

A SHORT STUDY ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

by
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*"LOOKING FOR THE BLESSED HOPE AND GLORIOUS APPEARING
OF OUR GREAT GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST"*

Titus 2:13

INTRODUCTION

One's eschatology must be based first on the Old Testament, and, then, the Epistles of Paul and Peter together with the Olivet Discourse and the parables of Jesus will add many details to it. Zahn writes,

The Revelation of John consequently takes its place as a part of Christian prophecy, which, as a source of knowledge, edification, and action, was such a powerful and highly esteemed manifestation of the Spirit in the time of the apostles. Revelation is distinguished from the other products of this Christian prophecy merely in the fact that it is a *written* record of revelation received; whereas the prophets, so far as we know, had up to this time contented themselves with *oral* utterance. In this, Revelation becomes a continuation of the writing of the O.T. prophets.¹

The book of Revelation is the only book in the New Testament devoted completely to prophecy. Much of its imagery is related to figures and symbols in the Old Testament prophets. Though there is no explicit quotation, there are over 400 allusions to it. Therefore, a thorough knowledge of these Old Testament books is necessary to interpret Revelation. For example, Isaiah chapter 24 implies a gap between the two resurrections; Revelation chapter 20 reveals that gap to be 1000 years.

The eschatological position taken in this paper on Revelation will incorporate the following truths: (1) there is only one Second Coming of Christ, which is and has always been the hope of the church; (2) there is only one First Resurrection; (3) there is only one Last Trumpet; and (4) Jesus comes only once "in the clouds," this being at his Second Coming.²

In regard to the Amillennial position, it will not be addressed in this study; anything other than a literal interpretation results in endless speculations. Consider just one example--the 144,000 of chapter 14. Who are they? Seiss writes,

Some answer, they represent the true people of God of all ages--the symbol of the whole body of the sanctified and saved. Others say, they are the choice spirits of

1 Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. III, pg. 385.

2 Alexander Reese, in his book *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, has done an exhaustive study on the pre-trib rapture. He concludes "that the Coming, the Appearing, the Revelation, and the Day of the Lord *all occur simultaneously.*" Each constitutes "the blessed hope" of New Testament believers and is the blessed hope of Christians today. See page 267.

the congregation of the glorified, selected and honored above all common Christians because of their preeminent qualities and abstinences on earth. Others tell us, they are the company of those who have remained true in faith under the errors and falsities of the Papacy. And still others say, they are none else than the assembly of the noble spirits who achieved the Reformation of the sixteenth century, and that their harp-notes and new song is "the harmony of the Reformed Confessions!" I see not how it is possible for any of these interpretations to stand. Without entering upon the many points in which they severally fail to conform to the record, I may say they all do violence to the consecutiveness and self-consistency of this Book, and defy all legitimate dealing with the particulars of the sacred description. We must find a better meaning, or give in that it is impossible to do anything more than *guess* at what the Lord intended to show us, whilst one guess is just as good and reliable as another. But God's Word is truth; and therefore there must be truth in this presentation--truth which will hold together with the rest of the Book, with the dignity of a divine prophecy so solemnly given, and with the grammatical sense of the words in which the account is presented. Nor do I know why candid and earnest men, but for their arbitrary and stilted theories, should be at a loss for an interpretation answering to the requirements.³

It will also be assumed in this study that the revelation given to John is, in its essence, chronological; otherwise it would simply be impossible for any reader, now or then, to adequately prepare for the "things which are to come after." But often, as with the writings of the Old Testament, we are given the final outcome first in a summary statement, and then the details which lead up to it are given directly following. As Biss⁴ states, "Revelation, like other books of prophecy, is composed of a series of visions which present, in different aspects and with varying details, the events of the same, or parts of the same period of history, the rule being that the earlier visions give outlines, the later ones details, of the same events."

As to the structure of Revelation, Zahn writes:

The division of the account into the two unequal parts, 1:10-3:22 and 4:1-22:9, corresponds to the division of the subject matter of all the visions into that which already existed at the time of the revelation, and that which is to come to pass in the future (1:19). The first part is a single vision According to 4:2, John falls again into a trance, which presupposes that he had returned to consciousness; and the fact that the voice of the angel who shows him what he sees is said to be the same as that which spoke to him in 1:10, enables us to recognize the beginning of another revelation. No feature of the picture which John had before him during the first vision passes over into the new one.⁵

The phrase "in the Spirit" is used repeatedly by John. It does not mean "indwelt by the Spirit" as in the Pauline use of the phrase (cf. Rom. 8:9). John seems to use it to mean the beginning of a new vision. We then have the following general outline:

3 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, vol. III, pp. 16-17.

4 From the appendices at the end of Samuel P. Tregelles' book, *"The Hope of Christ's Second Coming."* These appendices were written by Cecil Yates Biss (who prepared the second edition of the book for printing).

5 Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. III, pp. 392-393.

Prologue	- 1:1-8
Vision I	- 1:9-3:22
Vision II	- 4:1-16:21
Vision III	- 17:1-21:8
Vision IV	- 21:9-22:5
Epilogue	- 22:6-21

The prologue and Vision I constitute Zahn's first division. Visions II, III, IV, and the Epilogue form his second division.

Concerning the Great Tribulation itself, we read in Daniel 12:1, "*And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered.*" Fruchtenbaum writes,

The uniqueness of the Tribulation's relationship to Israel is especially brought out in Jeremiah 30:4-7. While the Scriptures have many names for the Great Tribulation, in this passage a name is given that directly relates the Tribulation to the Jewish nation: *the time of Jacob's trouble*. While it is true that all will suffer during that time, Israel will suffer more so. The basic reason for this lies in Israel's relationship to God as God's first born (Exod. 4:22) and, therefore, receives double both in blessing and cursing. The principle that Israel receives double for all her sins is stated in Isaiah 40:1-2 and Jeremiah 16:16-18. This is the reason the Tribulation is uniquely the Time of Jacob's Trouble.⁶

St. Paul writes to Timothy, "*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come*" (2 Tim. 3:1). Our Lord himself warns his disciples that in the last days "*there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be*" (Matt. 24:21). John records here in Revelation, "*It was granted to him [the beast from the sea] to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation*" (13:7). Also in 12:12 John records, "*Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.*" These words are all addressed to God's people, Christian and Jew. They are not words of warning to unbelievers. Therefore, it will be worthwhile to remember that the period of time known as the Great Tribulation is a period of time in which Satan's wrath against the seed of the woman is unleashed in all its fullness. In particular "it is the *Devil's* wrath against the saints for their rejection of *Antichrist*, and adherence to Christ."⁷

Our Lord Himself made reference to the cause and motive of the Great Tribulation. After speaking of the signs of the End-time, He says: "*And you shall be hated of all men for my Name's sake*" Yes, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the devotion of Christians to it, are what bring on the last great trial; and we know that this has been the cause of tribulation all down the centuries To be sure, there will be desolating judgments upon the Jews for their acceptance of Antichrist,

6 Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, pg. 770.

7 Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pg. 284.

but they are distinct from the wrath of Antichrist against the saints.⁸

We are part of that seed and therefore must expect persecution. Let us give praise to God who honors us by reckoning us worthy to suffer for Christ. And not only does he honor us, he also sustains us with His grace to suffer courageously and with a willing heart. Thankfully, Satan's wrath does not continue indefinitely. For the sake of the elect the time is shortened,⁹ and the wrath of the Lamb of God is quickly executed on Satan and those who refuse to repent. Then Christ shall come in all his glory to receive the kingdom promised to him by the Father.

One last word. This is a short study and not meant to answer every question nor address every issue.

⁸ Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pg. 288.

⁹ Matt. 24:22; Mark 13:20.

CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 begins with the words, *"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."* This revelation is not merely a communicated message. Rather, it is the "coming, appearing, manifestation, uncovering, presentation" of Jesus Christ in person.

There is every reason for the conclusion that the great theme and subject of this Book is the Coming of Christ, the Apocalypse of Himself, His own personal manifestation and unveiling in the scenes and administrations of the great Day of the Lord. When men speak of "the *death* of Jesus Christ," their language inevitably conveys the idea that it is Christ who experiences the death affirmed; and so when the Holy Ghost speaks of "*The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*," by the same necessity of language the only admissible idea is that it is Christ who experiences or undergoes the Apocalypse affirmed A tremendous Revelation is therefore brought before men in this Book. And if anyone would fully profit by it, let him bear with him this one vital and all-conditioning thought, that he is here dealing with Christ's own infallible foreshowings of the style, manner, and succession of events in which the Apocalypse awarded to Him by the Father is to take place. He who fails in this misses the kernel of the Book, and must fail of the blessing of those who read, hear, and observe the things which are written in it.¹⁰

Holding the position that the church will go through the tribulation, it would seem likely that we should find the following groups in the book of Revelation: (1) present-day saints (why else would there be a special blessing for reading it?), (2) dead saints (who are awaiting the redemption of their bodies), (3) elect Jews (since Paul tells us of a believing remnant), (4) unbelieving Jews (with whom Antichrist fosters peace), and (5) unbelieving Gentiles (since the earth, naturally, is still populated).

Verse 7 states, *"Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him."* Quoting Tregelles, "No supposition that the Church is found in resurrection glory prior to such a coming can be admitted as capable of reconciliation with this opening expectation."¹¹

Our Lord, in His discourse on the Mount of Olives, in speaking of what should be "immediately after the tribulation of those days," specifies the darkening of the sun and moon, etc.: *"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"* (Matt. 24:30). This, then, was the expectation of the Church declared by the Lord Himself before He suffered, of which the apostles were again reminded when He had been taken up from them into heaven. When our Lord stood before the High Priest, and when he said to Him "I adjure thee, by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ the Son of God, Jesus said to him, You have said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and

10 J. A. Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, Vol. I, pg. **.

11 Samuel P. Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming*, pg. 69.

coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). Who is there that cannot see how plain is the reference to the manifestation of the glory of Christ?¹²

When Jesus spoke of his coming again in the clouds, we have every reason to believe that he meant exactly that--he would be coming once more in that manner. Until that time, he is seated at the right hand of the Father: "*But to which of the angels has He ever said: 'Sit at My right hand, **till** I make Your enemies Your footstool'?"* (Ps. 110:1; Heb. 1:13).

12 Samuel P. Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming*, pp. 15-16.

CHAPTERS 2 AND 3

In 2:25 this same coming is again mentioned: *"But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations."* Rev. 1:7 must be admitted by all as Christ's second advent in glory (it is based on Dan. 7:13-14 and Zech. 12:10). Contextually, Rev. 2:25 must be the same "coming," and it is addressed to John's contemporary "churches."

It would seem apparent from these seven letters that the believers in John's day were to prepare to "overcome" until the end, that end being Christ's second coming. But at the time John is writing, the church is not living according to God's commandments. In such a state, how can they possibly overcome? Thus they are being warned as to what will happen should they not repent. Although John sent his letters to seven historical churches of his own day, it will suffice to say that there is much in them not only to warn but encourage every church up to the present day.

Frost has some helpful comments concerning these seven churches.

As an indication that the seven churches of the apostolic time did not altogether fulfill the prophecies of the letters addressed to them, and hence, that other churches of a future time--and this time immediately preceding Christ's coming--must do this, the following facts are to be noted: First, there is no historical evidence that there was in the past a church at Thyatira, Tertullianus (160-230 A.D.) and Epiphanius (310-403 A.D.) affirming that there was none; which, if it is true, means that this particular church must yet be established in order that the prophecy spoken of it may be brought to pass. Second, there is no proof either in the Scripture or in the patristic writings to the effect that all of the prophecies concerning the six remaining churches were fulfilled, that is, literally and in detail; which implies that the experiences prophesied in the letters to those churches are to have another and more exact fulfillment in the days to come. And third, it is manifest that certain divine warnings given in the letters to the churches, which were to be made effective if certain spiritual conditions were to remain, were never, in spite of the continuance of these conditions, brought to pass; which undoubtedly indicates that the warnings were given to the apostolic churches in a representative manner, that is, to them as representing other churches like them which should have existence at a later time, and in such conditions as would make possible the bringing to pass of every warning which had been uttered.¹³

THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

Those in Ephesus who overcome are promised that God will give them *"to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God."* Walvoord thinks this refers merely to ordinary--but genuine--Christians who have overcome the unbelief and sin of the world.¹⁴ This, however, seems a rather tame explanation in view of the nature of the revelation given to John. In Revelation we have recorded great trials that must be overcome, and for those who persevere,

¹³ Henry W. Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pp. 156-157.

¹⁴ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 59.

they are to partake of the tree of life in the New Jerusalem.

We read of the Nicolaitans' appearance first at the church in Ephesus, then in the church of Pergamos. Who were they? According to Zahn,

A comparison of Rev. 2:2 and 2:6 leaves no doubt that emissaries of this party had come to Ephesus some time before, and, after being turned away by the bishop of that place, had moved on to Pergamum and Thyatira, where they met with better success. The fact that they represented themselves to be apostles, and were declared to be false apostles, makes them itinerant teachers who roamed about, like the followers of Peter in Corinth, but does not necessitate the assumption that, like these, they originated in Palestine and taught a doctrine more or less Judaistic But the tradition that Nicolas, the proselyte of Antioch (Acts 6:5), later went astray as a libertine deserves to be believed If then this Nicolas himself, like Philip his former companion in office, emigrated to the province of Asia, or if adherents of his came to that place--which is more likely--it is quite conceivable that the representatives of this doctrine, because of its outward connection with the primitive Church, introduced themselves as apostles of a true gospel.¹⁵

THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA

"Nevertheless I have (a few things)¹⁶ against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." Zahn states that this Jezebel is definitely the wife of the pastor, and from the manner in which Christ describes himself in verse 23 (*"I am He who searches the minds and hearts"*), Jezebel knew how to conceal her actions even from her own husband.¹⁷

We note in particular the Lord's closing words to this church: *"But **hold fast** what you have **till I come.**"* Overcoming believers will continue until the coming of Christ at "the end," when He will give them "power over the nations."

THE CHURCH AT SARDIS

The angel of the church of Sardis was warned, *"Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you."* It depended on the overseer's attitude whether Christ's Coming would have the character of blessing or judgment. The same will be true of us.

THE CHURCH AT PERGAMOS

To those in Pergamos who overcome, Christ says, *"I will give some of the hidden manna to eat."* Zahn writes,

15 Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. III, pp. 419-420.

16 *"A few things"* is omitted in the best manuscripts.

17 Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. III, pg. 424.

The angel in that place is subject to a special temptation to deny Jesus and belief in Him, because he lives where Satan's throne is . . . it is not something external, like a prominent building or work of art, which is meant, but an institution or custom there prevalent in which the Christians recognized a striking embodiment and activity of the dominion of Satan. This is the cause of the martyrdom of Antipas, and of the continued danger in which the confessors of Christ are placed. It cannot well be doubted that the author means the cult of Æsculapius, the God of healing, in Pergamum, which flourished there as nowhere else How easily it might have happened that in daily life, or at the celebration of the feast of Æsulapius, Christians in Pergamum came into conflict with the heathen population, and that a Christian who openly expressed his abhorrence of this cult might have been killed by fanatical worshippers of the divinity!¹⁸

Those in Pergamos who overcome are promised "*a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it*" (2:17). Archer remarks that this stone is a symbol of acquittal in a court trial.¹⁹

THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

All those in the seven churches are told that they are to "overcome." Even those in Philadelphia who have persevered and will be "kept from the hour of trial" are still told to overcome something. There is nothing in this letter to make any Christian think that he will be raptured from the earth in order to be spared trials and suffering. The preferred meaning of εκ is "through," to be delivered "out of," not to exempt from (see John 17:15, Heb. 5:7, Gal. 1:4).²⁰

The phrase in 3:10, "I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world," is reminiscent of the verse in Luke 21:36. Each refers to the great tribulation; the same portion of it, that is, the close of the latter half; and the same spiritual experience in it, namely, of being kept, not from, but out of--in the sense of out of the midst of--the trials of that time. The word "from" in 3:10 is not *apo* but *ek*; and the thought is that those who will guard the word of Christ's patience, or endurance (see the Literal Translation), will be given strength to overcome in the midst of the persecutions which are then taking place and which are to spread through the whole inhabited earth, this last phrase indicating that the time referred to is when the tribulation is about to reach its utmost intensity and extensity. It will be seen that this view is consistent with the progressive idea contained in the seven letters, which has been more than once referred to, the Philadelphian church being next to the last in the series of churches (3:7-13), the Laodicean being the last (3:14-22), and the periods of the two churches bringing to pass the time when all things foretold will reach their climax (3:10; 11:1-13).²¹

18 Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. III, pp. 410-411.

19 Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.

20 In Heb. 5:7, speaking of Christ, we read: "*Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from (εκ) death, and was heard because of His godly fear.*" "Here is a case where we know that the Lord suffered and passed through death, and yet was saved out of it. Anything more decisive than this passage could not be wished for." See Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pp. 204-205.

21 Henry W. Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pp. 159-160.

The church at Philadelphia was suffering while they awaited Christ's coming in power and great glory. They are admonished to continue doing so, for in that they have shown patience ("*because you have kept the word of my patience*"), Christ, therefore, will keep them during the greater tribulation that is to come upon the whole world ("*I will also keep you*"). This coming shall be sudden, that is, occur quickly once it finally comes.

THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA

The church in Laodicea is counseled "*to buy from me gold refined in the fire . . . white garments that you may be clothed.*" The next verse reads, "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*" We read in 1 Peter 1:7 "*that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" And Job states, "*When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold*" (Job 23:10). Perhaps those in the church of Laodicea are being admonished because of their earthly comfort and ease. They are so lukewarm due to the lack of any trials that even Satan is not concerned about them. Could it be that Christ is telling them that they should be praying for those tests that prove faithfulness (buying gold and wearing white garments)? Trials will be coming in any event, and they will come as chastisement for those who do not have an attitude which pleases God. However, "if they hear his voice," he will come in and "sup with them," that is, be their strength.²² We have here in the church at Laodicea both the lukewarm and those who shall overcome.

Concerning Revelation 3:20, a verse with which we are all familiar, it would appear doubtful that it is addressed as an invitation to lost sinners. "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock*" is addressed to the Christians in the church at Laodicea. This church is being admonished for their lukewarmness, being warned that they are about to be spewed out. In verse 19 the Lord says that he rebukes and chastens, and in verse 21 he tells what will be rewarded to those who overcome. Verse 20 comes between them. It tells us that Jesus will come to the aid of him who is zealous and repents of his lukewarmness. It hardly seems, in this context, a plea for unbelievers "to open the door" of their heart.

22 Rev. 3:20.