

Introduction to Revelation

📖 Revelation 1:19

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In our series Major Prophetic Passages we have completed the OT. We said Daniel is the key to prophetic revelation. You really can't get off of ground zero without Daniel. Daniel shows us the big picture is four Gentile kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God. The four kingdoms are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome in two phases; one now past and the other still future. He also shows us a 490-year calendar for Israel and Jerusalem. 483 of those years are past seven are still future. He even shows us a foreshadowing of the anti-Christ who will come to rule during the last seven years in the person and work of Antiochus Epiphanes IV. And perhaps most importantly, Daniel shows us that the language of prophecy can be ordinary-literal or figurative-literal, but the fulfillment of both is literal. Therefore, we have a pattern for how to interpret unfulfilled prophecy. Often in the Seminary they teach Daniel and Revelation as a single course. What we have done is added some important prophetic passages between Daniel and Revelation. These form a bridge, if you will, from Daniel to Revelation. Ezek 37, 38 and 39 are important because they show us that after Israel is exiled from the land they will be regathered in unbelief and then again in belief. The return in unbelief has been taking place since the late 1800's and really met some kind of fulfillment in the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948. So all that remains of that prophecy is Israel to return in belief. Ezek 38-39 show that the battle of Gog and Magog will be instrumental in bringing about their belief. Zech 12, 13 and 14 are also important because they show us the Campaign of Armageddon. How all the nations of the world will gather against Israel and how in the midst of that campaign God will pour out His Spirit upon Israel and they will believe that Jesus is the Messiah and will ask Him to return and at that time the Lord will return with great power and glory and crush the armies of the world. That's the OT prophetic picture. In the NT we looked at Matt 24-25. This passage is critical because it gives the most detailed picture of the last seven years preceding Christ's coming to establish His kingdom. It builds on the framework of Daniel and it sets the stage for the Revelation. After this we explained why Israel's rejection resulted in the postponement of the kingdom from the human point of view, and how the Lord revealed that during the postponement He would build His Church. We then proved that the Church began on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Along with the new revelation that Christ would build His Church new prophetic truths related to the Church also began to be announced. We looked at a few of these. 1 Tim 4 and 2 Tim 4 show that the Church would begin with the truth in the Scriptures but would go apostate, moving away from the truth of

the Scriptures. John 14:1-3, 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:50-58 all show that the Church would end at the any-moment rapture where those who had died would be raised to return with Him in the air while those who are alive on earth will be caught up to the Lord and instantly changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. 2 Thess 2 is critical because it seems to indicate that the rapture is the cause of the apostasy, because at the rapture there is no faith left on the earth and that is the definition of the apostasy. We sketched it like this, but someone pointed out that it might be better to sketch it like this so that we don't get the impression that the rapture can't happen until there are no orthodox believers on the planet.

Now we come to the Book of Revelation. Our focus will be Rev 4-22. But there are some important sections in Rev 1-3 that lead up to Rev 4-22. Let's start with the title of the book in Rev 1:1. **The Revelation of Jesus Christ.** That's the title. The title is not "revelations." I hear that a lot. I'm not sure why people keep calling it "revelations" but that's not the name of the book. It's like saying "The Gospel of Johns." It sounds strange. The Greek word is *αποκαλυψις*, from which we get "apocalypse." The Lutheran Joseph Seiss titled his famous commentary, *The Apocalypse*, and it was a premillennial commentary written around 1901. So when you hear the title apocalypse it's not related to zombies or the end of the world but to an uncovering, or unveiling. Trenchard said, "In the New Testament, *apokalypsis* always has the majestic sense of God's unveiling of himself to his creatures, an unveiling that we call by its Latin name *revelation*. . . . It depicts the progressive and immediate unveiling of the otherwise unknown and unknowable God to his church throughout the ages." From the first word then, we are to know that this book is an unveiling of future things, things that were previously hidden but now laid open for all to see. And verse 3 pronounces a blessing on those who read and hear the things in this book. So it is clearly meant to be understood. Even though Luther said something to the effect, blessed is he who reads and hears but who could know what it says. So the English title is the Revelation. The word "revelation" is from the Latin. The Greek title is the Apocalypse. I will refer to the book simply as The **Revelation**.

What is the book about? The first verse says, **The Revelation of Jesus Christ.** The expression **of Jesus Christ** could be an objective or subjective genitive. If it is the objective genitive, then the book is *about* the revelation of Jesus Christ at His Second Coming. However, there are many things in the book that are not directly about Jesus Christ. There are things about the seven churches, things about the anti-Christ, things about the mark of the beast. Therefore, it is better to take this as a subjective genitive, the book is *from* Jesus Christ. The only other use of this phrase in Gal 1:12 is also a subjective genitive. The next phrase shows that the subjective genitive is correct, **which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants.** In other words, God gave these things to Jesus Christ. This shows a role distinction within the Trinity. What He gave Him was something **to show His bond-servants.** The word **show** indicates the use of multisensory information. The information is for **His bond-servants.** **Bond-servants** are those purchased by Christ and therefore belong to Him. So while the book may appear to be written to the **bond-servants** of the seven churches of Asia in Rev 2-3, it is actually written to all believers as represented by the seven churches.

What things are to be shown to all believers? **The things which must soon take place.** The verb **must** signifies divine necessity. There are **things which** are divinely necessary to **take place** in order for the plan of God to be fulfilled. But how do we explain that these things must **soon** take place, especially since this book was written in AD96 and now it is 2017? This has been explained a number of ways. The Greek word **soon** is *ταχει* and has two basic meanings. One is “quickly,” in the sense of things taking place at a quick rate. Another is “soon” in the sense of taking place soon in time. Out of these two meanings three views have developed. First, some insist that it must mean something soon in time. Since John prophesied in the 1st century they insist that the Book of Revelation was fulfilled in the 1st century. These are the preterists. In order to find fulfillment in the 1st century they claim the events of AD70 destruction of Jerusalem are what the Revelation describes. However, this forces them to claim the Revelation was written before AD70. This is highly unlikely. Moreover, this view does not admit into the discussion the fact that some passages use this word to refer to something that did not happen soon in time, but quickly. Second, others claim that it means soon from the divine perspective. What they mean is that everything was set in place for these things to be fulfilled in the 1st century, and so these things can begin to unfold at any moment. Proponents claim this conveys a sense of imminency to those addressed and is therefore an encouragement to godly living. That may be. Third, others claim that it means these things will take place quickly at the appropriate time. This too could be. The word *taxus* is used eight times in the Revelation. The majority of the uses are in the sense of “quickly.” Therefore, I prefer the meaning of “quickly” to other meanings. This would mean that **the things** described in this book will take place rather quickly when they begin to take place. It does not mean that they will happen close to the time John wrote these things. Therefore, you might strike out soon and replace it with the word “quickly.” That way you get the sense that when these things begin to unfold they will take place rather “quickly.” Certainly the events of the Tribulation will take place rather quickly once they begin to take place.

These things Jesus **sent and communicated by His angel to His bond-servant John.** In other words, the line of communication in these verses is from the Father to Jesus Christ, from Jesus Christ to **His angel**, which many think is Gabriel, but we really don't know, from **His angel to His bond-servant John**, and at last from **John** to us, **His bond-servants.** This is the chain of revelation involved in inspiration of this book. The mention of angels is interesting because angels have served as intermediaries in past revelation, as with the law at Mt Sinai, and prophetic truths in Daniel and Zechariah, the birth announcements of the Messiah. Furthermore, the Revelation mentions angels more than 70 times. So a reference to them at this point is appropriate to their introduction. The main idea here is the chain of revelation; from Father, to the Son, to the Son's angel, to John and lastly to us.

The word used to describe this chain is **communicated.** The Greek word is *σημαινω* and may refer to “significations,” such as are common in visions in the Book of Daniel. But it can also refer to verbal communication. Since both take place in the Revelation we don't want to press this word one way or the other. You will find that in the Revelation there are many situations when we have to be careful not to come down too hard on one side or another. The reason is because many of these things have yet to take place and so the exact

way in which they will be fulfilled is still not known exactly. Further, the Revelation is composed of over 500 allusions to various passages in the Bible; put together like a patchwork in a remarkable masterpiece. Few, if any, can plumb its depths entirely, but we will be in a much better position to do so if we have followed the plan of Scripture up to this point. So then we have 1:1, **The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bondservants, the things which must quickly take place, and He sent and signified them by His angel to His bond-servant John...**

We skip to 1:3, another important verse, **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.** This is the first of seven blessings in the book (Rev 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). Blessing usually means “an abundance.” The abundance is with reference to understanding. The reason there is an abundance of understanding in store for the one **who reads and those who hear** is because the Revelation is the culmination of all previous revelation. In this sense it is the climax of divine revelation. Fruchtenbaum said, “Since so much of this book is based on the Old Testament, a proper study of it will require a study of the Old Testament, resulting in a more comprehensive knowledge of the Bible.” It is that comprehensive knowledge that comes by reading it that is such a blessing. Fruchtenbaum’s quote puts emphasis on the necessity of the OT as a pre-requisite to understanding it. That is why we studied the major prophetic passages of the OT and NT first before trying to understand it. Expositors of the past have not understood it, as evidenced by their statements that blessed is he who hears it but no one knows what is in it. The phrase **he who reads and those who hear** is based on the 1st century practice of one taking a scroll and reading aloud from it in the hearing of a congregation. The blessing was pronounced on the one who read and those who heard. Next is stated that the **words** of the book are **prophecy**. Revelation contains things that are not prophecy but fundamentally Revelation is a book of **prophecy**. The definition of **prophecy** is a statement of divine will or purpose. The Revelation is essentially a statement of God’s will or purpose for history. That said, there are also apocalyptic parts, verse 1 used the word apocalypse to refer to this type of writing. Apocalyptic is a highly visionary, highly symbolic form of revelation with angelic interpreters. There are also epistolary parts. Epistles are letters written to be read to an audience. But the majority of the Revelation is **prophecy**. Those who read and hear are told to **heed the things written in it**. The word **heed** is the present participle meaning “keep holding on to.” Unfortunately, the Revelation is not often read or heard, much less held on to. Since we are going to read it and hear it we would do well to hold on to **the things written in it**. The only way to actually do that is to read it and hear it according to the rules of interpretation laid down by Daniel. Then we will be in a position to hold on to **the things**. Otherwise we will never understand the things or be able to hold on to them. The explanation for why is then stated, **for the time is near**. The word **near** is different than the word translated “soon” in verse 1. That was from *ταχυς*, this is from *εγγυς*. The word could be a synonym. The words are often used together. If they are synonyms, then it means that when these things begin to take place they will take place quickly. It could also be looking at the fact that from God’s perspective the Tribulation events are ready to take place. The reason is because Christ is already resurrected and ascended so that He is high and exalted at the

right hand of the Father in heaven. It is there that He will take the scroll, break the seals, and pour out wrath on the earth in order to cleanse the earth of sinners and return to establish His kingdom.

Moving on, let's look at 1:19, a key verse in the Revelation. This verse outlines the book; dividing it into three sections. If you have a red-letter edition you know that these words were spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the one who commissioned John to write. The three things the Lord Jesus commissioned Him to write are **the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things**. There are past things, present things and future things. The past things are **the things which you have seen**. What John saw in Revelation 1 was *A Vision of the Resurrected Christ*. The present things are **the things which are**. What John saw in Revelation 2-3 was *The Seven Churches*. The future things are **the things which will take place after these things**. What John saw in Rev 4-22 are *The Tribulation, the Millennial Kingdom, the Great White Throne Judgment and the New Heavens and New Earth*. So that gives us the three-fold outline of the Revelation. Interestingly, the book is divided into three distinct time zones. These do not overlap. The resurrection of Christ took place before the Church began, it is past, the Church was then founded and is now being built, it is present, after the Church the Tribulation and other events will unfold, they are future. The point we are making here is that the three distinct time zones do not allow us to mix the things which are, the Church, with the things which will take place after, the Tribulation. This is another argument for the pre-trib Rapture.

Let's look at a few things in Rev 2-3, **the things which are**. The letters are notoriously difficult because they are written to angels but the instruction is addressed to local churches. Note Rev 2:1, **To the angel of the church in Ephesus**. But the instruction is addressed to the churches themselves. Note Rev 2:2, **I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance**. This does not refer to the angels deeds, toil and perseverance, but to the Church of Ephesus. How then are these letters to be understood? A number of explanations have been set forth. My view is that the angels are angels and that the reason the letters are addressed to angels is to put the local churches on notice that angels are witnessing their function. From the OT we know that angels served this function when Israel was given the law. They were the witnesses of the Mosaic contract. In a similar way they are also serving as legal witnesses of the performance of each local church. Putting local churches on notice of angelic oversight should be a sobering thought resulting in responsiveness to Christ's words of instruction, overcoming challenges and persevering in the faith.¹ The churches faced different problems; love, perseverance, compromise, tolerance, complacency and lukewarmness. These are the basic problems that plague local churches today and local churches should take note of their problems, realize they are being watched by angelic witnesses and overcome.

One verse in the seven churches has commonly been used to support the pre-trib rapture. Let's look at Rev 3:10, This is the letter to the angel of the church in Philadelphia. Actually, this church had no problem. They are the only one of the seven that has absolutely no note of condemnation. This church, like all of them, represents all local churches in the general truths. The promise is they will be kept from the hour of testing which is to come

on the whole world. 3:10 says, **Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.** Without going into some of the grammatical issues with 3:9 and 10, except to say that it seems that verse 9 should continue into verse 10 as part of the same sentence. So that the words **because you have kept the word of My perseverance** go with the end of verse 9 and not the beginning of a new sentence in verse 10. In other words, verse 10 continues verse 9 and the period should be after the word **perseverance**. Thus, the words **I also will keep you from the hour of testing** are not conditioned on them keeping His word, but are a blanket promise. The promise is that Church age believers will be kept away from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole world. This means that the Church will not have to go through the period of testing. The period of testing is the Tribulation because it is the only thing that is coming upon the **whole world**. The purpose of the Tribulation is not to test the Church but to test **those who dwell on the earth**. This expression **those who dwell on the earth**, or **earth-dwellers**, is a technical term in the Revelation referring to persistent unbelievers.² It is used repeatedly and consistently to refer to those who are in a state of stubborn unbelief. Therefore, the promise is that the Church will not be present on earth during this time of testing but will be kept from it. How they would be kept from it is not stated, but we know from 1 Thess 4:13-18 it could be by physical death and we know from 1 Cor 15:50-58 it could be by rapture. In the case of the Philadelphian's they were kept from the Tribulation by death, they died prior to the Tribulation, but in the case of one generation of the Church it will be the rapture. Therefore, Rev 3:10 is consistent with the pre-trib rapture.

We come now to Rev 4:1 where we will start our verse-by-verse exposition of the Revelation. The verse harks back to the third division of 1:19, "After these things," that is, the things of the Church, **I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.** That last phrase is practically identical to the last phrase in 1:19, marking the third part of the book, the things which take place after the Church. Therefore, the Church is gone by Rev 4:1. And John is evidently in vision and he sees in vision **a door standing open in heaven** and he hears a **voice like the sound of a trumpet speaking with him** and telling Him to **Come up here**. Some think this is the rapture because they see heaven, they hear a trumpet and John is told to go up there to heaven. As great as that may sound, and it may be, there is no indication of Jesus descending, and certainly if it is the rapture, it is difficult to see how John represents the whole church in vision. It seems more likely that John is being called up to heaven in order to see things from a heavenly vantage point that must take place on earth.

That's enough for today. The things are to remember are that 1:1 is telling us that the title of the book is the Revelation, the source of the Revelation is Jesus Christ. He received it from God who delivered it by way of angelic guides to John who delivered it to us in written form. In 1:3 there is a blessing of abundance of understanding pronounced on the one who reads the Revelation and those who hear it read. In 1:19 the three-fold division is outlined; the things past, Rev 1, a vision of the resurrected Christ, the things present, Rev 2-3, the

seven churches, and the things future, Rev 4-22, the Tribulation, millennial kingdom, great white throne and new heaven and new earth. In Rev 2-3 the Churches and their problems are described and angelic witnesses pronounced in order to keep us motivated to respond to Christ's exhortation. In Rev 3:10 a promise to all the Church that they will be kept from the time of testing that is coming upon the whole earth, either by death prior to the Tribulation or rapture. In Rev 4:1 we move to things after the Church, and in particular, the events in heaven which precede the Tribulation on earth. Therefore, to be present on earth in 4:1 is to be in a bad place. The things pronounced in heaven are about to come on the earth and it is the wrath of the Lamb....

¹ <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/meaning-of-angels-in-revelation-2-and-3>

² <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/earth-dwellers-of-revelation>