

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 2

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Part I

The Seven Letters

Revelation 1–3

Introduction Revelation 1:1–3

- **What Is the Significance of Christ's Commission to John? What Do the Seven Churches Signify?**
 - **Historicist Approach:**
 - John is given a vision of Christ, who announces that he is to write of things that would soon begin to take place, and which would extend through the entire age of the church.
 - Seven churches in Asia received these letters, but they represent seven periods of church history, each exhibiting the special features of the respective original church.
- **What Is the Significance of Christ's Commission to John? What Do the Seven Churches Signify?**
 - **Preterist Approach:**
 - Christ appears to John on Patmos, commissioning him to write things that would soon afterward find fulfillment in the fall of Jerusalem.
 - The letters reflect the conditions prevailing in seven churches in the Roman province of Asia prior to the Jewish war of a.d. 66–70.
- **What Is the Significance of Christ's Commission to John? What Do the Seven Churches Signify?**
 - **Futurist Approach:**
 - While a prisoner on the isle of Patmos, John sees a vision of Christ, commanding him to write of events that would be fulfilled at the end of the present age, just prior to the Second Coming.
 - Some *futurists* take the letters in the same manner as do the *historicists*, while others take them more as do the *preterists* or those taking the *spiritual* approach.

- **What Is the Significance of Christ’s Commission to John? What Do the Seven Churches Signify?**
 - **Spiritual Approach:**
 - The symbolic vision of Christ depicts His glorious character and sovereignty, conveying Christ’s sovereign involvement in the affairs of the world and of the church, including his intimate concern for His suffering servants.
 - The churches resemble churches that might exist at any time throughout the church age, and the letters are applicable to any churches that may share their conditions. The number seven is symbolic, suggesting application to the whole Christian church of all ages.
- **Introduction**
Revelation 1:1–3
 - *“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, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 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.”* (Revelation 1:1–3, ESV)
- **Introduction**
Revelation 1:1–3
 - The expression, **Revelation of Jesus Christ (v. 1)**, presents a certain ambiguity. The Greek allows that Jesus Christ could be either the subject being revealed or the one doing the revealing.
 - The former idea—that it is Christ himself who is being revealed, or *unveiled*—would agree well with the general contents of the book, especially of the present chapter, and of chapters 5, 14, and 19, in which John sees pictorial representations of Christ.
 - The latter alternative—that the book contains information revealed through Christ—seems to agree with the rest of the verse, which suggests that the material of the visions was revealed first to Christ by God (the Father), then by Christ to an angel, who passed it along to John. John then bore witness (beginning at verse 4) to the visions, putting them into this written form.
 - The word translated “revelation” simply means “unveiling.” It gives us our English word *apocalypse* which, unfortunately, is today a synonym for chaos and catastrophe. The verb simply means “to uncover, to reveal, to make manifest.”
 - In this book, the Holy Spirit pulls back the curtain and gives us the privilege of seeing the glorified Christ in heaven and the fulfillment of His sovereign purposes in the world.
 - o Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Re 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

- **Introduction**

Revelation 1:1–3

- The word *signified* (**he made it know**) (*Rev. 1:1*) is important; it means “to show by a sign.” In Revelation, the noun is translated as *sign* (*Rev. 15:1*), *wonder* (*Rev. 12:1, 3*), and *miracle* (*Rev. 19:20*). This is the same word used in the Gospel of John for the miracles of Jesus Christ, for His miracles were events that carried a deeper spiritual message than simply the display of power. As you study Revelation, expect to encounter a great deal of symbolism, much of it related to the Old Testament.

- **Introduction**

Revelation 1:1–3

- Why did John use symbolism? For one thing, this kind of “spiritual code” is understood only by those who know Christ personally. If any Roman officers had tried to use Revelation as evidence against Christians, the book would have been a puzzle and an enigma to them.
- But an even greater reason is that symbolism is not weakened by time. John was able to draw on the great “images” in God’s revelation and assemble them into an exciting drama that has encouraged persecuted and suffering saints for centuries. However, you must not conclude that John’s use of symbolism indicates that the events described are not real. They are real!

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Revelation 1:1–3

- The phrase, **the testimony of Jesus Christ (v. 2)**, possesses the same ambiguity as does **the revelation of Jesus Christ** in verse 1. It could refer to John’s testimony *concerning* Christ (i.e., the gospel), or else to the message which Christ himself testified to John. The first option seems to work best here and in verse 9, since, in both places, “the testimony of Jesus” is coupled with the word of God.

- **Introduction**

Revelation 1:1–3

- Ultimately the message comes from God, but notice the chain of revelation involved: God gives the revelation to Jesus, who passes it on to an angel, who delivers it to John, who communicates it to the churches (“his servants”). John plays the role of a “servant” prophet, who brings a revelation from God to others. An angel is involved, but John does not seem to place as much importance on the mediating role of angels as do other apocalyptists. In this book, Jesus often bypasses the angel and speaks to John directly.
- In the chain of revelation, Jesus stands between God and his creation. John’s Apocalypse is theocentric, or “God-centered.” The book reveals what God says and what God does, but Jesus is the one through whom God speaks and through whom God carries out his will. John emphasizes this mediating role of Jesus throughout the book.

- o Davis, C. A. (2000). Revelation. The College Press NIV Commentary (90). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub.

- **Introduction**

Revelation 1:1–3

- Since the Revelation comes ultimately from God through his mediator Christ John calls it “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” The fact that John shares “the word of God,” rather than the word of a mere human being, is extremely significant.
- We humans may say, “Let this pig sprout wings and fly,” but our speaking the words will not make it happen. However, when the sovereign God speaks a word, then whatever he says is done. This is called “performance language” — language that accomplishes what it says. We see it, for example, in Genesis 1:3, where “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”
- Jesus is called “the Word of God” (e.g., in John 1) because he “performs” or accomplishes God’s will. In like manner, John calls Revelation “the word of God,” which means that what God says in this book concerning the present and the future is reality. *It will be accomplished.*

- **Introduction**

Revelation 1:1–3

- **Blessed is he who reads (v. 3).** This beatitude is the first of seven in the book. Initially, the blessing is pronounced upon the reader—probably the person who would read the book publicly in the assembly. Beyond that, the blessing is for those of the congregation who hear and obey. That this blessing extends also to those who hear and obey in later generations is no doubt intended as well.
 - Three activities are recommended: to read, to hear, and to take to heart. The setting implied is a local congregation. In a time of little literacy, one oral reader (**he who reads**) addressed many listeners (**those who hear it**). Both reader and hearers are to obey (**take to heart what is written**). This verb can also be translated “keep” or “observe.”
 - Easley, K. H. (1998). Vol. 12: Revelation. Holman New Testament Commentary (13). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
 - Those who allow the Revelation to penetrate their minds and hearts so that it reshapes their lives—*they are the ones who will be blessed.*
 - Davis, C. A. (2000). Revelation. The College Press NIV Commentary (92). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub.

- **Introduction**

Revelation 1:1–3

- The prophecy here is said to pertain to events whose time is near (v. 3). This is affirmed repeatedly. The things revealed, according to verse 1, must shortly take place, and a few verses later, we are told that John wrote of “things which are

about to take place” (so reads the Greek of verse 19). On the surface, this gives us the impression that John expected the fulfillment of the prophecies to occur very shortly after he wrote them. However, see comparative note.

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Revelation 1:1–3

- **Special Comparative Note on 1:1–3:**
- **“must shortly take place ... the time is near”**
- Of the four approaches we are considering in this commentary, the early-date *preterist* is the most comfortable with such statements about near fulfillment, taken at their face value. This approach views the book as written shortly before a.d. 70 and predicting the fall of Jerusalem, which occurred in that year. Later-date *preterists* would apply the fulfillment to the fall of Rome centuries after John’s time or, possibly, to the downfall of Domitian.

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Revelation 1:1–3

- *Historicists* would see the fulfillment as beginning shortly after John’s time, but extending long beyond, through the entire age of the church.
- To the *spiritual* interpreters, the time is always near, since the visions transcend any particular time period and may, in principle, recur or continue unceasingly throughout all times.

- **Introduction**

Revelation 1:1–3

- *Futurists* suggest that the terms “shortly” or “near” have some meaning other than that which first comes to mind. There are essentially two alternatives:
 - (1) The word “shortly” means “quickly” or “suddenly”—thus meaning that there will be a rapidity of fulfillment whenever the proper time may come, but that may be thousands of years later than John’s time. Though this may deal adequately with the word “shortly,” it does not dispense with the problem of “the time is near.”

- **Introduction**

Revelation 1:1–3

- (2) The second alternative is to suggest that “shortly” means “soon,” and that “the time is near” may be taken literally, but that John is speaking according to God’s way of reckoning time and nearness.
 - Since a day to the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day (2 Pet. 3:8), even an event two

thousand years removed might be regarded as “near” from God’s perspective.

- o Perhaps the greatest question suggested by this proposal is whether the original human readers of Revelation would share God’s perspective and would view such distant events as being “near.”

- **Introduction**

- Revelation 1:1–3

- 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.”
 - Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Re 1:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- 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 Saviour better.