

The Apocalypse - Revelation 1:1-4

by Steve Gallagher

The Book of Revelation is a revelation of Jesus Christ and the end times events that will unfold, emphasizing the imminence of the return of Christ and the importance of being prepared and ready.

Duration: 1:02:33

Scripture: Revelation 1:1-4

Topics: "Apocalypse Study"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by acknowledging the power and significance of the first four verses of the book of Revelation. They express a prayer for understanding and the importance of studying this marvelous book. The speaker mentions that they will focus on the first four verses in this session and save the discussion of Jesus Christ for the next week. They highlight the four-step process of communication in the book of Revelation, from God to Jesus Christ, to the angels, to John, and finally to the churches. The sermon concludes with a greeting from John to the seven churches in Asia, emphasizing grace and peace from God, the seven spirits before His throne, and Jesus Christ.

Transcript

The following message is provided by Eternal Weight of Glory. For other sermons, teachings, and articles, please visit EternalWeight.com. I promised you that I was going to strive to maintain a one-chapter-a-week regimen, but I was looking at chapter one and I just couldn't do it. It would do violence to the entire book to try to get this whole chapter in one talk.

So, what I'm going to do is today we're going to just look at the first four verses, and trust me, I am going to be hard-pressed just to get through that. And next week, if you look at verse five, you see the first four words there, and from Jesus Christ. From that phrase through the rest of the chapter is all about Jesus Christ.

So, next week I'm going to focus on Him, and I think that will be a very good study next week. And I didn't want to mess it up by trying to cram too much in. So, today we're just going to look at the first four verses.

Let's read them, and then I'll pray. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bondservants, the things which must soon take place. And He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bondservant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it, for the time is near. John, to the seven churches that are in Asia, grace to you and peace. From Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ.

And I'll stop there. Lord, this is a power-packed four verses in your holy word. And I pray, Lord, that you will breathe life into these words.

And I pray that because of this study that will transpire here today, that the listeners, the audience, the people here with me this morning will get the reality of this wonderful and marvelous book. The foundation of it would be laid here today in this study. Lord, I thank you for what was expressed here.

I thank you that it didn't just start at verse 4, but that there's these first three verses that are so powerful and so profound. We thank you for your word. We pray that you will bless your word to our hearts today.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. All right, the way I'm going to handle this is I'm going to take phrase by phrase through these four verses. And then we'll read it again at the end, and hopefully it'll mean something more to you when we read it at the end.

So it begins with two words, the revelation. The word revelation in the Greek is apokalupsis, and it comes from apokalupto. One's the noun verb, and one is the noun form, apokalupsis.

And the verb form is apokalupto. But anyway, apo, A-P-O, means off. That's exactly what it means, off.

Kalupto means to bury something or cover something or hide something. So when you put the two of them together, it's almost like putting in the English language, we would say un, in front of something. So you have something buried, so it becomes unburied.

You have something covered, so it becomes uncovered. You have something hidden, it becomes unhidden. And when you're using it in a figurative, spiritual sense, it's always referring to spiritual mysteries that God the Father has kept within Himself hithertofore.

Is that the right word? Hithertofore. Up till now. This has been something that He has kept hidden from human minds.

But now, there's something occurring here. An unveiling is taking place here, and something is, a lid is being taken off so that we can look down into a new realm of knowledge about primarily Jesus Christ and also about the future, and what's going to transpire in the future. This word apokalupto, that's the verb version, is used 26 times, and the noun version, apokalupsis, is used 18 times in the New Testament.

But, interestingly, this is the only time it's used in this book that bears it as its name. You know, of all the times that Paul used it, and Jesus used it, and so forth, it's only used one time, the very first word, practically, in the book, and it bears the name of that for the book. I want to read a couple of quotes about this.

These are both preachers. Adrian Rogers, famous Southern Baptist preacher, this is what he said. When Jesus came the first time, His glory was veiled.

When He comes back, His glory will be unveiled. When He came the first time, He came to a crucifixion. When He comes back, He will be coming to a coronation.

You must be His bond slave to receive this book. If you're not His bond slave, you are opening someone else's mail. And that is very true, you know, from a spiritual standpoint.

This is a spiritual letter. It's not just an exercise in academics. There's something profoundly spiritual and powerful in this epistle.

And you have to see yourself, and in reality, be a bond slave of Jesus Christ, or it's just going to be gibberish to you. Let me read the quote from Joel Beakey, who is a Reformed preacher of our day. Too many people ignore this book because of all the symbolism and difficult things to understand.

But this is a revelation. It is meant to be understood. I love that.

That is just a very wonderful statement. And he goes on to say, it's like going to a foreign country. You have to learn the customs and so on.

In the same way, we simply need to understand the genre of the book. And he goes into, you know, talk about that, which I don't want to get off track with. But he's making a good point here, that this book wasn't put here to just confound us and to make it, you know, to where, well, why even read that book? It's so full of symbolism and, you know, difficult things and mysteries and stuff.

Why even waste my time? I'd rather go read Matthew or something that I can get my mind around. But it's here for us to read. And not only is it here for us to read, there's a blessing promised with it.

As we'll see here in a few minutes. All right. Now, there's one other aspect I want to touch on while we're still looking at this word revelation.

We're talking about genres. And there are two genres when it comes to predicting end-time events. One is an apocalyptic form of literature, and the other is a prophetic form of literature.

Which is it here? You know, well, look at verse 1. It says, the revelation, the apocalypse of Jesus Christ. So, oh, okay, so this must be apocalyptic. Well, but look at verse 4, where it says, excuse me, verse 3, where it says the words of the prophecy.

So now, which is it? Well, I think it's worth knowing a couple of things about these two genres. Just in understanding what the Bible has to say about future events. A prophetic book tends to be communicated through the word.

So you see books like Joel and Hosea and Micah. They begin with the words, and the word of the Lord came to Micah, you know, or so on. And those tend to be on the side of the prophetic, those books.

But definitely that is representing more of the prophetic form that it comes to the prophet. Then you have an apocalyptic book, which tends to be communicated through visions. So Isaiah begins with the statement, something like, the vision that came to the prophet Isaiah.

And Ezekiel, the visions which Ezekiel saw, you know, or however those exactly are stated. And when you look at those books, you see they're packed full of visions, aren't they? Alright, so that's one difference between a prophetic type literature and apocalyptic type literature. But there's another, and it's probably more important.

A prophetic book tends to be optimistic. The message is that if the nation will repent, they can avoid the judgments that are being predicted. Okay, so that would be our style of preaching here at Pure Life Ministries.

We are constantly telling the men, if you'll just repent, you're not going to face the consequences of your sin. You know, so you could say that we would fit into that prophetic style of literature. An apocalyptic book tends to be pessimistic.

And what I mean by that is the message is that judgment is coming. It's too late to stop it at this point. The only hope lies in the future, not in the present.

Now think about that. And when you think about the book of Revelation, which is it? Well, it's both. It's both.

Because there is that apocalyptic message in this book. This is coming. And there is no getting around it.

Nothing's going to happen that is going to so profoundly change this world that these events are not going to unfold. Because it is going to happen. Because Jesus Christ is going to subdue all his enemies.

So it is very much apocalyptic. And yet all the way through this book is a promise to individuals that if you'll repent, you can still turn. And you can still escape the ultimate destruction of my enemies.

George Ladd calls it a prophetic apocalyptic. So he gets both sides of it. And it's true.

It is both. So that's good to know that stuff. We're not here to wow the emotions.

We are here to expand your comprehension of the Word of God. Sounds good, right? All right, let's continue on. The revelation of Jesus Christ.

All right, now right off the bat, we're not four or five words into this book. We are already coming into a controversy. Is this the revelation about Jesus Christ? Or is this a revelation from Jesus Christ? And I'm going to give you both sides of the story.

And you can decide for yourself which you believe. Okay? Let's look at what those people who believe this is about Jesus Christ. Let's just see kind of what they say.

Joel Beeky, a preacher, he says, This book is about Jesus Christ. He is the hero of this book. It is to show how Jesus Christ will conquer all his foes.

It is designed to get us to worship the king of kings. Wow. Who wants to stand up and argue that, against that? I don't.

Rex Andrews says, But this is, above all else, the revelation of Jesus Christ. So there's a couple of guys there who believe strongly that that's what this means. And it's hard not to see their point.

Think about it. Almost the entirety of the first chapter is all about Jesus Christ. So the foundation of the book, right off the bat, getting right out of the gate, it's all about Jesus.

And then chapters 2 and 3, we are given seven more attributes of Jesus Christ, scattered through those messages to the churches. Chapters 4 and 5 are all about his inauguration. Chapters 6 through 19 are all about God's destruction of his enemies, meaning Jesus' enemies, and the bringing of everything under the

feet of Jesus Christ, and the bringing of all the world's governments under the governorship of Jesus Christ.

And then chapters 20 through 22 are the description of his eternal marriage to his bride. So it's easy to see why some people would believe that this is all about Jesus Christ. This is the revelation of Jesus Christ.

It's easy to understand that. And now you're thinking, well, who in the world could think anything other than that? Well, I'll tell you who would think other than that is the scholars. Let me read you some quotes from biblical scholars because they have a point too.

And I'm really trying to keep this to a minimum because I don't want to get too stuck here. But Osborne says, Jesus Christ is not the subject of the book but the author. Thomas says, The plain fact that Christ functions in the role of revealer throughout the book is why he believes that it's from Jesus Christ.

When this is coupled with the plain statement of the first verse that the revelation is given by Jesus Christ to John as God gave it to him, the case is even more convincing. So in other words, here's this revelation. God gives it to Jesus and Jesus gives it to John.

All right? So, hmm, yeah, he's got a point there. And it is true that all the way through, it's Jesus Christ who's ripping open the seven seals, right? And revealing the contents of the future that are represented in each of those seals in that book. George Ladd says, God the Father is the ultimate source and fountainhead of all revelation.

God the Son is the agent through whom this revelation is imparted to men. Hmm, yeah, okay. The Expositors commentary says, Who else can impart a revelation so true, so weighty, and so precious? Yet again, the revelation to be now given by Jesus Christ is one which God gave him.

The revelation of the eternal and unchangeable plan of him who turns the hearts of kings as the rivers of water, who says and it is done, who commands and it stands fast. So again, the Expositors is focusing on the fact that this is a revelation that was given by God the Father to Jesus who is now giving it to us. And even Matthew Henry, believe it or not, is on this side, it seems, by what he said here.

It is a revelation which God gave unto Christ. Our Lord Jesus is the great trustee of divine revelation. It is to him that we owe the knowledge we have of what we are to expect from God and what he expects from us.

So when you look at the scholarly side, and I think that if you were looking at the Greek grammar, I think it would tend, it could go either way, but probably grammatically, it would be a little more sound to say that it's from Jesus, although I wouldn't say that it's an open and shut case on that. So there's the two possibilities. You have to decide for yourself which you believe.

For myself, I'm going to agree with the pulpit commentator who said, Christ is both the mystery and the revealer of it. And that works for me. He's both.

And I'll just accept that and not let my mind get hung up around an axle over the whole thing. I'm just going to accept it that Jesus Christ is the great mystery that's being expressed here in this book. And certainly at least a huge part of the revelation of who Jesus Christ is, which of course is found throughout the Old Testament, and then he's revealed throughout the Gospels, and revealed further throughout the Epistles, and now even further throughout the Revelation.

So it's a segment, a piece of the overall picture we are given of who this Redeemer, this Messiah, this Savior is. Amen? But, he's also the person who gives the revelation of God's eternal plan and how it's going to unfold in the days ahead, which, you know, is an awesome thought. Alright, let's move on.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his bondservants. And I'm just going to focus here on this word, to show, which in the Greek is *diknuo*. It's probably not pronounced correctly, but that's the word, and it occurs eight times in the book of Revelation.

It means, very similar to apocalyptic, it means reveal or unveil, and so parallels the word revelation. And this was interesting to me. John's Gospel contains a progression similar to the progression of this verse.

For thereto the Father, quote-unquote, shows, *diknuo*, the Son, all that he does. In John 5.20. And the Son, in turn, shows, *diknuo*, these works to the Jewish people. In John 10.32. So we see that same word being used back in the Gospel of John.

And it's very interesting, throughout, you see the connection between especially the Gospel of John and the Revelation. You'll see it throughout. Well, anyway, so this is a second term that is being used to express this form of communication.

Okay, so, which God gave to him to show to his bondservants, the things which must soon take place. Now, we're running into our second controversy here already. Still in the first verse, and here's another controversy.

And it revolves around this word soon. This word soon. How could this mean soon as we take the word soon? You know, this was written 1900 years ago.

So it's a little hard to take it as it is. How could we consider that as the bare meaning of that word? Well, there's two schools of thought on this. Some people believe it means suddenly.

And perhaps even some of the translations use it that way, I can't remember. There is an argument to be made here because elsewhere in the New Testament, this word is used in that form. And I would say that, you know, an argument could be made just by that.

But the reality is, I think that the people who hold that position mostly hold that position because of what I just said. That there's 1900 years have gone by and nothing has happened, you know, or these things have not unfolded. So I think that that's really kind of the main reason why they believe what they believe.

But they point to the fact that this word has been used as suddenly, you know, in other places in the New Testament. But most scholars believe it means exactly what it says, soon. Well, how could it be? And I have four different reasons for this.

The first is the whole concept of imminence, which is a vital concept throughout the book of Revelation and actually through all prophetic passages regarding the old times. When this word is used in apocalyptic passages, it always leaves one with the sense of imminence. In other words, the Lord wants the reader to feel as though these things could happen at any time.

And throughout the book of Revelation, there's a strong sense of obligation on the part of the reader to heed the warnings, to be prepared for the return of Christ. And that sense of imminence has served the church well for all these years. And, of course, the opposite attitude to having that spiritual urgency, that

readiness, that preparedness, you know, like when Jesus says, you do not know the hour, be prepared, be ready.

The alternative to that is to be a scoffer like you find in 2 Peter 3. What do they say? Well, we've been hearing about this since the fathers. And we don't want to be in that spirit, obviously. So imminence is a very important part of this book.

Regardless of how you take the word soon, the sense of imminence is throughout this book. And it's really a key theme. So that is one reason why most scholars believe it means soon.

Another is, I've got it written down here, the concept of imminence to John. And it was Thomas that brought this out. And what he was saying is that when Daniel and the other Old Testament prophets spoke of the end times, they couldn't do it with a sense of imminence.

You know, because here they are standing here, and they're projecting things that are not going to happen for 2,500 years. But that's not the big issue. The bigger issue is the first coming of Christ must occur first.

You know, until we get through the first coming of Jesus Christ, there is no imminence. But John is already on the other side of that. He's 60 years later after Jesus has been crucified and everything.

So this is 60 years later, and now everything is standing in readiness for the first time in all the history of mankind and of all the prophetic statements that have been made in the Old Testament times. For the first time, we are ready. It could happen at any time as far as that's concerned.

So that's another reason why they believe that. I'll add a third one, is the prophetic perspective. And that is basically this, that when prophets are given a sight of end times events, or, you know, whether it comes in a vision or in a word from the Lord, either way.

I heard it described this way one time, that a prophet is standing on a mountain, and he is shown another mountaintop. And, you know, a good picture of it is Frodo in Lord of the Rings, when, you know, Mordor would just come zooming up right in front of him. You know what I mean? It just would be like a zoom, and there it is, right there.

Well, that's kind of what I'm saying, is that a prophet is shown that mountaintop, but he has no idea how much distance is between those mountains. He doesn't see any of that. All he sees is the end times events, and he doesn't have a sense, not only about the chronological order of things, but when that's going to happen.

It feels to him like it could happen at any moment, and I know that feeling so well myself. It's just, I'm a minor, minor, minor prophet, you know, and the Lord has given me sights, I'll put it that way, of end times events. And when I received them, and I didn't have the maturity at the time to understand this mountaintop dynamic, it felt like, man, it's going to happen next week, you know, and that's very much how I felt.

But no, a lot of things have to unfold before we get to that point. So that's another reason why, when the Bible uses the word soon, that it's in scriptural language, soon, from God's perspective. Well, what does it say in 2 Peter 3? That a thousand years is like a day to the Lord, so soon to the Lord means a few minutes, his time.

Well, that's thousands of years, our time, you know what I mean? So you have to think of that word in God's timetable. Soon means that, from his perspective, it's coming very quickly. And the last thing I'll say is that there is the sense of the unknown.

Jesus said, but of that day and that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. That's Mark 13.32. So for all those reasons, when you combine all of that together, you get the sense of why the scholars believe that this really does mean soon, in the sense that we would usually use that word. Let me talk for a second about end-time prophecies.

Think of it like this. This is kind of the way it came to me the other day. Think of a long wall, and think of a mural on that wall.

And I'm going to begin with the book of Daniel, not because he's chronologically the first, but what Daniel did is Daniel came along and he drew a picture, let's say in pen and ink, you know, and he draws this picture of history that begins with Nebuchadnezzar, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greeks, the Romans, and then the end-time revived Roman Empire. He draws this whole huge schematic, okay? Then other prophets come in and they paint a little picture here, and they paint a little picture here, and they paint a little picture here. And then Jesus comes with his Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, 25, and he fills in a bunch of the blanks.

And then the book of Revelation comes in and fills in even more of it. See? So each prophet that comes along is adding to the picture that we are given. So what we have to do is stand back.

We want to have it all real inside of us. You want it in your heart, not just your mind, but in your heart you want the realities that are expressed in the prophets, by Jesus Christ, and also the book of Revelation. You want it all in you, because then you can step back and you can look at the mural on the wall, and you can get a pretty good sense of how things are going to unfold, not just from an academic standpoint, but from a personal, spiritual standpoint in your heart.

All right, we've got to get moving on. We're running late here. Let's continue this out.

We're still on the first verse. I told you I was going to be hard-pressed to get these four verses in just one hour, but we'll do it. Okay, this next phrase, and he sent and communicated it by his angel.

All right, now this is the third term of communication that we are receiving here, and this one is *semeno*. In the New American Standard it says communicated it. I don't know how the other translations say it, but this word *semeno* comes from the word *semo*, S-E-M-O, and that word means a mark or a sign.

Okay, so this really gives us a sense of the symbolism that is throughout this book. He communicated it. He symbolized it.

Elsewhere this word is used, usually in the New Testament, it's either used as signify. Well, what does signify come from? The word sign, right? Signify or indicate is another way that the New American Standard translates this word elsewhere in the New Testament. It really ties into the whole symbolic communication that comes through the book of Revelation.

And while I'm here, I'll touch on something that Osborne brings out, that there's four parts to this communication. There is, again, think of the Revelation as a baton, okay? Lack of better illustration. So God hands it to Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ hands it to his angels, and they are used as the mediators to hand it to John. And then John, in turn, writes it down for the churches, us. So you have this four-step process of this communication, and it ends up with us.

And we are the ones who are meant to receive it in the first place. Let's move on here. This last phrase in the first verse, to his bondservant John.

And you have that quote there in front of you that Osborne stated. This was a title of honor. And he explains what he means by this.

Due to the client-patron structure of Roman society, a slave could function as the agent of his master, possessing a representative authority, and with Christian leaders it was often associated with the term apostle. Think of Joseph, for instance. Joseph became mighty in the house of Potiphar, right? And he, I'm sure, represented Potiphar in different business dealings and so on.

And really, if you get into the Old Testament stories, you see that happening time and time again, where a slave has become very trusted by his master and is utilized in that kind of a role as actually the master's spokesman or representative or ambassador to other business people, whatever. And so when it's talking about bondservant, it may sound like a negative term, but really there's a positive side to it, and it became a term of honor there in that first century church. To be called a bondservant is to say, I am in the service of the Most High God.

If we didn't know that we know that we know how humble John really was, you would almost think it was a source of pride to him, but I know he didn't write it for that reason. And I'll mention one other thing too. John gives his name to this epistle, this book.

But you cannot find his name in the Gospel of John. I don't know if you knew that. Any time he refers to himself, he just simply says the apostle whom Jesus loved or something like that.

His name is not attached to the book of John. And also the same with the three epistles, where as Paul's epistles would say, or Paul and Timothy to the church of Ephesus or whatever. Grace and peace be to you, and so on.

Paul always wrote his name except Hebrews, which was almost certainly Paul who wrote it and didn't put his name in that, probably just because of all the hostility in the Jewish community towards him, so he just wrote it anonymously. He almost certainly is the author of the book of Hebrews. But anyway, that's a side note.

But why does John have his name attached to this? You know, actually there have been some people, I was just listening to an audio book this morning, Eusebius, who was an early Christian historian, who was making the case that the revelation was not from the apostle John, just for this reason, because his name is attached to it, but his name is not attached to any of his other writings. So why is it that scholars across the board believe that this was the apostle John? Well, there's probably a number of reasons for it, but I'll just touch on this one thing. I'll just mention this one thing.

When you look at the prophecies in the Old Testament, their name was always attached to it. There was no pseudonyms there. It was never done anonymously, and the reason why is because they are bringing this fantastic message, this otherworldly message, this message that could be construed as off the wall, and you had to attach it to a person for it to have any credibility.

And the credibility is based in the person's level of spirituality and godliness and walk with the Lord. So that's why John's name is attached to this book right from the beginning, is because it had to be. You know, I know just by the way that John is, he would have much preferred to have done it anonymously so he could not get any credit for it.

That's what he's trying hard to resist. This is the son of thunder back in the times when he was with his Savior who wanted the right hand and the left hand, he and his brother, and you can see how much that thing in him, that ambition in him has been crucified by the time that he writes his epistles and his gospel, he doesn't even want his name mentioned. You can see the process of what God does in men's lives, and he's doing it in our lives.

Although I still write my name on all my books. Well, they got to see the person behind it. All right, let's move on.

Verse 2. Verse 2. We're talking about John, okay? This is the bondservant John who testified to the Word of God. And we will get into the whole Greek term behind this word, testified, which is martyr. We'll get into that next week.

But for now I want to just focus for a second on the Word of God. And what I want to say is it means more in Scripture than simply a message that was sent from God to his people, okay? And that is certainly there. But when you're talking about the Word of God, you're really mostly in Scripture is referring to the oral Word of God, the spoken Word.

And you have to realize that when we're talking about the spoken Word of God, we are talking about a dynamic life force. You know, we are talking about a God who just speaks the Word and the heavens are created with one statement. You know, we're talking about a God who sends His Word forth and it is accomplished.

So, you know, there is a dynamic force in the Word of God. When it is expressed, especially through His prophets, it actually creates something. It actually makes things happen.

And John is testifying to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ. And there's that word again, martyr. You know, in the Greek, used twice in this little statement here.

And we'll get into that next week. But this is what the pulpit commentator said. To bear witness to the truth of the Word of God was St. John's special function throughout his long life.

And to this fact, he calls attention in all his chief writings. And that is just well put. Okay, so let's move on.

Even to all that he saw. And I'll just mention that this word saw is used 62 times in the book of Revelation. So again, you see the vision concept being reinforced again.

That this wasn't so much a word that he heard. The Word of the Lord came to Micah. This was something he saw.

You know, he saw this, he saw this, he saw this. All these visions, all these different things that occurred. He saw them occur.

Okay, verse 3. See if things are looking up already. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it. This is the first of seven beatitudes that

are mentioned throughout the book of Revelation.

And we'll talk about those later at another time. But I just wanted to touch on that. And I want to say this.

This promise absolutely, I believe, it applies to us today. If you read this book, if you hear this book read and you apply its truths to your life in the sense of making yourself prepared for the coming of the Lord and being spiritually prepared and actually living out the principles taught in this book, you will receive a special blessing from the Lord. You will receive a special blessing from the Lord.

And I mean this, what I'm going to say. I believe that as we go through this class in the weeks ahead that something is going to be added to all of us spiritually. You know, think of a sculptor who has a form and then they start adding clay on, you know, and it gets built up and shaped and all that.

Well, I just believe, and I don't want to overstate it, but in some small way at least, that every week something else is being added to your spiritual being and preparing you to go through what we are going to go through in our day. Will it be all of this? I don't know. But certainly the days leading up to it at the very minimum.

I know we are in the time right now. So my guess is we will go through everything that's written in this book. But whether we do or not, we're going to go through a lot of very difficult times in the future.

And I really do believe that if we will really apply ourselves to these different messages that come forth out of this book in the weeks ahead that it really is going to do something for us spiritually. But having said all of that, long-winded preacher, having said all of that, if I'm to remain true to the context of what's being expressed here, I have to acknowledge that that's not really what was being said. Let me explain what I mean.

The practice at the time in church settings was for the elders to get up and read Scripture in the meeting. And that came back from hundreds of years of Jewish practice down through the years in the synagogues where the priests would get up and read Scripture. And we saw that even happening with Jesus in Nazareth when he got up and read out of Isaiah, right? So that was the way it had happened down through the years.

And think of the practicalities of that. People didn't just walk around with Bibles under their arms in those days. Just the book of Isaiah, for instance, was probably a number of these big, huge scrolls.

And so for each of these New Testament churches, they would be lucky to have all of the scrolls of the Old Testament Scriptures and even of Paul's epistles and the different things John, Peter, and so on had written, the Gospels and so on. They would be really fortunate if they had all the scrolls, copies of them, at their church, but at the very most, one copy per church. Okay? One copy per church.

Now just think about the reality of that here at Pure Life Ministries. What if this Bible right here was the only Bible in this whole fellowship? Now the reality is, each of us probably has five, ten different Bibles. But think if this was the only one.

And this was the way it was in Communist Russia and other countries not that long ago. That they'd be lucky, a church would be lucky to have one Bible. So if there is only one Bible, you can't just go and get up in the morning and have your time in the Word.

You go to church on Sunday, and if you're a sincere believer, what are you doing? You are listening, aren't you? It's not like today where we hear sermons come and go, we hear the Bible, we read it, and it loses its value, it loses its sense of urgency to us. But if that is the only time you are actually going to hear the Word of God, you are going to be listening with every fiber in your being. And then when you hear something, you are going to be applying it to your life.

Because it's going to have great value to you. Right? Can you see that? So what John is really referring to here about this blessing, to the person who reads, it's the elder who gets up and reads this thing in the church service. This revelation scroll that has come to them.

He gets a blessing, the hearers, if they are sincere, they get a blessing, and then they maybe double the blessing as they actually go out and live it and let it affect their lives. You know, the thing that really hit me is how opposite what I'm describing to you, the opposite sense you get in 2 Thessalonians 2 where it's describing the apostate church, who what? What are they known as? They don't have a love for the truth. I'm going to be preaching on that Sunday, I believe.

Let me just read what Osborne says here. These two concepts, hearing and keeping, are combined frequently in both Old Testament and New Testament. In fact, the Hebrew word for hear also means to obey.

The two concepts are inseparable biblically. In the letters to the seven churches, each letter contains the admonition, let the one who has an ear hear what the Spirit says. And this is then connected to the promise to the overcomer.

The central theme of keeping God's commands is found ten times in the book of Revelation. Alright, and then the last phrase there in the third verse, for the time is near. The word time here is the word kairos, which I talk about extensively in my book, The Time of Our Lives in Light of Eternity.

And we're running out of time right now, so I'm not going to get into that. Now you have to buy my book. Now verse 4 begins the salutation.

Verse 4 through 8 is the salutation from John. And I'll get through this pretty quickly. But there's just some important things that we have to touch on here.

This is the salutation, and it comes from three different persons. From him who is and who was and who is to come, from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ. Okay, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

What does he actually say? The first phrase is, John to the seven churches that are in Asia. Now, why these churches? Why not just a general epistle like, for instance, John's epistles, which weren't aimed at anyone in particular? They were just sent out to the church at large. Why didn't this book go out like that? Well, I would say, first of all, that Jesus had a definite message to those seven churches.

For whatever his reasons were, he had a message to each of those churches. And, of course, John is just the bondservant, so he's going to think of it in those terms. But also, I believe that John had special ties to those particular congregations.

And that probably is part of what's behind that as well. Listen to what George Ladd said. There is no hint in the seven letters that they represent seven successive periods of church history.

Now, this is George Ladd, who comes from a Reformed background, I believe. Definitely one of the New Testament scholars of the last 50 years. And that is a direct refutation of the dispensationalist viewpoint of the New Testament, the Bible, the way God deals with man, and so on.

What do I mean by that? Because one of the hallmark theological concepts that the dispensationalists believe is that these seven churches represent different periods of church history, and the Laodicean church is the final church at the end. Well, it makes good sense, you know, the final church at the end. That makes good sense.

But really, it's a stretch to try to force-fit those other churches in throughout history. But it has to work that way for them to keep with their system. You know, for chapter 4, verse 1, when John is allowed into the throne room, for that to represent the believers' rapture, to keep with their system that they've got laid out, it has to be that way.

And one of these guys was talking about John MacArthur, actually, and he said, John MacArthur should know better. John MacArthur is a scholar, and he should know better than to try to force-fit this stuff like he did, which I really appreciated what the guy said because he put him in his place, and he was right about that. All right, so I'm getting kind of off track here, but it's really good stuff.

You need to hear it. All right, let me continue with Ladd's statement. However, seven was one of John's favorite numbers.

The significance here is of diversity within a basic unity. John chose these seven churches with which he was well acquainted so that they might be representative of the church at large. Okay, and I'll get into that in a couple of weeks when we get into chapters 2 and 3. And also, one of the commentators noted that Paul also wrote to seven churches, and I went back to verify that.

Hey, that's true. He did. That was interesting to me.

Okay, what's the message? Grace to you and peace. And the Believer's Bible says this. Grace means the undeserved favor of God and the strength that is needed in the Christian life day by day.

Well, when you consider all that's going to come against the Christians of this period, you can see why that's important. Peace is the resulting calm that enables the believer to face persecution, sorrow, and even death itself. That's important.

That was a good statement by the Believer's Bible. From Him who is and who was and who is to come. Well, who is that? That's God Almighty.

That is God the Father. And that phrase is used four other times in the book of Revelation. In verse 8, chapter 4 verse 8 also, chapter 11, 17, and 16, 5. So four other times that phrase is used.

The pulpit commentary says, Eternally self-existent and yet who is, as it were, ever moving forward, unrolling on the page of history His unfinished and unfinishable name. Yeah. I just love the way some of these guys put these words together.

It's just such a descriptive. You could just sit and contemplate that statement for an hour easily. But we're running out of time, so we've got to move along.

And I've got one more controversy for you today, okay? Can you handle one more? The seven spirits who are before the throne. Angelic spirits or Holy Spirit? Which is it? There's a number of people who believe, including Rex Andrews, who strongly believe this represents angelic spirits. And like Rex Andrews ties it in with the seven churches.

And how does each one begin? And to the angel of the church in Ephesus or Smyrna, Pergamum, whichever. Okay, and so he ties those seven spirits in. And you can get the, you know, I get that.

I understand where he would believe that. But there's, again, when you take more of the scholarly approach. And by the way, you're going to constantly run into this.

The subjective approach versus the scholarly approach. Remember we talked about that last week. And here's another good example of it.

Rex Andrews takes the subjective approach. The spiritual, you know, this is how he sees things. The scholars say, well, wait a minute.

How does this fit in with the rest of Scripture? And how this is typically used and so on. And you see that dynamic, that tension constantly throughout this book. And it's a good tension.

Here's why the scholars believe it's the Holy Spirit and why I agree with them. Number one, there's an Old Testament precedence for this. In Isaiah 11-2, in your Bible there are six aspects of the Holy Spirit mentioned.

But in the Septuagint version, which is the Greek version of the Old Testament that was written, I think, in 70 A.D. in Alexandria, Egypt by Jewish scholars, their version has seven. Seven facets of the Holy Spirit. Okay, so there's already Old Testament precedence.

But even more importantly than that is Zechariah 4, which is really what this is tied to much more, where the prophet describes a candlestick with seven lamps, which are the eyes of the Lord ranging over the whole earth. And the primary verse there, not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord of hosts. So you see a definite tie-in there with this concept of the Holy Spirit being sevenfold.

In other words, the complete version. That's what seven represents in the book of Revelation and in Scripture. Seven represents completion, fulfillment, you know, the whole thing.

And so it seems as though, based on Old Testament usage, that the Holy Spirit is represented in a sevenfold capacity to accomplish God's purposes on earth. Alright, now also look at the context here. It's right in the middle of the Trinitarian formula, isn't it? You've got He who was, who is, who is to come.

That's obviously God the Father. And then on the other side, from Jesus Christ. And what's in between? The seven spirits who are before the throne.

So there also you see evidence that, yeah, well, I see what you mean, yeah. You know, it wouldn't make sense that it would say God the Father and then seven angels and then the Son, you know. And let me take that one step further, and that is this.

And this may be the most important piece of evidence of why it's the Holy Spirit. To have it that formula, that this message is coming forth from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Son and seven angels? That would put them on equal status with God. Which you just do not do, you know.

No one is on the same level as God is on. Only Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit can be on the level of God the Father. So you're not going to send, the Lord is not going to send a message, a salutation from Himself and these puny little nothing angels.

It's not going to happen. And that's probably the biggest piece of evidence, but I will add one more. And that is just simply the New Testament designation of the Holy Spirit, which, for instance, in John 15, 26, it says that the Spirit comes forth from the Father.

And then in Romans 8, 9, Paul says that it is the Spirit of Christ. So we see the Holy Spirit, whatever the dynamic is in that relationship, which was so far out of our realm of comprehension, but we can get a sense of one aspect of it, which is that the Holy Spirit is issued forth from God the Father to accomplish His purposes throughout the earth. And I'll read again a quote from the Believer's Bible.

This is what he says. This refers to God the Holy Spirit in His fullness, seven being the number of perfection and completeness. And I'd say that says it all.

And I end with this quote from Ryrie, the Ryrie Bible, just regarding the number seven. Let's read through it real quick. The number seven occurring 54 times in the book appears more frequently than any other number.

In the Bible, it is associated with completion, fulfillment, and perfection. And I give all these. You can see it in the notes on the website or your notes there.

In the Revelation, there are seven churches and seven spirits, seven lampstands, seven stars, seven seals on the scroll, seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb, seven angels and seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven heads of the dragon, seven heads of the beast, seven golden bulls, and seven kings. So there is kind of just a thumbnail of the number seven throughout the book. All right.

Now, I know we're over time, but I am going to read this again. I want to read these four verses, and I'm going to try to read them with meaning. And I want you to actually, you know, you could even close your eyes and listen or read along if you want.

But after all that has been expressed here, let's reconsider in context what is being said. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show to his bondservants, the things which must soon take place, and he sent and communicated it by his angel to his bondservant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it, for the time is near.

John, to the seven churches that are in Asia, grace to you and peace. From him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ. Amen, and God bless you.

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