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# **REVELATION**

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**Earth's Final Chapter**

**AL PITTMAN**

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# COPYRIGHT

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*Revelation: Earth's Final Chapter*

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## INTRODUCTION

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“We know most pastors are not teaching prophecy anymore.” – Joel Rosenberg<sup>1</sup>

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This stunning statement by Joel Rosenberg, an expert on biblical studies and spiritual-political conditions, should give all of us a reason to pause.

We have come a long way, maybe, from 1980 when Hal Lindsay’s book, *The Late Great Planet Earth* was named by the New York Times as the bestselling nonfiction book of the previous decade. Not the Christian book of the decade, the nonfiction book of the decade.

How far we have fallen from the days of frequent prophecy conferences, updates, and a nearly churchwide fervency concerning the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Men such as Chuck Smith, Tim LaHaye, and Chuck Missler were household names and frequent visitors to bestsellers lists. Yes, there were

## INTRODUCTION

volatile disputes over eschatological issues. Whether the rapture was pre-, mid-, or post-tribulation and other topics were all hotly debated. But at least they were discussed prominently.

The *Left Behind* book series sold tens of millions of copies. Sadly, like the cinematic version of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the *Left Behind* films were awful at every level.

Still, Jesus commanded His church to be on alert for His return.

This is not to imply that prophecy is totally submerged in today's church landscape; there are old-school beacons such as David Jeremiah, Charles Stanley, and Chuck Swindoll. But it has been largely relegated to the sidelines where devotees of various perspectives have narrow conversations without wide distribution.

This is why I was encouraged to prepare and present a 23-week series that traversed Revelation, chapter by chapter. Sequential teaching has fallen out of favor and has even been criticized as a lazy pulpit style. Where, then, is equipping the church with the full counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27)? How can a Christian compare Scripture with Scripture, rightly dividing it, if such a major subject is ignored or relegated to symbolic stature? This is a grave error of omission on the part of a growing segment of those on the center stage of church communication.

Israel, the rapture, prophetic elements of current events, and the lifeblood of prophecy—the return of Christ—are ignored or underwhelmingly expounded due to being overshadowed by an “encouragement gospel.” Yes, the Bible is a vehicle for encouragement, but the main engine should be the comfort of the soon return of Jesus, and the ageless admonition to watch for this return.

*“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”* (Matthew 24:42)

# 1

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## THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

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### Revelation 1

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“And why was the book of Revelation written? It was not written primarily, let me assure you, in order that people might be able to work out the date of the end of the world! That is a very grievous misunderstanding of that book. The book of Revelation was written in order that God’s people who were passing through terrible persecutions and terrible adversity might be able to go on rejoicing. If your understanding of the book of Revelation does not help you rejoice, you are misunderstanding it.” – Martyn Lloyd-Jones<sup>1</sup>

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*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this*

*prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.* (Revelation 1:1–3)

Imagine sitting in a movie theater next to someone who has already seen the movie. The whole time, they're alerting you to the outcome of the movie's critical events *before* they take place. No one wants that. When *The Sixth Sense* first came out, lines formed at theaters for the next showing. Between showtimes at one multiplex, a real comedian walked out of the theater and shouted, "Bruce Willis is dead the whole time!" There were some very unhappy folks.

Revelation is like that, except we're all very glad to know the ending. If I could rename the book, I'd call it *Spoiler Alert! We Win!*

Revelation provides the capstone of our Christian faith, giving us confidence that our future is secure. But it does more than that. Revelation describes the culmination of the glory of Jesus, and it is given to us directly by Jesus himself. This book is *His* revelation, and by the way, it is singular. We need to be clear about that because it is often mistakenly referred to as "Revelations."

The book of Revelation is estimated to have been written around 95 AD. In the Greek, the word translated as "revelation" is *apokálypsi*. This is where we get the term *apocalypse*, which means "disclosure, appearing, or coming." The author of the book is the Apostle John, who referred to himself as "that disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13, 20, 21). John had been exiled to the island of Patmos by the Roman Emperor Domitian (81–96 AD). Patmos was in the Aegean Sea about twenty-five miles off the coast of Asia Minor. There was a small prison on the island and nothing more.

John—now a castaway, isolated from society, and living in relative obscurity—is set to receive the greatest revelation known to

mankind. But isn't that just like God? In our own lives when we've been cast away and the world has given up on us, His greatest work is yet to be revealed! God clearly was not finished with John, and God is not finished with you either. My prayer is that as we go through this amazing book, you will be inspired to live more fully for Christ. John shared a similar sentiment when he declared:

*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)*

## **WE ARE ON THE CLOCK**

Scripture reminds us that in the last days, scoffers would arise mocking the promise of Christ's return (2 Peter 3:3-4), just as people mocked Noah's warning of a flood. Of course in the case of Noah, we know how things ended for those who scoffed. The rains came, the ark was sealed, and the mockers perished from the face of the earth! (Genesis 7). It will be the same for those who scoff at the notion of Christ returning. In regard to the timing of His coming, Peter reminds us:

*But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:8)*

Notice in Revelation 1:3 that there is a blessing. In fact, the word used here, *makarios*, means "to be supremely blessed," and the blessing is for *all* who read, hear, and keep this prophecy. The book of Revelation is not science fiction. It is not intended to

terrify readers and it certainly should not be avoided. To the contrary, there is promise of a built-in benefit from the simple reading of this document. We should certainly take advantage of that promise.

But we shouldn't stop there. We should earnestly study this book and get it into our hearts because Revelation ultimately reminds us: It is not where you've been but where you're going that matters! From our journey through Revelation, we will be encouraged about our future destination as believers. We will also learn fascinating details of the future that are available in no other document on earth.

## **REVELATION 1:4-6**

This letter is for all believers even though it is specifically addressed to the seven churches in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. Seven is a significant number in Hebrew culture; it speaks of completion or perfection. Some have taken the seven churches in Revelation to represent the seven stages of the church before Christ returns. If that is the case, the last stage—the Laodicean church—is not very promising. An alternative interpretation is that while the seven types of churches detailed here represent the general flow of church history, each church age contains elements of these seven kinds of churches.

In verse 5, we find confidence for our salvation in statements about who Jesus is and what He has done. First, we are reminded of Christ's reputation as a faithful witness. Jesus said to Pilate, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11). We are also reminded of Christ's work: He washed us in His own blood. We further find security in the motivation behind His work: love (John 3:16). In verse 6, He emphasizes our eternal status: kings and priests. He has taken us

from ruin to royalty. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

In verse 7, we find the second advent, or coming, of Christ. He came first as a lamb to die for our sins; the second time He will return to judge the earth like a lion (Revelation 19). “Every eye” will see Him when “lightning flashes from east to west” (Matthew 24:26–27).

John wanted his readers to know he was not a fair-weather companion. He and the other believers of his time had experienced life together in Christ, through the good, the bad, and the ugly. Christians today are often eager, not just to abandon one another, but to shoot our own wounded! What does the “patience of Christ” look like? It looks like this: “who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

In vv. 12–18, John has his mind blown. Notice from verse 17, that our flesh has no defense in the presence of His glory. Every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord! (Philippians 2:10–11). To the redeemed, however, He says, “Do not be afraid.” Not even the grave and death can harm you! He holds the key. “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:22–23).

Regarding verses 19 and 20, it’s worth noting that the revelation of Christ here was preceded by the full revelation of God’s love on an old rugged cross. That’s why He tells John to write the things he has seen. All throughout Scripture, we find that God doesn’t want

us to fear for our future. Even communion helps us remember not to fear because it reminds us of the cross.

John has also carried this message of encouragement at other times. This same John assured us in 1 John 4:18–19, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.” Have you received the full revelation of God’s love for you? Rather than making us afraid, this book is meant to stir excitement and wonder about our future with Christ. As Eugene Peterson once wrote, “I read the revelation not to get more information but to revive my imagination.”<sup>2</sup>

Another neat thing about the book of Revelation is that it comes with its own natural outline:

## **THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE SEEN**

John had seen the person of the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh. John had the benefit of seeing Jesus on earth both before and after the resurrection. Now he recounts a vision of the glorified Jesus. The Bible is very limited in giving physical descriptions of what Jesus looked like, but here we find a grand and startling exception. While Isaiah 53:2 tells us that the incarnate Messiah was not physically attractive in a way that He would be desired for His appearance, this is not the case in Revelation. The veil of human camouflage is taken away and John reports a magnificent sight: Jesus in his heavenly glory.

## **THE THINGS WHICH ARE**

John wrote these words as the church age was unfolding. In these two chapters, we discover some crucial information—we find out what Jesus thinks of His church. The seven churches addressed

here existed at that time, but as mentioned previously, some believe they also represent various church ages throughout history.

## **THE THINGS WHICH WILL TAKE PLACE AFTER THIS**

In these verses, the curtain is pulled back and we get a detailed view of future events. The “best of the best” for mankind is found here. From the rapture, to the end of the curse, to the millennium and beyond, these chapters take the human mind to the edge of our comprehension. Words can scarcely convey what awaits us in God’s glorious future.

And so, with that outline in place, we begin a magnificent journey through the final book of the Bible. In the course of this survey, we will find high peaks of glory and depths of evil beyond what we can currently fathom. Mankind will experience global plagues, spiritual superbeings, and even an unthinkable day when suicide will be impossible. Through it all, remember the first words of this book, “This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ.”