

Chapter 1

Introductory Remarks

The Book of Revelation has been termed the most difficult book in the entire New Testament. Many there are who hesitate to read and study this book, because, as they say, “It’s too deep for me!” They may express joy in reading the four “Gospels;” they may find some of the “Epistles” interesting and instructive; but when it comes to the Book of Revelation, they shy away from it. Why? Perhaps they feel that the great amount of symbolic language used in the book is too mysterious and too bewildering to comprehend; or they may feel that the many and varied interpretations that have been given to the prophecies in this book have only resulted in making them more confused and discouraged.

Now, we will readily concede that there are many difficult passages in this book and that many questions are certain to arise, - questions which we are unable to answer. Nevertheless, we have before us a beautiful book, giving us Christians the comforting assurance that the Christ who came into this world of ours to suffer and die for our sins is now the living and loving Lord, who is in complete control of all events in the world and who will see to it that no enemies or powers will be able to overthrow His Church. Accordingly, it is our fervent prayer that the inspiring message of this last book in the Bible will impart to us the courage, the comfort, the hope, and the peace which we so desperately need in these closing days of the world’s history.

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ” is also known as “The Apocalypse,” because it is a disclosure or unveiling of future events. In symbolic language, this last book of the Bible gives us a vivid description of how the Church of Jesus Christ will fare from the first century until the end of time.

The real author of this book is God, who is also the author of all the other books of Sacred Scripture. However, as God utilized certain individuals and inspired them to write the various books of Scripture, so He also inspired the Apostle John to write this particular book.

Because of his testimony of Jesus, John had been banished to the small, barren island of Patmos, which was located in the southeastern Aegean Sea, off the coast of Asia Minor. This probably happened around the year 95 A.D. during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian. It was while John was in exile on this island that he was privileged to receive this revelation and was inspired by God's Holy Spirit to record the same.

There can be no doubt that this book was a source of untold comfort to the believers in Asia Minor, who at that time were enduring severe trials and persecutions. But not only a comfort to those first-century Christians. Like all books of Scripture, especially the writings of the New Testament, this book serves to console the Christians of all ages amid the manifold tribulations and trials which will be present until the last day. At the same time this book also sounds a warning not to surrender our faith in Christ by following Satan and his allies.

If we were asked to give a theme or title to Revelation, we might suggest the following: “The Conquering and Victorious Christ, The King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” After the introduction (chapter 1), we have the seven visions. The first vision (chapters 2-3) embodies the well-known letters to the seven churches; and in this vision we behold the conquering Christ as the Head and Ruler of His Church, encouraging and also admonishing the believers by means of His Word. In the vision of the Seven Seals (chapters 4-7) Christ is portrayed as the King of the universe, causing all events to work together for the good of His Church. This is followed by the vision of the Seven Trumpets (chapters 8-11), and we cannot but sense that the conquering and victorious Christ will permit no false spirits to overthrow His Church. In the fourth vision (chapters 12-14), we view the struggle of Christ with Satan and his allies. In the vision of the Seven Bowls of Wrath Poured out on the Earth (chapters 15-16), we behold the avenging judgment of God upon His enemies. In the sixth vision (chapters 17-18), we witness the downfall of Satan’s allies, and we rejoice in the conquering and victorious Christ. The final vision (chapters 20:1-22:5) discloses the crushing defeat of Satan, the old Dragon, and presents to us a beautiful picture of the new Jerusalem, - the Kingdom of Glory. The last verses of the final chapter (verses 6-21) lead us to breathe the prayer: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”

Regarding the interpretation of the book, let it be said that there have been many misinterpretations. Generally speaking, we must not view these seven visions as specific events or episodes that follow one another in consecutive or chronological order. Rather, each vision views the same struggle of Christ and His Church against Satan and his allies, but each from a different angle, thus affording us a better and more comprehensive picture of the battle that will continue throughout the New Testament era.

Furthermore, we must bear in mind also that in Revelation most of the events, - though real and historical, - are described in symbolic language and that these symbols simply cannot be interpreted literalistically. In this connection, however, we must emphasize that nothing in Revelation can be interpreted in a manner which would contradict other clear teachings of Scripture. That would violate the doctrine of inspiration as well as the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. So the moment that you want to put an interpretation on something in Revelation that is not in agreement

with the clear teachings of the other books of the Bible, you can know assuredly that you are off on the wrong track. Scripture cannot and does not contradict itself. Hence, a good rule to follow is: “Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur” - “Let Scripture interpret Scripture.” To do so involves a careful reading and study of the context, - the verses immediately preceding and following the statement under consideration; it means that we study parallel sections and passages in Revelation and also parallel passages and doctrines in other books of Scripture; and it means that we cannot resort to human reason and let human reason be our master, nor should we allow our imagination to run wild. Furthermore, the caution certainly is in place not to go beyond the point of comparison in interpreting the various symbols in Revelation. Let us not be too concerned about interpreting Revelation in every detail and thus lose sight of the main or central message.

It cannot be denied that many false teachings concerning the end of the world and Christ’s second coming have been read into Revelation. For example, many churches and individuals are using the Book of Revelation to support their teaching of, and their belief in, a literal millennium, - the erroneous doctrine that before the end of the world Christ will come again and that He will reign visibly here upon earth for a period of a thousand years. In view of the fact that so many people are adhering to this false teaching, it might be well at the very outset to review what the clear passages of Scripture teach concerning Christ’s second coming and the end of the world.

As a “starter,” we note that Scripture clearly teaches that the time of Christ’s second coming has been set, and that this appointed time is unknown to all created beings.

Acts 1:7 - He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”

John 5:28 - “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come out

Matthew 24:36 - “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

Scripture furthermore clearly teaches that at the appointed time Christ, the God-man, will appear unexpectedly, suddenly and visibly to all people at the same time.

1 Thess. 5:2-3 - For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Matt. 24:27, 30 - “For as the lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”

Matt. 24:42-44 - “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Acts 1:11 - “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Again, it is a clear teaching of Scripture that Christ will come in divine glory, surrounded by His holy angels, for the express purpose of judging the living and the dead. On that day, there will be a resurrection of all the dead.

John 5:28-29 - “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out - those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

Acts 24:15 -there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

Daniel 12:2 - Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

1 Thess. 4:16-17 - For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be

caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

All the dead having been resurrected, they, together with all the people still living at the time of Christ's second advent, will appear before the throne of Christ to be judged. The verdict uttered by the omniscient Judge will be final and unalterable.

Matt. 25: 31-34, 41, 46 - "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'" "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (See also Matt. 13:40-43).

Acts 10:42 - He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

Rom. 14:10b-12 - For we will all stand before God's judgment seat, It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

2 Cor. 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Heb. 9:26b-28 - But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many

people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

The Scriptures also declare that simultaneous with Christ's second coming will be the destruction of the present world.

2 Peter 3:10-12 - But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

To summarize, then, what are the clear teachings of Scripture concerning Christ's second coming and the end of the world? On the basis of the Bible passages that we have quoted, we can definitely affirm the following truths:

- 1) The time of Christ's second coming has been set, but is known only to God.
- 2) His coming will be sudden and unexpected.
- 3) He will appear visibly to all people.
- 4) He will come in divine glory, surrounded by His holy angels.
- 5) All the dead will be resurrected.
- 6) All people will have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. No one will be exempt.
- 7) This judgment, which will be absolutely just, will determine a person's destiny for all eternity. Either a person will be eternally saved or eternally damned.
- 8) At the time of Christ's second coming, this world, as we now know it, will be destroyed.

It will be well for us to remember these clear teachings of Scripture as we proceed on our journey through Revelation. While many questions certainly will be

left unanswered, we nevertheless confidently pray that God's Holy Spirit will lead and guide us to know and believe the central message of this book.