementia? Who exactly is unveiling Christ?

Revelation 1:1–2 (ESV) — 1 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.

He revealed this information, through an angel, to the Apostle John. The Beloved Disciple. The one who wrote the Gospel of John, John 1, 2 and 3 and now we see the book of Revelation.

It is a book of signs: It is a book that communicates in signs. It is true that the signs used in Revelation have been a source of confusion or controversy for some readers. Yet the signs are necessary because John expresses things of heaven, which Paul said he heard with inexpressible words (2 Corinthians 12:4). John described things he saw, so he could only use symbolic images to explain it. To us, this book is prophecy, but John simply recorded history unfolding before

him, as he saw it. "John had visions from heaven; but he described them in his own language and manner."

We sometimes wonder if the authors of the New Testament knew they wrote Holy Scripture. At least in this case, John knew. because he called it a revelation from God. He knew it came from the Father through Jesus, and not from any mere human. He knew it was the Holy Scripture because he called it the word of God, as an Old Testament prophet would say. He also called it the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The signs are also necessary because there is tremendous power in symbolic language. It is one thing to call someone or something evil or bad, but it is far more vivid to describe the image of a woman drunk with the blood of the saints

By His angel: Many of the signs and visions of the Book of Revelation came to John through the supervision of an angel. We will see John interact with angels throughout this revelation.

Revelation 1:3 (ESV) — 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.

Blessed. This is the only book in the Bible that carries that specific promise. Now we understand that we are blessed by every word of Scripture, but it is clear that God knew people, even believers, would hesitate to read and understand this book. After all, Satan opposes everything from God especially the ultimate unveiling of who God really is and who Satan really is

Because they neglect the book Revelation, many people miss this blessing. For example, the Anglican Church virtually omits Revelation in its regular schedule of readings for both public worship and private devotions. The Baptist Seminary I attended for one year before transferring didn't even have a class on it. This is a typical attitude towards the Book of Revelation. Many people believe that only fanatics want to dig deep into this book, but really, it is a book for anyone who wants to be blessed.

Fortunately, John didn't say that we had to understand everything in the Book of Revelation to be blessed. There are some difficult things in this book that may only be understood as we look back at fulfilled prophecy; but we can be blessed by reading and hearing even when we don't understand.

the promise of blessing itself shows that John regarded this book as Holy Scripture. In the Jewish world, such a blessing could never be pronounced on a merely human book.

He who reads: This is in the singular. It speaks of one person who reads. "Those who hear" is in the plural. It speaks of many people hearing. The idea is probably from custom of the early church, where attention was given to the public reading of Scripture, which was often then explained. In our modern way of speaking John might say, "Blessed is the pastor who teaches Revelation, and blessed is the congregation who hears it." Most of all, pastor or congregation, blessed are those who keep those things which are written in it.

God's revelation is both a promise and a demand.

It is a promise because it gives us a new way of looking at the world. Ancient Greek tragedies, reflect a way of looking at the world that lacks hope for ultimate justice and healing. God's perspective, by contrast, encourages us that his justice will always prevail—often in the short run, but always in the long run.

It is a blessing but this revelation also approaches us as a demand. As God's servants who receive his message, we, like John must be "witnesses" of his message

In many parts of the world Christians are actively sharing their faith and paying a heavy price for it; for example, Protestants in China multiplied from under two million believers to perhaps thirty times that number after four decades of intense persecution and the torture and martyrdom of many of their leaders.

The twenty-five baptized Christians in Nepal in 1960 multiplied one-thousand times over in twenty-five years—at a time when Christians faced a six-year prison sentence for baptizing others.

By contrast, many North American Christians have proved timid merely witnessing to their coworkers. Revelation challenges our complacency, whether by pointing us to the price true Christians must be prepared to pay for following Jesus, or by revealing the dangers of compromise with a world inescapably opposed to the one we acknowledge as Lord

This is why verse 3 is not only a blessing, but a blessing specifically directed toward those who hear and keep or apply what is written in it. Revelation is not good news for everyone. It should terrify those satisfied with the way things are the same way it would have terrified many ancient hearers who learned of its message

The Book of Revelation gives us much more than information for prophetic speculation. It gives us things to keep. If we understand the Book of Revelation, it will change the way we live.

Note that this text itself claims to be a prophecy of God. Prophets stand between God and the people and speak on behalf of God. So John is speaking to us on behalf of God revealing what will soon take place.

All of these things together show that beyond doubt, the Book of Revelation claims to be Holy Scripture. A critic can agree or disagree with that claim, but it can't be denied that Revelation makes the claim

Revelation 1:4 (ESV) — 4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

So very simply, John is writing this letter to seven real churches in seven very real places in Asia—modern day Turkey.

Revelation 1:11 (ESV) — 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."

Map

Ephesus was John's church. Paul had spent years there establishing it on his third missionary journey. He stayed there and led the church from AD 54-57. Ephesus was a very important city and had a very important deep water port for ships. A city that was very wealthy and had 250,000 people. After Paul left and some years later, John led that church.

The next church is the church at Smyrna. This is modern day Ismir in Turkey. You can visit the sites of each of the churches today. They are real places, real churches, who years ago were the church homes of very real believers.

The other churches are Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia. John is writing a letter to each of them. We will learn more as we go forward. We will dive into detail about each of these churches and our church soon.

But since seven in the number of completion we will see that these letters, while specifically addresses to seven churches were to be shared with all 7. So the letter to Ephesus was read to the other six and so on. Why?

Because I believe the message to the churches is given to the global church including us as well. As we study the letter to the churches we see ourselves. We see that every church has the issues outlined for each individual church. In one sense the seven letters identify the areas where the global church has failed and is the reason why Jesus must return and set all things right. We can't do it. We try but we cannot do the work of God...for God...at least not to completion

In some way Jesus is outlining how His followers have failed at the mission.

Revelation 1:4–5 (ESV) — 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.

The construction of who is, who was and who is to come is intentionally awkward in the ancient Greek. It seems that John searched for a phrase to communicate the Old Testament idea of Yahweh.

It is never enough to just say that God is, or to just say that He was, or to just say that He is to come. As Lord over eternity, He rules the past, the present, and the future.

The Greek language lacks a term for this so John spells it out.

John essentially tells them, I pray for grace and peace for you from the trinity. The Father who was and is and is to come, the seven spirits i.e. the complete Holy Spirit and From Jesus .

Note that this greeting to the churches is from the Trinity....

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 (The Father) , and from the seven spirits who are before his throne (the Holy Spirit), 5 and from Jesus Christ (The Son) the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

This letter is written by John but he is writing on behalf of this whole assembled group.

7 Spirits who are before the throne. We have seen 7 stars (the angels of the churches) 7 Lampstands (the Churches) and now 7 Spirits. Seven is the biblical number of completion.

John brought a greeting from God the Holy Spirit, who is described with this title. The seven Spirits who are before His throne speaks to the perfection and completion of the Holy Spirit. John used an Old Testament description of the Holy Spirit.

The idea of the seven Spirits quotes from the Old Testament. Isaiah 11:2 describes seven aspects of the Holy Spirit:

Isaiah 11:2 (ESV) — 2 And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

7 Aspects of the Holy Spirit.....Of the Lord, of Wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of might, of knowledge, and of fear of the Lord

It isn't that there are seven different spirits of God, rather the Spirit of the Lord has these characteristics, and He has them all in fullness and perfection.

And from Jesus Himself....the faithful witness...

Firstborn from the dead means much more than that Jesus was the first person resurrected. It also means that He is pre-eminent among all those who are or will be resurrected. Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren

Jesus is the ruler over the kings. Before the Book of Revelation is over, Jesus will take dominion over every earthly king. At the present time, Jesus rules a kingdom, but it is a kingdom that is not yet of this world.

Revelation 1:5–6 (ESV) — To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

John says, may this letter bring glory and honor to Jesus. Who loves us and freed us with His blood and made us a kingdom of priests.

Notice the order: first loved, then washed. It wasn't that God washed us out of some sense of duty and then loved us because we were then clean. He loved us while we were dirty, but then He washed us.

It would have been enough just to love them and cleanse them. But He goes far beyond, and makes us kings and priests to His God and Father. This is more than Adam ever was. Even in the innocence of Eden we never read of Adam among the kings and priests of God.

We are kings, so we are God's royalty—this is privilege, status, and authority. We are priests, so we are God's special servants. We represent God to man and man to God. We

offer sacrifice unto Him (Hebrews 13:15). We have privileged access to God's presence (Romans 5:1–2).

Kings and priests: In the Old Testament, it was forbidden to combine the offices of king and priest. Under the New Covenant, we can be like Jesus in the sense that He is both King and High Priest (Luke 1:31–33; Hebrews 4:14).

So Jesus loves us. He loved us and loves us while we are still sinners. In fact, the Book of Revelation is the full expression of His love for us. We have seen and responded to His Love as it was revealed to us through Scripture. But even as overwhelming as that love is....it is only a taste of the depth of God's love that is being revealed fully in this Book.

This is first and foremost a book that fully reveals God's Love. It is a book that show us how much God is willing to go through to save those who can still be saved....to allow those who reject Him to clearly know who and what they are rejecting.

It is a book about God's Justice. In the end everyone gets what they want. You either spend 1000 years with Jesus as Lord on earth or you don't. You either spend eternity with Jesus in a new heaven and new earth or you spend eternity separated from God in Hell.

We have waited 65 books for this final unveiling. It is an incredible truth that we are going to explore. I can't wait to share the truths that are in this book with you.

The promise is that both the teacher and those who learn will be richly blessed. I can't imagine being more blessed but I am willing to go there. This is going to be an incredible experience and if the Lord is willing we will continue the story in two weekis. Lets Pray