

Lesson 1 Revelation 1

“What you have seen”

Memory verse: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” Revelation 1:3 (NIV).

Don’t ever prophesy,” said American humorist Josh Billings, “for if you prophesy wrong, nobody will forget it; and if you prophesy right, nobody will remember it.”

Over the centuries, prophecies have come and gone, and yet the book of Revelation written near the close of the first century is with us still. Even today, with many years of concentrated study it still fascinates readers by its message and mysteries.

No book in Scripture reveals the glory of God and Christ in any more splendour than does this book, and yet no book has been more misunderstood and misinterpreted and neglected than this book. In chapter 22 of Revelation, in verse 10, it says, “Seal not the words of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.” If there’s one thing God wants in regard to this book, it is that we know what it teaches: seal it not.

The book begins with a blessing, chapter 1 verse 3, “Blessed is the one who reads...” It ends with a blessing, chapter 22 verse 7, “..... Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.” It is the only book in the Bible that begins and ends with a promise of blessing to the one who reads. And we are told that we are to understand it because the time is at hand, and what that basically means, in chapter 22 verse 10, is that what is said here is the next event on God’s messianic timetable.

In Revelation 1, John introduces his book and gives us the data essential for appreciating and understanding this prophecy.

The word translated “revelation” simply means “unveiling.” It gives us our English word apocalypse which, unfortunately, is today a synonym for chaos and catastrophe. The verb simply means “to uncover, to reveal, to make manifest.” In this book, the Holy Spirit pulls back the curtain and gives us the privilege of seeing the glorified Christ in heaven and the fulfilment of His sovereign purposes in the world.

In other words, Revelation is an open book in which God reveals His plans and purposes to His church. When Daniel finished writing his prophecy, he was instructed to “shut up the words, and seal the book” (Dan. 12:4), but John was given opposite instructions: “Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:10). Why? Since Calvary, the resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, God has ushered in the “last days” (Heb. 1:1–2) and is fulfilling His hidden purposes in this world. “The time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3; 22:10).

John’s prophecy is primarily the revelation of Jesus Christ, not the revelation of future events. You must not divorce the Person from the prophecy, for without the Person there could be no fulfilment of the prophecy. “He is not incidental to its action,” wrote Dr. Merrill Tenney. “He is its chief Subject.”

Indeed, whatever you do as you study this book, get to know your Saviour better!

Things to learn: 1) The content and symbols in the book 2) the effect of the theme on readers 3) the profound spiritual experience of John

Discussion questions:

Q1 How did the Lord convey the contents of this book to His servant, John and what is the use of symbolism in this book?

Q2 You may not have read the whole book of Revelation but chapter 1 gives you an idea of the general theme of the book. What do you think is the theme of this book and how would that affect readers?

Q3 Discuss the profound spiritual experience of John in what he heard, saw and did as recorded in verses 9 to 18.