



## THE BOOK OF REVELATION

### 13: WHY WAS THE BOOK OF REVELATION WRITTEN?



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The Book of Revelation has to have a meaning for each and every generation of the Church. Otherwise chapters 1-3 are only relevant to seven churches of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and the entire rest of the Book only relevant to the Church living in the very last days before the Second Coming of Christ.

And in spite of the command to *'watch and to pray'* and in spite of the warning to be aware of the *'signs of the times'*, how might the people of God know for definite that it was they who were living in these *'Last Days'* and thus to know that now was the time to study the Book of Revelation? Indeed the danger in assuming that Revelation is only for those extreme final years and then of assuming that a person is now living in those final days, is that it then opens the way for Christians to focus almost entirely on this one book to the exclusion of the rest of Scripture and to start thinking, believing and behaving out of the conviction that they are facing the imminent end of all things.

Clearly the Bible teaches us to live in the knowledge that one day Jesus will come again and that this knowledge is to influence how we live in this temporary world: *'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... But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.'* (2 Ptr.3v11,13-14). The knowledge that Jesus will come again is to lead us deeper into godliness and holiness and indeed ever since the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, we are living in the *'Last Days'*, even if the actual Second Coming itself may still be afar off.

Simply to think that Revelation is for the end times inevitably means that it can have little or nothing to say to any other generation of the Church. But if we understand and accept that Revelation speaks to us all, then it behoves us to read it and to reflect upon it and to apply its deep truths to how we live our lives today (cf Rev.22v7).

### OF WHAT IS THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN A REVELATION?

1. A REVELATION OF THE LORDSHIP OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB.
2. A REVELATION OF THE CALL AND OF THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH

Unsurprisingly, these two themes are contained and revealed in the very first chapter of Revelation.

*To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

*"Look, he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him." So shall it be! Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."*<sup>1</sup> (1v4-8)



## 1. A REVELATION OF THE LORDSHIP OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB.

When the angel Gabriel met with Zechariah in the Temple, as recorded in Lk.1, there were two different realities going on. To Zechariah, from an earth-bound perspective, it appeared that his and Elizabeth's longed for and prayed for son would never be given to them: that their daily prayer for the coming of the Messiah was a long way from being answered and indeed might never be answered in their life-time: that the growing might of Rome and the murderous rule of King Herod and the existence of a corrupted and compromised high-priesthood, was the truth of their present and of their future. But to Gabriel, there was another and deeper reality, which involved the certainty of the gift of a son to this godly and prayerful couple: the coming of the Messiah and of a great turning of the people to God. What was it that gave this totally different perspective? 'The angel said to him, *'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.'* (Lk.1v19).

Thus we need to start where Jesus is: *'seated... at [God's] right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.'* (Eph.1v20-21).

And so we begin the journey into Revelation and of revelation, where John begins it: in the Spirit and in Heaven. *'After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.'* (Rev.4v1).

Through the lens of the Book of Revelation, we *'come up here'*. We stand in the presence of God: we stand in Heaven, to see and to understand what is truly happening on earth and what lies behind the events unfolding in the world, not just at the end of days but every day.



### 'THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST...'

 (Rev.1v1).

The Book of Revelation is all about Jesus. King from first to last, He 'bookends' the beginning and the end, appropriate for One who is the Alpha and the Omega. This is most clearly demonstrated in the unveiling of what will happen in human history and the reasons behind these events, leading ultimately and inevitably to the final and utter triumph of the Lamb over sin and over Satan and to the coming of the Kingdom of God. He is Lord over the fate of nations and over our own individual lives and our eternal destiny. He is Lord over all the powers of Heaven and Hell. And this is a Lordship that is eternally true, in spite of appearances and of course most graphically demonstrated in the Crucifixion, where the apparent reality and truth was that Satan and sin had triumphed when the actual reality and truth was that they had been utterly vanquished (cf Rev.5v5-6).

And let's not forget that this revelation of Jesus was as much a revelation for John as it was for the rest of the churches. This was not Jesus the carpenter's son, or Jesus the suffering servant and not even the Jesus of Easter Day. Rather it was the Jesus whom John had glimpsed briefly on the Mount of Transfiguration (cf Rev.1v12-18).

And this is more than Jesus can simply say what is going to happen – any prophet or soothsayer might do that without in any way being able to make those events occur. This is Jesus revealing that He is purposing, willing and ultimately controlling these events, however terrifying or out of control they might appear to be. This is a truth about God contained in both the Old and the New Testaments. *Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand and I will do all that I please...What I have*

said, *that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do*' (Isa.46v9-11). And see for example Isa.42v5,9; 43v10-13; 44v6-8; Isa.55v10-11; Jer.1v9-12; Dan.2v28.

Similarly the teachings of Jesus in the Synoptics about the Second Coming (Mt.24; Mk.13; Lk.21) or Paul's words in Galatians about the First Coming (Gal.4v4-5), demonstrate that God is in control and that events will unfold according to His plans and purposes.

In the opening paragraphs of Revelation, the descriptions of God and of Jesus, are virtually one and the same. He is described as being the One *'...who is, and who was, and who is to come...'*(1v4,8). As *'the Alpha and the Omega...'* (1v8) and as *'...the First and the Last. I am the Living One...'* (1v17-18) and as the One who *'...who holds the key of David.'* (3v8).

In the last few verses of the final chapter of Revelation we read exactly the same, that Jesus is, *'... the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.'* (22v13). He is *'...the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.'* (22v13). Everything and everyone is encompassed by Christ.

### **LORD OF ALL – THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE**

As the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the whole of human history is held by Christ (cf Col.1v15-17). And at the start and at the completion of the book, He is the One who sent His angel to reveal to the Church what must happen (1v1; 22v16).

Once John is caught up into Heaven, he (and we) will see what lies behind world events and he (and we) will see and will understand from Heaven's perspective, because he (and we) will be standing in the very throne room of Heaven (cf Eph.2v6). There is the constant repetition of God's 'throne' (3v21; 4v2-6, 9-10; 5v1,6-7,11,13; 6v16; 7v9-11,15,17; 8v3; 12v5; 14v3; 16v17; 19v4-5; 20v11-13,15; 21v1,3). Do we get the message!?! And so superior is He to all others, that even those seated in thrones in Heaven, bow down at His feet (4v4; 11v16)! Indeed chapters 4-7 are the indispensable pre-reading before we turn to the catastrophes and judgements that will befall the earth and to the persecution of the saints. Without standing in Heaven, we will not be able properly to comprehend what is occurring when we stand on the earth.

And so Jesus is revealed as being Lord over world events, whether that be the rise and fall of cities, empires and rulers or the natural disasters that are to come. And these events only occur according to God's plans and purposes, released by the opening of the seals and by the sounding of the trumpets and the pouring out of the bowls of wrath.

The debate and discussion about whether such disasters are actually and actively willed by God, or whether they lie in His permissive will, or whether they are the inevitable consequences of a world that has been catastrophically affected by sin, both Adam's 'original sin' and the thousand and one selfish and sinful actions that occur every moment of every day, lie beyond the scope of these studies. However what is absolutely within the remit of these studies and is one of the central themes of Revelation, can be summarised in the words of Psalm 31v14-15: *'But I trust in you, Lord; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands.'*

### **LORD OVER SIN AND OVER ALL THE POWER OF SATAN**

It is Jesus and Jesus alone who holds the keys of Death and of Hades (1v18) and it is an angel of God who has the key to the Abyss to release demonic forces for a defined and limited time and with defined and limited powers (9v1-11). Later an angel will bind Satan and then release him to go to his ultimate destruction, accompanied by the Anti-Christ and the False Prophet and by Death and Hades (19v19-21; 20v1-3,7-10,14).

In the war in Heaven, Satan *'is not strong enough'* and is cast down in great wrath, *'because he knows his time is short.'* (12v7-13). The Beast is given power successfully to wage war against the saints of God, but only for a controlled and limited period (11v1-12; 13v7) and no human power of wickedness can stand against the power of God (6v15-17; 17v16-17; 18v1ff; 20v7-9). And see Psalm 2, echoed in Rev.2v27; 12v5; 19v15.

### **LORD OF HIS PEOPLE AND LORD FOR HIS PEOPLE**

One of the great chapters of the Old Testament is Isaiah 40 and in it the nations are described as being like *'fine dust'*, or like a *'drop in a bucket'* (v. 15). The rulers of the world are *'brought to nothing'*, and *'its people are like grasshoppers'* compared to the greatness of God (v.22-23). In the face of such a God perhaps it is no wonder that God's people at times feared that *'My way is hidden from the Lord...'* (v.27). But in that same chapter comes the marvellous verse: *'He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.'* (v.11).

Given the elemental struggle that is described in Revelation and the great unfolding of God's cosmic plans for the world, it might be easy for a Christian to wonder: *'does God even notice me?'* and the answer is a resounding *'Yes!'*

The very reason that the angel is sent is to let the Church know ahead of time what will happen and why, so that it may be prepared. And see how the Book begins: *'To the seven churches in the province of Asia: **Grace and peace to you** from him who is, and who was, and who is to come... and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him **who loves us** and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.'* (1v4-5). This *'ruler of the kings of the earth'* knows and cares about us.

In the letters to the seven churches, the Lord knows all about them – *'I know...'* occurs on every occasion. Often that is about how they are doing, *'I know your deeds'* but sometimes about their sufferings, *'I know your afflictions'*, or even, *'I know where you live.'* The Lord knows the name of the believer who was killed at Pergamum and on two occasions, at Ephesus, and at Thyatira, mention is made of the quality of the believers' love for Jesus and at Laodicea, Jesus says: *'Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline...'* (3v19).

Jesus is attentive to the sufferings and cries of those who have suffered and died for the sake of their Lord and for the Gospel (ch.6v9-11;7v1-17;), whilst the final description of the Church is that of a *'bride, beautifully dressed for her husband'* (19v6-9; 21v2). What better description of the relationship of love between Jesus and His people, the One who calls us beautiful and who made us beautiful! For the Church and for the individual believer to know the *Lordship* of Jesus is for the Church and for the individual believer to know the *Love* of Jesus. But of course this would be no surprise to John. For had he not always known that he was *'the disciple whom Jesus loved'*?

And thus the Book ends as it began with grace and with love: *'The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!... The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.'*(1v4-5; 22v17,21).

