

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

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Pastor's Bible Study

A Bible Study Series
Based on the book
"Revelation Four Views" by Steve Gregg

Lesson 4
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Part I

The Seven Letters

Revelation 1–3

The Lord Who is Coming

- **The Lord Who is Coming**
- *“Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.””* (Revelation 1:7–8, NKJV)
- **The Lord Who is Coming**
 - With the words, **Behold, He is coming**, we are introduced to the great theme of the book.
 - The comfort that this promise contains for the suffering believers, and the warning for the obstinate, will be elaborated upon throughout the remainder of the book.
 - 1:7. This theme verse, or “thesis statement” for the Book of Revelation, is also its first prophecy—and its first poetry.
- **The Lord Who is Coming**
 - **Behold, He is coming! (v. 7).** But precisely what event is being announced?
 - The *futurist* approach takes this statement somewhat literally, seeing in it a prediction of the Second Coming of Christ in the clouds at the end of the present age. This seems to many to be the most natural way to understand the expression and is apt to be followed by most who favor the *historicist* and the *spiritual* approaches as well.

- **The Lord Who is Coming**

- The *spiritual* approach may see this as one of several references to the Second Coming, though this approach is also at liberty to spiritualize the coming as does Rushdoony: “This Christ comes continually in the clouds of judgment over history.”
- The most elaborate arguments for an alternative meaning of this verse is presented by some *preterist* commentators, who suggest that the passage does not predict the literal Second Coming, but is a figurative description of Christ’s coming in vengeance to destroy Jerusalem, not in person, but using the Roman armies in a.d. 70. This understands Christ’s “coming” in the same way as does Rushdooney (see above), though limiting the reference to a single event.

- **The Lord Who is Coming**

- As a prediction of the return of Christ, it emphasizes the contrasts between his first and second comings. Although the prediction is based on Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10, Revelation does not directly quote either.
- “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence” (Dan. 7:13).
- “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son” (Zech. 12:10).

- **The Lord Who is Coming**

- The first coming of Christ was marked by lowliness. The Second Coming will be **with the clouds**—representing the majesty of the presence of God (Ps. 104:3). Not only that, **every eye will see him**. His ultimate victory will be open for all to observe.
- In contrast, hardly anyone noticed his birth except a few shepherds and magi. Only a few hundred witnessed his resurrection appearances.
- Those who have rejected Christ in every age, beginning with **those who pierced him**, have thought they were superior to him. At last they will realize their terrible error. He will become their Judge. As the doom of **all the peoples** (unbelievers) sinks in, they **will mourn because of him**.

- Although such mourning is taken by some as grief and repentance, Revelation contains no indication that this will happen. Rather, they will realize that all is lost and that he is about to inflict judgment on them.
- **The Lord Who is Coming**
 - *“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”* (Revelation 1:8, ESV)
 - Who is the speaker in v. 8? The expression **who is and who was and who is to come** has previously been used of God the Father (comments, v. 4).
 - However, the expression fits equally well when applied to Christ (cf. Heb. 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever”). The Speaker here is able to take upon himself the Old Testament title *El Shaddai* (the Almighty), a name used interchangeably with the Lord (Gen. 17:1, etc.).
- **The Lord Who is Coming**
 - The expressions, **Alpha and the Omega, and the Beginning and the End** are here used for the first time in Scripture, but are later (v. 17) amplified by the addition of “the First and the Last,” a title for Jehovah in Isaiah 44:6.
 - All these titles (which are essentially synonymous in meaning) are combined in Revelation 22:13, where they seem to be applied to Jesus (see 22:12, 16).
 - Even in 1:17–18, the speaker identifies himself as the one “who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore,” a reference that points unmistakably to Christ. Revelation, then, attributes to Jesus Christ titles uniquely attributed to the Lord in the Old Testament.
 - This data is death to any theology that withholds full deity from Jesus Christ; it illustrates why Revelation is said to present a “high Christology.”
- **The Lord Who is Coming**
 - **1:8.** Before describing his first vision, John records the sovereign words of the Lord God who is able to bring it all to pass. Since one theme in Revelation is the conflict between the powers of good and evil, readers are reminded of who really has the power.
 - First, he is the **Alpha and Omega**, the A and Z, the one in control from before the beginning of time until after the end.
 - His eternity is further noted in the phrase, **who is, and who was, and who is to come** (v. 4).

- Finally, his power is seen in the title **the Almighty** (*Gr. pantokrator*), the one whom none can resist. The Greek translation of the Old Testament often rendered “Lord of Hosts” as “Lord of pantokrator”, that is “Almighty Lord.” Revelation’s language thus reflects the Old Testament’s triple designation, Lord God ... Almighty. It is the full Old Testament name of God, traditionally translated “Lord God of Hosts.”

The Setting of the Revelation

- **The Setting of the Revelation**

- *“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. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 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.””* (Revelation 1:9–11, ESV)

- **The Setting of the Revelation**

- Again the author identifies himself by name. He does not call himself “the apostle,” but by the more humble term, your brother (v. 9).
- Although John was on ... Patmos (v. 9) when he saw the visions, he may not have written the book in its present form until some time after his return to his home in Ephesus.
- That John was on the island **for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus (v. 9)** has been taken by some to mean that he went there as a missionary of his own accord, though church traditions indicate that John was banished to this island by the emperor. Rulers used banishment to an island as a means to rid themselves of influential troublemakers, without having to kill them. Another tradition holds that John previously had been sentenced to be dipped in boiling oil. Whether he was miraculously preserved through this ordeal or banished to an island instead of carrying out of the original sentence, nobody knows.

- **The Setting of the Revelation**

- Since John suggests that he was his readers’ **companion in the tribulation**, the suggestion that he was experiencing persecution is preferred.

- The apostle John often stressed his similarities to—rather than his differences from—his readers. He is their **brother and companion**, similar to 1 John 3:13, “Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.” The early Christian brothers and sisters shared in **suffering** (tribulation) and the **kingdom of God and in patient endurance**. The reality of the second makes the other two possible. These common experiences of Christians are mentioned again and again throughout Revelation. Here is the first mention of *tribulation* in Revelation. Tribulation is assumed to be the common experience of those who are in Jesus rather than something believers are to escape.
- **The Setting of the Revelation**
 - Believers are also “companions” or “sharers” in “patient endurance.” The Greek term is ὑπομονή (*hypomonē*), a key word in Revelation that is translated either “patient endurance” or “perseverance” (see Rev 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12).
 - *Hypomonē* is the attitude that John encourages Christians to adopt in the face of the “tribulation” or “suffering” of the “labor pains.” It is more than just stoicism—more than just “gritting your teeth and bearing it.” It is persisting in faithfulness to God because we know that he is in control and his kingdom will ultimately prevail.
 - **Patmos** is a rocky, crescent-shaped island about 37 miles southwest of the mainland of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), where the seven recipient churches were located.
- **The Setting of the Revelation**
 - The island is one of a group of about fifty islands called the Dodecanese. Patmos is located between two other islands named Icaria and Leros. Patmos, shaped like a crescent with its horns facing eastward, was a safe place for vessels to anchor during storms and was therefore important to navigators. It was the last stopping place when traveling from Rome to Ephesus and the first stopping place on a return trip to Rome.
 - Being a rocky and barren place, it was chosen as a penal settlement by the Romans, as were other islands in the group. Early Christian tradition says John was sent here during Domitian’s reign over Rome (a.d. 81–96) and was forced to work in the mines. Another tradition adds that when Domitian died, John was permitted to return to Ephesus.
- **The Setting of the Revelation**

- A *futurist* commentators feel that the sentence, **I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (v. 10)**, would be better translated, "I was [carried] in the Spirit unto the day of the Lord." This would be a way of saying that the Spirit carried John into the future so he could observe the actual "day of the Lord," i.e., the Second Coming and its precipitating events at the end of the age.
- The majority of expositors, including most *futurists*, however, take in the Spirit on the **Lord's Day** to be a reference to John's state of mind on the first day of the week—our Sunday. This day has been known as "the Lord's Day" in Christian tradition since at least as early as the Didache (late first or early second century), since it was the day of Christ's resurrection.
- **Didache (Δίδαχη, Didachē)**. An important first-century Christian document. A witness to the earliest stages of the Christian church. Its full title is "The Teaching (Didache) of the Lord to the Gentiles through the Twelve Apostles," but it is known simply as the Didache. A unique collection of early Christian sayings, liturgical traditions, and community directives. About the length of the Letter to the Galatians. Modern scholarship divides it into 16 brief chapters.
 - William Varner, "Didache" In , in The Lexham Bible Dictionary, ed. John D. Barry and Lazarus Wentz (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012).

- **The Setting of the Revelation**

- This vision begins not with sight but with sound: **a loud voice like a trumpet**, compelling, not to be ignored, the first of many times in Revelation that John uses like or as for a direct comparison. This is the voice of the risen Jesus, whom he was about to see.
- The voice commanded John to **write on a scroll**, the form in which books existed in those days. Sheets of paper handmade from the papyrus plant (a kind of reed) were glued into strips about a foot wide but as long as thirty feet and then rolled up. The scrolls were handwritten with ink in even columns a few inches wide. Since Revelation was written in Greek, the columns went from left to right.
- The seven cities Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (see Col. 4:16)—had been evangelized directly or indirectly through Paul's ministry. Paul himself had written letters to Ephesus and Laodicea.

- **The Setting of the Revelation**

- The seven churches were mentioned in verse 4, but they are now named in verse 11.
- There were at least three other churches in Asia at this time, but the number may here have been limited to seven because of the symbolic value of that number. Seven, being the number of completeness, could suggest that the message to the seven churches is applicable to the total church throughout the world.
- The cities are listed in the logical order in which they would likely receive the letter. Assuming Ephesus would receive the letter first, it would travel northward then east and southward again in a horseshoe-shaped route.

- **The Lord Who is Coming**

- This everlasting triumph of Jesus is based on the three great attributes of deity. First, He is *omniscient*. He says: ***I am Alpha and Omega***. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.
- The Lord Jesus is God's alphabet. The alphabet is an ingenious way of storing the accumulated wisdom of the race. Our literature is composed of various letters of the alphabet arranged in an endless variety of ways.
- Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the first letter and the last, the first and final source of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. His decrees will be based on omniscience. He cannot be deceived, disputed, discredited, or disconcerted. He could not be when He came the first time to redeem; He cannot be when He comes the second time to reign. His dictates will be full, inexhaustible, and wise, based on infallible knowledge of all the facts, all the forces, all the facets directly or indirectly involved.

- **The Lord Who is Coming**

- Second, He is *omnipresent*. He says: ***I am... the beginning and the ending***. His omnipresence is stated here in terms of time, but it is just as true in terms of space (see [Matt. 18:20](#)). The Lord is present in the midst of any company of His people in any part of the world at any given moment of time. "Lo, I am with you always," He says, "even unto the end of the world" ([Matt. 28:20](#)).
- This was David Livingstone's favorite text. At every crisis in his life he would write it in his diary and add: "It is the word of a Gentleman of the strictest and most sacred honor, and that's an end of it!" To be present

everywhere, what an attribute for a King! No wonder His triumph will be everlasting.

- **The Lord Who is Coming**

- Third. He is *omnipotent*. He says: ***I am... the Lord which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*** The first part of this expression has already been used to describe the Father ([1:4](#)); it is now used to describe the Son. He is God in every sense of the word. He is "the Almighty," an expression that occurs only ten times in the New Testament, nine of them in Revelation.
- The first time the title occurs in the Bible is in [1 Samuel 1:3](#). Elkanah, we are told, "went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh." The judges have come and gone, and failure is everywhere. But the Lord has not failed! He is "Jehovah of hosts, the Almighty."
- Come back to the Apocalypse. Again there is failure everywhere. The church has failed and, apart from a raptured remnant, has become completely apostate. The nations have failed and have fallen for the blandishments of the Beast. Israel has failed. But God has not failed, for Jesus is coming again. "All power is given unto me," He said as He prepared to leave the earth for heaven. The claim was not rhetorical; it was true! His triumph will be eventual, but it will also be everlasting.

- John Phillips Commentary Series, The - The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring Revelation: An Expository Commentary.