

Introducing the Book of Revelation

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Psalter: 50

Scripture: Revelation 1:1–9

Psalter: 368

Sermon Text: Revelation 1:1–3

Psalter: 411

Psalter: 134

The Revelation of Saint John the Divine, the last book of the Bible, is sometimes referred to by its Greek name as *The Apocalypse*. The word *apocalypse* repeatedly appears in various forms of social media today. Many people describe the times in which we live as *apocalyptic*, saying these days are the end times. Even unbelievers talk—albeit flippantly—about the end of the world. Politicians frequently discuss the likelihood of a nuclear holocaust if rogue nations such as Iran and North Korea acquire nuclear capability. We suspect that such nations might easily bomb Israel or even the United States in the near future, which could cause the final breakdown of society—indeed, of the world.

People inside and outside the church are talking about eschatology, or, the doctrine of the last things. Even unbelievers are using language and imagery from the Bible, specifically from the Book of Revelation. Scientists and politicians and world leaders are quite at home talking about Armageddon and the end times.

What will happen to the United States, and by extension, to the world? Will our children and grandchildren continue to enjoy the freedoms and pleasures of peace that

we know today? Young people wonder if they will live long enough to marry and have children before Christ returns.

To address such concerns, we can turn to no better source than the Bible, specifically to Revelation. I must confess that I approached this series of studies on Revelation with considerable trepidation. I had wanted to take on this task for nearly two decades, but did not dare to do so because of the difficulty of correctly interpreting several chapters in the book. Yet, the importance of this book and a growing internal urge to attempt this task with God's help have brought me to a point where I can no longer hold back. I hope that you and I may approach this book with a sense of awe and wonder. Pray that God will give us what we need to explore this book biblically, doctrinally, experientially, and practically in an accurate and edifying way so that we all may be blessed by the Holy Spirit and bring God the glory due to His name.

We will begin by considering the first three verses of Revelation 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: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. 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.

These verses are the title page and foreword for Revelation. They contain all you would expect to find at the beginning of a book. The *title* is *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. The *contents* of the book are everything that John saw and attested of this revelation, including things that would shortly come to pass. The *author* of the book is the apostle John. John doesn't name himself as author, but he assumes that everyone would know he is the

apostle John. There must have been hundreds of people named John in the churches of that time, but referring to himself as “John the servant of Christ” was sufficient to identify himself as the beloved disciple and apostle who wrote the Gospel of John and the three epistles of John found in the New Testament today

These verses also give us a foreword to the book, offering details about the agencies and forces that helped John write the book. As revelation, this book is a prophecy that came from God through Christ. It was given by an angel to John and then delivered to the churches. Furthermore, the apostle commends the reading of this book, promising a blessing to those who read it, and exhorts those who hear it read to observe and safeguard what they hear. To summarize, these verses offer us (1) the title and contents of Revelation; (2) the manner in which the contents of this book were communicated; and (3) words of commendation from John to those who read and hear it. Let us use those divisions to help us look at the opening verses of the Bible’s last book.

The Title and Contents of Revelation

Christians are often divided about the Book of Revelation. Many ignore the book altogether, except for some well-known texts found in the letters to the seven churches of Asia. Some texts here and there in the book are often preached at funerals. Some Christians ignore the Book of Revelation because of its unfamiliar context and its extraordinary imagery. A sea of glass, a lake of fire; six-winged beasts full of eyes before and behind; dragons, scorpions and serpents; vials of wrath, stars falling to earth, and a bottomless pit—such things are the stuff of myths and legends. The symbolism is foreign to most of us and difficult to interpret. Many people think Revelation is so dreamlike and confusing that it cannot really be understood.

At the other extreme are those Christians who are obsessed with the book and read it more than any other part of Scripture. They say the book holds the answers to all our questions and concerns regarding the distant past, the upheavals of our times, and the shape of future events.

Happily, there is a way to understand Revelation that falls between these two extremes, hinted at in the title of the book. The contents of the book are summarized as *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. The word for *revelation* in Greek is *apocalypse*, which literally means an uncovering or unveiling of something that was previously hidden or kept secret. Thus, this book is an unveiling or uncovering of Jesus Christ.

Revelation was never meant to be an obscure or closed book. It was not meant to be enigmatic. It was written to be read and understood. You may have read this book in times past without attempting to understand it. You were confused by the book's imagery and symbolism and put off by the many conflicting interpretations people have given to that imagery. You became so frustrated that you gave up trying to understand the book. That is a pity, because this book was meant to be understood. The very title suggests that we can and should try to understand what is written in this book.

We admit there are many strange things in the Book of Revelation. Perhaps we should begin our study by imagining ourselves as missionaries who are about to go out to a strange land. One of the first things we do to prepare for that mission is to go to orientation school. There we learn *how the language works* in this new country. People who have never learned a second language are often astonished to be told that not every language works the same way or in the same order as the English language. So we need to approach the language of the Book of Revelation as a new language that must be mastered.

Second, we must learn *the culture* of this new country. We need to understand that what we do may convey a different meaning to people in a foreign culture. Only when we know a culture can we begin to grasp what dress, habits, gestures, and other body language mean in that setting. In some cultures you may present a gift with one hand, but in other cultures you must use both hands or you will insult the receiver. You might say, “I am not insulting you,” but your actions will speak louder than your words. Some of us give up and say, “I’m not going to change my ways to suit those people. I want to do things my way.” If we do that, we will never understand a new culture or be comfortable living with the people who belong to it.

In that light, how can we begin to understand the language and culture of Revelation? First, we must view the content of this book as the “Revelation of *Jesus Christ*,” not merely as the “Revelation of *St. John the Divine*,” as the title in our English Bible puts it. This title simply implies that John was the human instrument who recorded the prophecy and that he was also instrumental in delivering it to the churches. John himself recognizes that his book is the revelation of Jesus Christ given to him as Christ’s servant.

This vision is about Jesus Christ, not the pope, Hitler, Napoleon, Saddam Hussein, or any other person in world history. It has much to say about world history and tells us much about the motives and methods of world leaders, but it is primarily focused on Jesus Christ and His further revelation of Himself to His church. Because Revelation is not primarily about world events or world personalities, we must take care not to read them into the book; we are rather to look at them in the light of the book. We may then understand what goes on in our world according to principles we find in the Book of Revelation, as it discloses

who Jesus Christ is and what He is doing in the world, and what He will do to bring all things to an end. So, the Book of Revelation is first of all a book about Christ.

Let me put it this way: *the Bible was not written to satisfy the hunger of the human mind for knowledge of future events*. Many Christians use the Book of Revelation as a kind of horoscope to predict the future. They might as well read the stars. The Bible is not a horoscope; it is a revelation of Jesus Christ. It is to be understood rationally, spiritually, and practically—not superstitiously or speculatively. Indeed, reading Revelation as a horoscope is not only useless but downright sinful because all such efforts are forbidden in Scripture (Deut. 18:9–14). The technical term for this abuse of Scripture is *bibliomancy*, or, using the Bible as a literary divining rod or Ouija board.

Jesus said, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1:7). Instead, walking by faith, we live one day at a time, knowing that Jesus is Lord, committing the keeping of our souls to a faithful Creator, and casting all our cares upon Him. We must not attempt to pry into the future, for God alone holds the key to it. If He were to hand over that key to us, we would be sorry. So we are not to interpret Revelation speculatively or superstitiously. We must understand the book in terms of our Lord Jesus Christ, because it is a revelation of Him.

Revelation tells us that Jesus Christ, as the Lamb of God, is seated on the throne of heaven. He is the theme of this book, as the One revealed. But He is also the Revealer, the author of the book. Verse 1 says this book is “the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.” “Things which must shortly come to pass” can also be translated as “things which must soon begin to happen.” This phrase is the key to understanding the

Book of Revelation: Jesus Christ wants to show us things that must shortly come to pass.

Some interpreters say these words refer to the immediate historical context of the apostle John, who lived in the first century after Christ. They say Revelation refers to events of that time, such as the persecution of Christians under Domitian, who ruled as Emperor of Rome from AD 81 to AD 96. At that time, it was a capital offense for a person to be a Christian. Following this view, everything in Revelation that would shortly happen should thus be understood in that specific historical context.

Others view these words differently. They say the things that “must shortly come to pass” refer to events and people that extend long into the future. They think that many of these events will occur during the Millennium or thousand-year period prior to the second coming of the Lord.

Still others believe “things which must shortly come to pass” refers to what will happen in all of church history—from the first advent of Christ to His second coming. Let me explain that in more detail here at the risk of being technical. With a book like Revelation, you must be technical. We will be studying this book for a long time, so from the beginning we must lay a solid foundation that will help us know exactly what we are doing, where we are going, and how we should best interpret this book.

Let me explain it to you this way: in church history, five predominant ways of interpreting Revelation have emerged. While these approaches have some substantial overlap at points, they still represent five distinct views of the message and themes of Revelation. Let us summarize those approaches.¹

1. For a succinct summary of these five views, see Cornelis P. Venema, “Interpreting Revelation,” *Tabletalk* 36, no. 1 (Jan. 2012):10–13.

First is the *preterist* approach. This views Revelation wholly in terms of the circumstances that transpired in John's day prior to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70, or in the early Christian centuries leading up to the destruction of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, without any reference to future events. The word *preterist* is derived from the Latin word *praetertum*, meaning "that which is past." Preterists believe that any interpretation of Revelation must be confined to the historic past rather than projected into the future. This view interprets Revelation's opening words, "things which must shortly come to pass," as events that happened in John's own time. Preterists argue that, just as the seven churches of Asia were real first century churches to which letters were addressed, so the entire Book of Revelation contains only things that came to pass in John's day or shortly thereafter, with the exception of chapters 21-22, which clearly refer to the time of the new heaven and new earth. The strength of this approach is that it strongly affirms the operative framework of the book as "things which must shortly come to pass." Its weakness is that Revelation then has little to say to the church today in the midst of her struggles.

Second is the *historicist* approach to Revelation. This view, which was held by most sixteenth century Reformers, sees the Book of Revelation as a symbolic representation of the panorama of church history, from the first coming of Christ to His second advent at the end of the world. A historicist would say that the seven churches of Asia do not refer to seven particular churches in Asia Minor, but to seven ages of church history. They would then conclude that today we live in the age of Laodicea, or the era of the lukewarm church. They thus view Revelation as a chart of church history, offering a series of historical pictures moving from Christ's first

coming to the end of the present age. In Revelation 13, the beast rising from the sea is the rise of Islam in the seventh century, while Revelation 17, several centuries further along, refers to the Roman Catholic Church and rise of the papacy. The strength of this approach is that it embraces all of church history; its weakness is that it too easily assumes that Revelation prophesies a linear movement through church history with no repetition of events seen from different points of view.

Third is the *futurist* approach to Revelation. This was the most popular view of evangelicals at the beginning of the twentieth century, especially premillennial dispensationalists, but it has lost ground in recent decades. The futurist believes that the visions of Revelation 4–22 refer to events that are still future, that will transpire immediately prior to and along with Christ's second coming at the end of history, which will then usher in the millennial age. Most futurists are premillennial, who believe that Christ's return will precede the millennial age. The problem with this view is that it reads the book as almost entirely without reference to the needs and struggles of the churches to which John first sent this book. It also affords little consolation for the suffering church at any other point in church history, including today, because it exclusively focuses on events surrounding Christ's second coming. The strength of this view is that it emphasizes the ultimate victory of Christ and His elect over the world at His second coming.

Fourth is the *idealist* approach, sometimes called the *poetic* or *inspirational* approach. This position is sometimes called *iterism*, from the Latin verb *itero* meaning "to repeat," because such interpreters hold that the events described in Revelation are repeated from time to time in the experience of the church from age to age. This approach teaches that Revelation is relevant for

everyone, since it deals with principles and symbols that are always valid in our personal history and experience. The idealist scarcely wrestles with the problem of chronology in Revelation, preferring to see this book and its symbolism as a tract written for persecuted Christians of any period. The symbolism is interpreted loosely, in a very general way, to give comfort and encouragement to persecuted Christians. The strength of this approach is its applicability to the church of all ages; its weakness is that it is difficult to affirm this view exegetically, based on the description, “things which must shortly come to pass” (1:1).

Finally, the *eclectic* approach embraces the apparent strengths and rejects the apparent weaknesses of the other four approaches. This approach acknowledges that there are elements of truth in all of these approaches. Personally, I believe this is the best and safest approach to take. Though there are serious problems with each of these approaches, we can also glean something from each. Cornel Venema explains this approach well:

Preterism rightly insists that the visions of Revelation reflect events and circumstances contemporaneous with its writing or the period immediately thereafter. But preterism fails to adequately account for the way Revelation also reveals events and circumstances that characterize the struggles of the church throughout the entire inter-advental age. Futurism partially solves the problem of preterism by emphasizing the way the visions of Revelation portray events that will take place shortly before the end of history. But in doing so, futurism exaggerates the future orientation of the book. As for historicism, although the events portrayed in the vision of Revelation have occurred in the past or may reoccur at various points in history, these events are not limited to a particular time in the past, present, or even future.

The obvious strength of eclecticism is its ability to incorporate the primary emphasis of the other

approaches without the one-sidedness that often characterizes alternative views. The weakness of the approach may be its tendency to ascribe different meanings to the same vision.²

In accord with many Reformed theologians, I propose an eclectic approach that accents the idealist or iterist approach. This approach has also been called the *parallel* or *cyclical* view of Revelation. Imagine a man with a video camera who is taking pictures of the congregation. He pans over the people, starting on one side of the church and going all around. Then he goes up into the gallery and does the same thing. Then he goes to the back, comes from behind, and pans over everyone again. That is what we see in Revelation. The book offers us views of the entire history of the church, but seen from different vantage points.

I believe there are seven parallel sections in Revelation. All told, the Book of Revelation offers different views of the church in history, as we will see as we make our way through the book's seven parallel sections. With this parallel or cyclical view of the book, we will see how each section spans the entire dispensation of the gospel from the first coming of Christ two thousand years ago, down to His coming again at the last day.

The great theme of Revelation is the victory of Christ and His church over the old serpent and his helpers and all the kingdoms of this world. We will track that theme through each of the seven sections and see how this book accomplishes its purpose: to inspire, comfort, and encourage God's people in the church in every era to press on in the face of persecution and amidst all our struggles, knowing we are on the winning side in this anti-Christian world. I believe this is the right way to interpret the

2. Venema, "Interpreting Revelation," 13.

Book of Revelation. It puts Christian warfare into proper perspective. God pulls back the curtains to offer us a glimpse behind the events we read and hear about in the news media, or learn about in history, so we can see what unseen but powerful forces are shaping reality in the world around us. Such insights from Revelation will help us fight the good fight of faith and endure to the end. I hope this revelation of Jesus Christ will strengthen our faith, and afford us greater hope and comfort as we progress through this study of the Book of Revelation.

We will look at the book's seven parallel sections, each dealing with the entire present age or dispensation, from the first to the second coming of Christ. We will divide it like this:

- first section, chapters 1–3;
- second, chapters 4–7;
- third, chapters 8–11;
- fourth, chapters 12–14;
- fifth, chapters 15–16,
- sixth, chapters 17–19; and
- seventh, chapters 20–22.

In summary, the Book of Revelation is about Jesus Christ and His victory over the powers of evil. It was written to offer hope to Christians in times of difficulty and darkness and to warn others of judgment to come because of their persistent unbelief and impenitence. You might say the personal themes of Revelation are (1) Christ's revelations of His glorious victory over evil, (2) hope for believers in the midst of persecution, and (3) warnings to unbelievers who are fast approaching Judgment Day. Remember that each of these themes applies to you personally, but do not approach Revelation as if you were solving a difficult puzzle. Do what John did in Revelation 1:17: fall at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. If studying Revelation doesn't

make you bow before the Lord Jesus Christ in wonder, adoration, and joy, then somewhere along the way you have missed the point of the whole book.

The Communication of Revelation

Consider the beauty of the opening verses of the Book of Revelation:

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

Revelation has been communicated to us in four ways that we must keep in mind to properly understand this book. First, it comes to us *from God through our Lord Jesus Christ*. It was delivered by an angel to the apostle John so that we might all benefit from it. It comes to us as an apostolic epistle (1:4), handed from one person to another, from church to church, and from age to age. When you want to send a valuable item through the mail, you don't just stuff it in a mail slot and hope for the best. You send it by registered mail to ensure that the item is received and signed for by the person it is addressed to. Revelation has come to us as a letter registered by God for believers in the church throughout history.

The last verse of the book is much like the ending of many other epistles in the New Testament: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Rev. 22:21). This benediction implies that, although this epistle was sent to the churches in Asia Minor in the first century, it has profound implications for all Christians and for

the church everywhere and in all times—even in our present century.

Second, this book comes to us as an *apocalypse*. It must therefore not be read literally throughout. As a specimen of apocalyptic literature, it is filled with imagery, symbolism, and other kinds of figurative language. To read it all literally is a basic error in interpretation, a failure to do justice to the literary character of the book.

Most of us understand this when we read a book. Fiction has different rules than non-fiction: one allows for imaginary people, places, and things, while the other is based on reality. Allegorical literature must be read allegorically; you cannot read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as you would read Calvin's *Institutes*. Thus, it is crucial to understand that the Book of Revelation cannot be interpreted as mere factual data. Most books in Scripture can be accepted at face value unless there is a special reason for not doing so. But Revelation was not meant to be read that way. If you read it that way, you end up with things that are simply impossible. You must see it as a book that uses imaginative symbolism to help you see more clearly the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, for example, numbers in this book are symbolic rather than mathematical. Colors are symbolic. So are animals, many of which we have never seen. So are patterns that keep on repeating.

Revelation draws us into a world that is full of symbols that leave us with profound impressions. As we examine the symbols in this book and see what they mean, we will begin to understand the message of this book. Revelation is a kind of picture book of the glory of Jesus Christ. It is, as John says, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. What you and I are meant to see in this book is not a book of puzzles but a catalogue of paintings depicting the glory of our Lord and Savior.

Third, this book is communicated as *a divine vision*. Ordinarily Scripture speaks of words and hearing. But Revelation uses the language of seeing and perceiving. In this revelation Christ is not just *speaking* to His servants but *showing* them things that must soon take place. Indeed, as you read through Revelation, you will find the recurring expression, “I saw.” In most of the Bible the recurring expression is, “Hear the Word of God.” But Revelation invites us to *see* the Word of God. John is offering us these views of the Lord Jesus Christ, saying, “I saw this,” and “I saw that.” As he presents one image after another, the scenario builds in scope and depth until at the very end of the book what we see finally begins to make sense.

Finally, this book is communicated as *prophecy*. John says in verse 3, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy.” We usually understand a prophecy as something that foretells the future. But in the Bible most prophecy does not speak about the future as much as it applies the Word of God to the present situation. There may be indications about the future, but by and large prophecy is given so that we may know how to live for God’s glory in the present.

Revelation 1:1 says God gave this revelation to Christ “to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.” At the end of verse 3, God says, “Keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” So the book writes about things that must “shortly come to pass...for the time is at hand.” So we have things that will happen *soon* and events that are *near*, but that is not so much for us as it is for John and his companions. The language here echoes Daniel 2, in which Daniel interprets an astonishing vision of God’s kingdom, to be fulfilled “in the latter days” (2:28), or at the beginning of the *last days*. Now John is shown that those promises have come to fruition because of the work of Jesus Christ,

and the time is short. As the Lord Jesus often declared, “The kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:14). So this revelation of Jesus Christ is a revelation for Christians living in the last days.

When people ask me if I think we’re living in the last days, I answer, “Of course we are living in the last days, but we have been living in the last days from the Bible’s point of view for the last two thousand years.” The New Testament says the onset of the last days was marked by Christ’s pouring out His Spirit on the church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17). That is when Christ inaugurated His kingdom, which is now spreading to the ends of the earth. The last days include the days in which we are living. Thus, John is being told, “You stand at the beginning of the days when the kingdom of Jesus Christ will extend to the ends of the earth.” That is what Revelation is all about. It is communicated to us as a letter from God, an apostolic epistle, an apocalypse, a divine vision, and as a prophecy.

The Commendation of Revelation

In verse 3, the apostle John commends the book of Revelation to all who read it, or, hear it read. He says, “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.” We must remember that this book was sent out in times of controversy. Not everyone acknowledged the authority of John; thus, he could by no means be sure that everyone would receive this epistle with the due measure of faith, reverence, and submission. We must also remember that in those days, many in the church could not read. One of the duties of the minister of the Word was “to give attendance to reading” (1 Tim. 4:13), that is, the reading and exposition of Holy Scripture, so those who could not read could at least hear them read and expounded for their edification. John promises a bless-

ing to both faithful ministers who read and expound this book and also to those who hear it with faith and do what it teaches and commands. We may therefore conclude that we shall be blessed by doing the following things:

- *By reading and studying this book with faith, reverence, and godly fear, as the Word of God and the Word of Christ.* Repent of any past neglect of this part of Scripture. Embrace Revelation as a book God wants you to read and understand. Read it “with an high and reverent esteem...with a firm persuasion that [it is] the very word of God...with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in [it]; with diligence, and attention to the matter and scope of [it]; with meditation, application, self-denial, and prayer” (Larger Catechism, Q. 157).
- *By being obedient to Christ.* John says in verse 3 that people are blessed who hear what Revelation says and “keep those things which are written therein.” Notice that God’s blessing is not pronounced upon those who own a copy of this precious book, nor upon those who only read it or have it read to them, nor upon those who specialize in debating the meaning of this prophecy. The blessing is pronounced upon those who “keep those things” written in it. We *keep* the words of this prophecy by cherishing them as the Word of God and by applying them to ourselves and to our lives in such a way that, as followers of Christ, we are looking forward to the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We want to live as He would have us live until He comes. Knowing that this world will pass away, we look forward to a city with a foundation whose builder and maker is

God (Heb. 11:10; 2 Peter 3:10–15), and we live as strangers and pilgrims in the earth.

So, Revelation calls us to be faithful, willing, obedient subjects of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Various parts of the Bible call us to different forms of obedience to Jesus' office-bearing ministry. The gospels primarily tell us about Jesus as a prophet—"He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:29)—and call us to respond to that teaching: "Take heed therefore how ye hear" (Luke 8:18). The epistles open up the work of Christ as high priest. He is the One who offered Himself as a complete sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God. And today, He continually makes intercession for us. We are to respond by presenting our "bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is [our] reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). The Book of Revelation is primarily about Christ the king. Like Psalm 2, it calls on us and all mankind to "kiss the Son" in sweet submission, "lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little" (Ps. 2:12). But Christ also speaks in Revelation as prophet, intercedes as high priest, while He reigns as king. The Book of Revelation calls us to bow before Christ as prophet, priest, and king, and then to go out and be prophets, priests, and kings standing under His banner and ministering to a perishing world.

- *By being prepared for Christ's coming.* Verse 3 concludes: "for the time is at hand." The lesson embedded in these words for every person in every age of the Christian church is *be prepared to meet your King in righteousness and peace at all times.* We ignore or resist Christ's lordship to

our own peril. You may bend the knee to culture, gurus, Pharisees, libertines, false prophets and prophetesses, or other idols of the times, but know that the sure judgment of King Jesus will soon fall upon you and all others who live carelessly, or walk disorderly, and on every church that does not submit to Christ as Lord.

- *By overcoming through Christ.* The implication of verse 3 is that Christ has power to bless His people even in the midst of severe persecution, and they will be blessed in overcoming the world by faith in Him. Christ promises in Revelation 2:7, “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” God’s overcoming grace and your overcoming faith will be a blessing to you, enabling you by faith to overcome the powers of evil at work in a wicked world. This blessing is sure because, as Peter declared at Pentecost, “God hath made that same Jesus... both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

The counterpart to this promise of blessing is the curse John pronounces at the end of Revelation: “Cursed is he that hears the words of this prophecy, and does not keep those things which are written herein: for the time is at hand.” Believers who read these words are promised blessings, but unbelievers are warned against the danger of despising and disregarding God’s warnings, for the end is near. “Behold, the judge standeth before the door” (James 5:9). Here, John specifically invokes the wrath of God, in the form of a deadly curse, upon those who deal lightly or deceitfully with these words, imposing on it ideas and words of their own choosing, or else discarding anything they disagree with or don’t understand.

Dear friend, examine yourself. Are you reading about Christ, being obedient to Christ, preparing to meet Christ, and overcoming sin through Christ? If you have not found blessing in Christ, you are ignoring Christ at your peril. You will be cursed forever if you do not repent of your sins and take refuge in the mercy of the Lord of glory. But, if you seek for blessing in the reading, hearing, and keeping of the words of this revelation of Jesus Christ, then you will be blessed indeed. Amen.