

Introduction to the Revelation

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Revelation 1:1 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:

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

3 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.

4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;

5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to

him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;

20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels [ministers] of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

The Zenith of the Bible

God has some last words for us in the Revelation, and I thank God for them. Woven throughout the sixty-six books of the Bible is a glorious revelation of Jesus Christ and the great plan of redemption that God set forth. It took a period of more than fifteen hundred years to write this Book. Men today think if they have to spend seven, eight, or even ten years to write a book, that it is a struggle. Well, the writing of this Book took more than fifteen hundred years and forty different men, as they were moved on by the Holy Spirit.

Some of them, such as the Apostle Paul, were highly educated. Some of those authors were fishermen who had no education whatsoever. Others in the Old Testament were herdsmen whom God had called right from the flock; yet they authored many books of the Bible. Some of them were tax gatherers and businessmen to whom Jesus had said, "Come, and follow Me." Through the Holy Spirit, they were able to write for us different portions of the Bible.

When we come to the Revelation, we come to the very zenith of the sixty-six books. Some of the deepest truths and the most powerful portions of God's Word, the most enlightening and inspiring of the sixty-six books, are found in the last book, the Revelation.

Let us read Revelation 1:3. It 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." The time was at hand when it was given to John for the blessings to come from the Revelation and the study of the prophecy of it. There are many who will not regard the Revelation as a prophecy. Some feel it was only a veiled way of communication that the early church used to protect themselves from the Roman Empire. Others say its fulfillment is future (the Second Coming of Christ), others say it is past, while a few say it is for now.

Millennialists all agree that God's clock of prophecy stopped at Calvary, and that it will not tick any more until Jesus comes again. The truth is, however, God told Daniel and exactly pinpointed when the kingdom would come. That teaching is so plain that if they own the seventy weeks as consecutive years, or four hundred and ninety years, then they have to admit that the kingdom is here. So to uphold their millennium, they say that sixty-nine weeks went

by, then God's prophecy time clock stopped. They say that it has not been ticking since Calvary, and that it will not start ticking until Jesus comes again. My friend, there is no truth in that whatsoever. All seventy weeks of Daniel's prophecy have been fulfilled. God help us to sort out the falsity and find the truth.

A careful study of the Revelation will definitely prove to us that it is a prophecy of the church, of her conflict with the many adversaries, beginning with Christ's first advent and climaxing with the Second Coming of Christ. The Second Coming of Christ will bring the destruction of the earth and the heavens. This Revelation only reaches to the Second Coming of Christ; there is nothing in the Bible that teaches anything, beyond that, except the judgment scene.

A Present Message

Time has been broken into many dispensations; there was Abraham's dispensation, back in the patriarchal age; there was the age of the law of Moses; there was the age of the prophets. From the day of John the Baptist on through, however, we moved into the last days of time. Now is the time for this Revelation to be fulfilled and made plain before the minds of the people.

Revelation 1:1, 5-6 tells us: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass. . . . And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

Here, John spoke of Jesus Christ as the first begotten from the dead, referring to His resurrection, and telling us that He is the Prince of the kings of the earth. When He loved us and washed us in His own blood, He purchased the church (Acts 20:28) and made us kings and priests so that we could reign right here on the earth. His dominion, which began when He arose from the dead, will last forever. Thank God, that is better than a thousand years.

When Peter preached that first message under the anointing of the Holy Ghost, he told the Jews that they had crucified the Lord of glory, and the same Jesus whom they had crucified, God had raised Him up and made Him Lord, King, and Ruler. The words of the Revelation begin at the Resurrection of Christ, when He paid the price of redemption and established the church. It began in the first century and continues through all the ages of time, right to our present age.

Now, there is a part of the Revelation message which fits our age. Verse 19 says, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are [things that were going on in John's day], and the things which shall be hereafter." In some portions of the Revelation, Jesus is called "the lion of the tribe of Judah." When He has fully opened the last seal, when the seventh-trumpet angel has fully sounded the last trumpet, when the last great battle of Armageddon has been fought, when Babylon (false religion) has fully fallen, and Satan is defeated, then Revelation 1:7 will be fulfilled: "Behold, he cometh with clouds" In seven verses John covered the whole thing. Verse 5 deals with Christ's first coming; then verse 7 prophesies of His second coming. I want you to understand that the Revelation message is not to begin in some millennial age, nor is it referring to some age that passed before John's day.

Why Symbols?

Many times people ask, "Why is the Revelation written in symbolic language?" There are basically two schools of thought about Bible prophecy. There is a school of people who interpret everything in a literal sense, But when we begin to take the Word of God literally—every verse, every word—we are going to get into trouble. Certainly, the prophets did prophesy that the desert would blossom as a rose, the lion would eat straw like the ox, and the wolf and the lamb would lie down together, but we just need to let God settle us down a little bit.

While there is one group of people who are literalists, there are others who believe that a portion of the Bible is written in a figurative sense. There are parts of the Bible that are definitely to be taken literally, and there are parts of it that can only be taken spiritually, or figuratively. The literal thing is just a figure of a spiritual picture that God is endeavoring to get to us.

Why would God give a picture of one thing to teach something else? First of all, symbolic language is used because men in a lost condition, according to the Bible, are deaf and blind; they cannot comprehend spiritual things. First Corinthians 2:14 tells us, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." If God ever gets spiritual truth to them, He has to use a parable. He has to bring spiritual things down to an earthly level where they can understand.

This is why Christ used parables when He taught the Gospel. Consider Nicodemus. He had a greater education than most of us. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, but he could not understand spiritual things. When Jesus told him that he needed to be born again, the first thing he said was, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter

the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (John 3:4). He could not understand the spiritual things at all.

When Christ spoke, He used symbols in much of His language. When He looked on the multitudes, He looked on them as "sheep without a shepherd," fainting and weary, and ever coming short of what they needed to be. He taught about the ninety-nine sheep that were safe in the fold, and of His seeking the one lost sheep. He was using figurative language to show the concern that He had for one lost soul. If He had stood up and preached that He came to save that one lost soul, those Jews would have risen up and said, "We're not lost." So He talked about sheep that had wandered and lost their way, and He got the picture across to them.

Figurative language is used throughout the Bible, taking natural things to teach spiritual lessons. It is not confined just to the Revelation. This is how we answer all the symbols in Revelation; for every dark saying there is in the Revelation, there is another Scripture in the Bible that will let us know what the symbol represents. Jesus, speaking of those who are sick in sin and desiring to be saved, called them a "white harvest," and the "sickle" (God's Word) needs to be put in to reap that harvest. Without figurative speech, there is a multitude of souls who will never understand the lesson.

There are many other reasons for symbolic language. Interpretation of words can become very confusing for the reason that the same word may have varied meanings. There may be six thousand words in the Greek language, and several hundred thousand in the English language. Because of that, one Greek word has many different meanings. The Greek word for *box* is just translated "box," but we use the word in lots of ways. The only way you can understand the correct interpretation is by how it is used in the sentence (contextual interpretation).

Only His Children Can Read the Message

Jesus used signified language, or parables, to hide the deeper things from those who are not Christians. When the disciples asked Jesus: "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" He answered, "Be cause it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matthew 13:10-11). He taught that these things are hidden from the wise and prudent, but just revealed unto babes (in Christ). Revelation 1:1 says, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants . . ." Now you might as well mark it down, if you are not a servant of the Lord, you are not going to get some of the truth.

No man can be charged in court because he has written or read symbolic language. The judge can always say, "That may not be what it means." That meant something to the morning-time church; even though it was understood by the Christians, it was hidden from the enemy, and it still is!

I am glad I understand that Armageddon is almost over. Oh, yes! While false religion begins to gather their forces to fight Armageddon, they will hear the words "It's finished! It's all over!" at the Second Coming of Christ. My friend, the Revelation is revealed unto His servants. Today, it is our lamp in a sin-darkened world, and I thank God for it. It warns the reader of dangerous periods in the destiny of the church. The truth in its pages challenges the church to engage in this final conflict of the ages. It all will soon be over, friend; if you are ever going to stand up and fight for truth, you must do it now.

His Precious Word

God's Word not only challenges the church, but it causes our faith to become strong in the assurance of final victory. There is nothing that holds me steady in the trial and blesses and strengthens me as the encouragement I find in God's Word. I already know how it is going to win out. There will never again be a one-world power. When Jesus comes, the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet will be trying to get together, but they will be divided all the time they are trying to get together. If I did not know that, I would be scared to death with what is going on today. This Book (the Bible) will inspire your faith.

The Revelation is like the old eighth-grade arithmetic books were. Do you remember them? We had a terrible struggle up to that point, but when they put out the eighth-grade book, they put the answers in the back of the book. After you worked the problem, you could look in the back of the book to tell whether or not your answer was correct. Well, this is how the Revelation is: the answers are in the back of the book.

The devil is turned around. He tries to tell you: "You can't win by standing for truth. You're in the minority. The church will get wiped out." The church, however, will never be defeated. She will be more glorious from here on out than she has ever been. The Revelation is given to us for encouragement. It will inspire our faith and make our faith stronger in the assurance of the final victory. As we study the Revelation, we are going to find that love overcomes hate every time. No matter how much hate is built up and developed against the church, if she does not lose that love, she will come out victoriously.

Light always dispels darkness; darkness never puts out light. Someone may say, "There was a Dark Age." Yes,

that was because the light was not shining, but as soon as the light appeared again, it began to dispel the darkness. It is light again in the evening, just as it was in the morning. All the way through the Book, good overcomes evil, and truth destroys error. Satan will finally be completely defeated, and Christ will conquer and reign forever and ever. If you want to stir up the devil, when he comes around and gives you a hard time, just start telling him that by the Word of God, he is already a defeated devil.

The Key

Let us read Revelation 1:18. It reads, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death." The keys to symbols are a necessity to anything. The key to anything, if it is locked, is a necessity. Without a key, you cannot get in. Without the key, maps fail to have meaning. All intelligible thought is a puzzle without a key. Christ said that "I . . . have the keys."

Christ has the key to all eternal things. How our troubled world has sought for the key to unlock peace. We have spent millions of dollars at peace conferences, and we are farther from peace today than we were before we spent all the money. Why? Only Jesus Christ has the key to peace; He is the Prince of Peace. Only He can unlock peace in your heart, in your home, and in our nation. I know the Pope will tell you that he has the keys, but you will not find it written anywhere in the Word where Christ gives the keys to anyone else, in the truest sense.

I know He gave the ministry the keys to the kingdom, which is nothing more than the Gospel that unlocks man's understanding of how to get into the kingdom; but when He talks about the key to eternal things, He holds those. He holds the key of life as well as the key of death. When He said, "I . . . have the keys of hell and of death," that is merely figures of all the forms of woes that can affect the church.

What is Jesus telling the church? "I have the keys. The devil may tell you that he will do this or that to you, but he can do nothing. There cannot be a good or a bad thing come upon you unless I unlock it." That meant much to the church in John's day, and it means much to me. The devil can unlock nothing to me. He can bring nothing upon me unless he first consults Jesus.

Following that thought, if I truly live for Jesus, there can be nothing come upon me but what will be good for me. Everything works for my good. He has the keys to life (the present); He has the keys to Hades (life after death); and He has the keys to death (in between the two). The devil has so charmed the minds of people that they are almost afraid to move. People are afraid to testify, afraid really to trust God, and afraid really to throw themselves upon the mercies of the Lord.

Someone may say, "Well, Brother Wilson, just hold the standard the way you want, but I'm going to Heaven whether you say so or not." You are not going to Heaven unless Jesus unlocks it to you. You cannot force your way into Heaven. You cannot force your way into Paradise, because He has the keys. A preacher may preach the best he can, bring out all your good points, and try to preach you into Heaven, but if you have not been right in your heart, Jesus will unlock hell to you. Now if we really believe that today, it ought to bring a new seriousness and soberness into our living.

This is why I can live fearlessly, as far as man is concerned. Why? Nobody is going to touch a hair on my head unless God says so. I am going to live until the very moment He sees fit to take me. I will not undergo a bit more persecution and heartache than what He sees is good for me, to develop me. Oh, what a wonderful way to live! Hades and death are taken as figures of all the forms of woes which can affect the church, or a symbol of everything the devil can put at you. When Jesus said that He holds the keys of hell and death, it means that He is in absolute control.

Total Victory

When God made that second everlasting covenant with Abraham and talked about the seed being as the stars, He began to talk about some other things. Let us read Genesis 22:17. It says, "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed [Christ] as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies."

Matthew 16:13-18 records this conversation between Jesus and His disciples: ". . . he asked his disciples saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock [Christ] I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

God told Abraham that the seed (Christ) would possess the gate of His enemies, or control His enemies. Jesus' own

words were that the gates of hell would not prevail against Him. Now when we talk about His enemies, they are our enemies as a Christian. We do not have time to study all of them, but the last enemy to be destroyed is death. Death is an enemy to man in a sense; but thank God, it has been destroyed. Second Timothy 1:10 tells us that "Jesus . . . hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." He destroys death by proving to the Christian that death is not what he thinks it is. He can turn it around and so destroy the enemy, death, that it will be a welcome friend when you come face to face with it. Jesus will be right there to unlock Hades, a place of paradise for you to rest till the Second Coming of Christ.

In Revelation 1:17-18 Jesus told John: "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." You and I only have "derived" life. We derive life from someone else, and since this is true, we cannot give life to anything. But thank God, He is life. That is why Paul told us that the first Adam was just a living soul; he only had life for himself. The second Adam, Christ, is a quickening Spirit; He is life personified. He does not derive His life from someone else; He is the life-giver. He was dead, but He is alive for evermore. Not only is He alive for evermore, but He can also give life. Since He has life in Himself, He can quicken life. When He talks about death here, He is referring to death of all kinds. He can bring death to feelings, powers, sins, backslidings, and doubts. He can quicken all these things, if you will allow Him.

The Key of Experience

You might ask, "Why did He say that He had the keys?" Anyone who has passed through any great experience and has come out victoriously has the key to that experience. This is why God takes us through some hard places. When you go through a hard experience and come through it with victory, then you have the key to it; you can unlock admonition to someone else to help them through. No one can really help you very much who has not been through something himself. It is easy to say what you would do in certain circumstances, when you have never actually been faced with it; but only someone who has gone through the experience has the key to unlock help to anyone else. I believe in living right down where we are, and not talking something greater than we actually possess.

Christ has the key to the experience of death because He passed through it victoriously. Since He passed through it victoriously, He is able to unlock victory to you and me. When He told John that He had the keys of Hades and death, He was saying in so many words: "I've been tempted in all points. The devil did his very best to defeat me—he drained his source of power—but I am still victorious."

As He went to the Cross, He said, ". . . this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). When the devil took Him to the Cross, he was actually trying to bring Him into his purpose, but what did he do? Through His death, the veil was rent from top to bottom so that you and I, when we go through a trial, can look right into the very holy place where our Anchor is and be made able to go through the circumstance because He went through it. When they placed Him in the grave, there were plenty of people, the devil included, who thought it was all over. The truth of the matter is, however, He went into the grave to tear its bars asunder and to rob it of its victory. It makes me want to serve Him. Without Him, neither history nor prophecy has real meaning.

The Alpha and Omega

Christ is not only the key to Hades and death, but He is also the key to the Scriptures. That is why He uses Alpha and Omega, the first and the last letters in the Greek alphabet. Just as it takes the first letter and the last letter to complete the Greek alphabet, when it comes to Christian living, you have no beginning in Christian living until He comes in. He is not only the beginning, but also the end. He is the Alpha and Omega of truth, the key to the Scriptures.

The Revelation is His revelation: "The Revelation of *Jesus Christ* . . ." (Revelation 1:1). It reveals what Christ can do for people under the worst circumstances. It reveals the grace that Christ can give His children when they are thrown to the lions or when they are burned at the stake. In this time when only God in Heaven knows exactly what we face, the degree of it, Jesus is wanting to reveal Himself afresh to you.

It is a revelation of how Jesus Christ can save. My friend, when you study through the Word of God, you will see where He moved on men in all walks of life. His power is just the same whether the man is possessed with seven devils, or with seven hundred; whether he is a highly-educated man, or a very religious man. He quickens them into a new life, with power to live free from sin.

Then, His grace, strength, wisdom, and help are revealed throughout the Revelation. He wants us to get our eyes anointed that we might see a new, fresh revelation of Jesus Christ and what He can do for people. He is still the Healer of every sickness and every disease. He is still the Keeper. He not only can save a man, but He can also keep him through every circumstance and trial. If you get the Revelation of Him that God wants you to have, you will be able to join with the Apostle Paul and say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." We are

hindered today in too great a way because our vision is not clear. We begin to limit God to what we can do in our physical strength. We need a vision of Jesus Christ as Lord of lords and King of kings. He controls all things when it comes to His church.

Let us read Luke 11:52. It states, "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered." Here Jesus represents the key of knowledge of God and salvation under the figure of a sanctuary that you enter into. It was the duty of the scribes (referred to here as lawyers because they wrote and taught the Law) to lead people into this sanctuary, but they had locked the door and kept possession of the key. The key referred to here is the Word of God, the interpretation of which the scribes planned exclusively for themselves.

When they rewrote the Law, they just wrote it to suit themselves. If they would have written the Word of God, it would have been the key of knowledge that would have opened up an experience of salvation to men and brought them into a sanctuary, the church. When they changed it, however, they not only refused to go in themselves, but they also shut the door so that others could not go in. Is this going on today? Whoever the preacher is who will not preach the Gospel as it is, and who is ever seeking to find something else to teach to people except God's Word, is living under this woe.

Christ is the key to the Scriptures. It is foolish to try to literalize a symbolic portion of the Bible. You may ask, "You don't believe the lion is going to lie down with the lamb?" No, my friend, those are only figurative expressions, referring to the peaceful Kingdom of God. Animals are used to show our natures before we are changed, and then how we act after we are changed through the great and mighty power of God. Jesus did not come to change animals; He came to change us. The animals do not need changed; they are exactly as God made them. It was man who fell, who needs to be changed.

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