

# THE 50 FINAL EVENTS IN WORLD HISTORY

## **Also by Robert J. Morgan**

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*Mastering Life Before It's Too Late*

*Reclaiming the Lost Art of Biblical Meditation*

*The Jordan River Rules*

*The Red Sea Rules*

*The Strength You Need*

*Then Sings My Soul*

*Worry Less, Live More*

# THE 50 FINAL EVENTS IN WORLD HISTORY

THE BIBLE'S LAST WORDS ON  
EARTH'S FINAL DAYS

ROBERT J. MORGAN



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*The 50 Final Events in World History*

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*To John Campbell*

# Contents

*Introduction: The Trajectory of Our Times* . . . . . xi

## **Part 1: The Starting Point (Revelation 1–3)**

1. The Hidden Code for Understanding Revelation . . . . . 1
2. Next Stop: Patmos (Revelation 1) . . . . . 8
3. Christ’s Final Messages to the Churches  
(Revelation 2–3) . . . . . 22
4. The Foreseeable Future (Revelation 4–22) . . . . . 29

## **Part 2: The Fifty Final Events (Revelation 4–22)**

*The First Half of the Tribulation—Revelation 4–11* . . . . . 34

1. The Potential Rapture of the Church (4:1) . . . . . 36
2. Celebration Erupts in Heaven (4:2–5:14) . . . . . 38
3. The Lamb Inaugurates the Tribulation—Seal 1 (6:1) . . . . . 45
4. A Powerful Political Leader Appears (6:1–2) . . . . . 46
5. Global Conflict Rocks the World—Seal 2 (6:3–4) . . . . . 48
6. Famine Ravages the Earth—Seal 3 (6:5–6) . . . . . 49
7. The Death Rate Soars—Seal 4 (6:7–8) . . . . . 50
8. Multitudes Die for Christ—Seal 5 (6:9–11) . . . . . 52
9. Natural Catastrophes Sweep the  
Planet—Seal 6 (6:12–17) . . . . . 53
10. 144,000 Jewish Evangelists Are  
Commissioned (7:1–8) . . . . . 54
11. More Martyrs Arrive in Heaven (7:9–17) . . . . . 55
12. Dramatic Manifestation of Answered  
Prayer—Seal 7 (8:1–5) . . . . . 58
13. A Global Firestorm Erupts—Trumpet 1 (8:6–7) . . . . . 61

14. The Sea Is Contaminated—Trumpet 2 (8:8–9) . . . . .	62
15. Fresh Water Is Contaminated—Trumpet 3 (8:10–11) . . . . .	63
16. Sunlight Is Diminished—Trumpet 4 (8:12) . . . . .	64
17. Demons Are Released to Terrorize the Earth for Five Months—Trumpet 5 (8:13–9:12) . . . . .	65
18. High-Ranking Demons Are Released to Destroy a Third of Surviving Humanity—Trumpet 6 (9:13–21) . . . . .	69
19. A Massive Angel Heralds, “There Will Be No More Delay!” (10:1–7) . . . . .	72
20. John Receives a Message About the Second Half of the Tribulation (10:8–11) . . . . .	73
21. Two Super Prophets Are Commissioned (11:1–14) . . . . .	74
22. Heaven Declares: “The Time Has Come!”—Trumpet 7 (11:15–19) . . . . .	79
<i>The Midway Point of the Tribulation—Revelation 12–13 . . . . .</i>	
23. Satan Is Expelled from Heaven and Attacks Earth with Vengeance (12:1–17) . . . . .	84
24. The Antichrist Arises (13:1–10) . . . . .	93
25. The False Trinity Forms (13:11–13) . . . . .	97
26. The Abomination of Desolation Is Set Up in the Temple (13:14–15) . . . . .	98
27. The Mark of the Beast Is Issued (13:16–18) . . . . .	100
<i>The Last Half of the Tribulation—Revelation 14–18 . . . . .</i>	
28. The 144,000 Arrive Safely in Zion (14:1–5) . . . . .	104
29. Three Angels Deliver Final Messages to the Earth (14:6–13) . . . . .	106
30. Christ’s Declaration of War (14:14–16) . . . . .	111
31. Warfare Erupts Around Israel (14:17–20) . . . . .	114
32. The Seven Last Angels of the Last Plagues Appear (15:1–8) . . . . .	116
33. Global Contagion Spreads—Bowl 1 (16:1–2) . . . . .	118

34. The Seas Are Destroyed—Bowl 2 (16:3) . . . . .	119
35. The Fresh Water Is Polluted—Bowl 3 (16:4–7). . . . .	120
36. Intense Heat Scorches the Planet—Bowl 4 (16:8–9). . . . .	121
37. Darkness Covers the World—Bowl 5 (16:10–11) . . . . .	122
38. The Euphrates Dries Up—Bowl 6 (16:12) . . . . .	123
39. The World’s Armies Converge at Armageddon (16:13–16). . . . .	125
40. Earthquakes and Extreme Weather Devastate What’s Left of Earth—Bowl 7 (16:17–21). . . . .	129
41. The Antichrist’s Religiopolitical System Is Destroyed (17:1–18) . . . . .	132
42. The Antichrist’s Capital City Implodes (18:1–24) . . . . .	139
<i>The Return of Christ—Revelation 19–22</i> . . . . .	144
43. Hallelujahs Ring Out in Heaven (19:1–10) . . . . .	146
44. The Lord Jesus Christ Returns! (19:11–16). . . . .	149
45. The Rebels Are Defeated (19:17–21) . . . . .	154
46. The Millennium Breaks Forth (20:1–3) . . . . .	156
47. The Tribulation Saints Are Resurrected to Reign with Christ (20:4–6) . . . . .	158
48. The Final Battle (20:7–10) . . . . .	161
49. The Wicked Are Judged at the Great White Throne (20:11–15). . . . .	162
50. The New Heaven, the New Earth, the New Jerusalem—and Eternity! (21:1–22:21). . . . .	166
Conclusion: The Spirit and the Bride Say, “Come!” . . . . .	178
<i>Appendix</i>	
<i>The Five Views of Revelation</i> . . . . .	183
<i>Revelation on a Napkin</i> . . . . .	191
<i>Genesis, Revelation, and the Circle of Scripture</i> . . . . .	195
<i>Will We Know One Another in Heaven?</i> . . . . .	198
<i>Antiochus IV Epiphanes</i> . . . . .	205

*Gog and Magog* . . . . . 219  
*A Final Word* . . . . . 232  
*Acknowledgments* . . . . . 234  
*Notes* . . . . . 235  
*About the Author* . . . . . 246



## The Trajectory of Our Times



Every day the sun rises and sets, etching another sentence of history onto the parchment of our times. The tiny blue marble of earth, suspended in the vastness of a spangled universe, spins on its axis while its inhabitants cling for life. People are fearful. Our world is in disarray, and who knows what will happen to us and to our children? Who knows what tomorrow holds?

Almighty God knows.

He knows what's ahead. He knows it perfectly, instantly, totally, and omnisciently. He knows the future as well as the past, and the outlines of His predetermined plans are engraved on the pages of His Book. The Intelligent Creator is an Infallible Communicator, and He has packed His Word with remarkable predictions, like a woman packing remnants into her quilting chest.

I'm convinced a phenomenal pattern is about to unfold. World events aren't lurching into chaos; they are moving toward culmination and consummation. There's hope for tomorrow, and there's hope for you and yours. The cascading flow of crises is merging with the outlines of Bible prophecy, like two mighty rivers crashing into each other and coalescing into an unstoppable flood. For the children of God, this isn't a flood that will sweep us away. It will lift us up!

We need this kind of uplifting hope. Everyone I know seems

## Introduction

to have a lot of unexpected stress. Looming over the demanding details of daily life are gathering clouds of worldwide cataclysm. We are living in perilous times. The world has always been in a mess, but not since the days of Noah has our fragile planet faced such imminent and existential dangers as now. The threats—nuclear, economic, technological, philosophical, moral, political, biological, viral, environmental, and a host of others—imperil the earth with calamities of biblical proportions, which is what this book is about.

In these last days, when breaking news hits us at the speed of light, it's vital to understand scriptural prophecy and to have a firm grasp on the Bible's last words about earth's final days. As no prior generation, we need to understand the contents of the book of Revelation, which opens with these words: *The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place* (1:1).

## Me?

Perhaps you're thinking, *Me? Study Revelation?*

Absolutely! Nothing is more exciting than knowing tomorrow in advance, especially when tomorrow is hurtling toward us with unprecedented trouble. How exhilarating to stand on the precipice of prophecy, peering through the mist into the mysterious days predicted in the Bible's final book! History moves in only one direction—never backward, always onward, toward its final pre-appointed end. It grinds relentlessly into tomorrow, oblivious to the catastrophes and cataclysms in its wake.

Dr. J. Barton Payne, a Bible scholar and seminary professor who served on the translation committees for the *New American Standard Bible* and the *New International Version*, analyzed the prophetic portions of Scripture and calculated that of the roughly 31,000 verses in the Bible, over 8,000 contain predictive prophecy—8,352 verses to be exact. In other words, about 27 percent of the Bible is

prophetic. Some of those prophecies were historical or messianic predictions, which have already been fulfilled, but many still point toward the future—including much of the material in the final book of the Bible, Revelation.<sup>1</sup>

Since prophecy is a subject that interests God and occupies His Word, it should intrigue our minds and thrill our hearts, especially in these tense days. All the other books of the Bible lead to Revelation. It's how God chose to conclude Holy Scripture. The preceding sixty-five books pave the way for the twenty-two chapters that compose the Revelation of Saint John, the sixty-sixth and final book of the Bible.

Without Revelation, the Bible would have no satisfying conclusion. It would end with the book of Jude, which is a wonderful epistle about contending for the faith but is not a book that heralds God's plans for time and eternity.

Revelation is the terminal toward which the train of history is traveling, and we're all aboard for the ride. The events it describes are forthcoming. That's why I'm keen to study Revelation and to teach its truths to others. It gives me affirmation, answers, assurance, anticipation, and a call to action, enabling me to stand stronger for Christ in my generation.

I'm deeply troubled when I think that perhaps 80 or 90 percent of Christians, in my estimation—even those who have been attending church for years—are baffled by Revelation. It's understandable in a way, because Revelation is full of apocalyptic images. But this isn't a sustainable condition for any growing Christian. As never before, we need God's answers about our future!

My goal is to demystify the book of Revelation for you. I've examined this remarkable book for fifty years and taught through it many times. I've concluded that the simplest way to understand Revelation is to take it as literally as possible and as sequentially as possible. Using that approach, I think I can help anyone understand its content.

The last book of the Bible is not named *Obscurity* or *Puzzlement*

## Introduction

or *Ambiguity*. It's called *Revelation*, for God wants to *reveal* His future to His children. This is the ultimate consummation for which all the Bible was given and toward which all history is moving. It is the glorious hope for which every child of God is waiting.

It's time you understood this book from its first phrase to its last verse.

It's time to know the fifty final events in world history. I cannot tell you when these events will begin unfolding. It may be before you finish reading this book, or it could be ten years from now—or a hundred years or more. Jesus said, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority” (Acts 1:7). But it *is* for us to study His Word, including its fabulous final installment—Revelation.

## Him!

To stay healthy of heart, we need anticipation, expectation, something to look forward to. Anticipation is the secret of hope, and hope is the key to mental health. Whether it's finishing a medical treatment, taking a long-planned trip, awaiting the birth of a baby, planning for graduation, or nearing a milestone, we need a future event to keep us going. With Christ, it's not just a future event we're awaiting; it's a coming King. Today more than ever we need *Someone* to look forward to.

In Revelation, we meet Jesus as we've never seen Him before—as a King enthroned in glory, walking among golden lampstands, presiding over the epochs of time and eternity, and shining like the sun in its brilliance. He is receiving the praises of ten thousand times ten thousand, returning to earth as a conquering hero, and reigning forever as the Lion, the Lamb, and the Lord of all. The book of Revelation puts the finishing touches on the biblical portrait of Jesus, letting us see Him as He is in His eternal state, as

the Root and Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and the illuminating force of New Jerusalem.

Our conception of Jesus is incomplete without the descriptions of Him in Revelation, and as you study these twenty-two chapters, you'll see Him with new appreciation and love Him with heightened recognition for all the glories of His person and His position of supreme authority.

That's why I love the book of Revelation. It's about Jesus, and it's about tomorrow, which is right on schedule. It cannot be rushed or delayed, and it will arrive on time whether we're

ready or not. For those who know and understand the final book of the Bible, the future is worth thinking about. The events of Revelation are well worth studying. In fact, great blessings come into our lives when we devote our attention to the incredible 404 verses that make up Revelation. This is the only book in the Bible that begins and ends by pronouncing special blessings on those who study, understand, obey, and share its truth.

***Our conception of Jesus is incomplete without the descriptions of Him in Revelation.***

*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. (1:3)*

*Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll. (22:7)*

Let's claim these blessings as we move through the pages of Revelation and discover God's prophetic road map for the coming days of adventure and apocalypse, which will soon engulf our world and usher in the endless ages of eternity.

## How to Get the Most out of This Book

The goal of this book is to demystify the book of Revelation, helping you grasp and apply its contents. Let me suggest getting a good copy of a modern translation of the Bible and a sharp pencil or a pen that won't bleed through the pages, and doing the following:

1. Draw dividing lines between the following chapters (see example, opposite page):
  - Chapters 1 and 2—This delineates chapter 1 as the prologue of the book, and you can write the word *Prologue* over chapter 1. Over chapter 2, write the words *Messages to the Seven Churches*.
  - Chapters 3 and 4—Over chapter 4, write *Worship in Heaven*.
  - Chapters 5 and 6—Over chapter 6, write *First Half of Tribulation*.
  - Chapters 11 and 12—Over chapter 12, write *Middle of Tribulation*.
  - Chapters 13 and 14—Over chapter 14, write *Last Half of Tribulation*.
  - Chapters 18 and 19—Over chapter 19, write *Return of Christ and Thousand-Year Reign*.
  - Chapters 20 and 21—Over chapter 21, write *Our Eternal Home*.
  - These mark the major divisions of Revelation. Keep your open Bible beside you as you read *The 50 Final Events in World History*.
2. As you work your way through the fifty final events, number each one in the margin of your Bible (see example, opposite page). This will help you follow the book's unfolding content.

3. As you read, ask God for insight into the meaning and application of the book of Revelation. A good prayer is “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law” (Psalm 119:18).

## REVELATION 3:13

mouth. <sup>17</sup>You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. <sup>18</sup>I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

<sup>19</sup>Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. <sup>20</sup>Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

<sup>21</sup>To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup>Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

*Worship in Heaven***The Throne in Heaven**

- ① **4** After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”
- ② <sup>2</sup>At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. <sup>3</sup>And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. <sup>4</sup>Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. <sup>5</sup>From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were

314

blazing. These are the seven spirits<sup>5</sup> of God. <sup>6</sup>Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. <sup>7</sup>The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup>Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

“‘Holy, holy, holy  
is the Lord God Almighty,’<sup>6</sup>  
who was, and is, and is to come.”

<sup>9</sup>Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup>the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

<sup>11</sup>“You are worthy, our Lord  
and God,  
to receive glory and honor  
and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they were  
created  
and have their being.”

**The Scroll and the Lamb**

**5** Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup>And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open

<sup>5</sup> <sup>5</sup> That is, the sevenfold Spirit

<sup>6</sup> <sup>6</sup> Isaiah 6:3



PART 1

# THE STARTING POINT

*Revelation 1–3*





## The Hidden Code for Understanding Revelation



A few years ago when I had a rigorous trip to Branson, Missouri, for a speaking engagement, I asked my college intern, Carson, to come with me and help with the driving. In Branson, I spoke several times, then we fastened our seat belts for the drive home. “Since we have seven or eight hours on the road tonight,” I said to him, “what do you want to talk about?”

“I want to understand the book of Revelation,” Carson said. “Could you walk me through each chapter while I drive?”

Reaching into my backpack, I pulled out my Bible and turned to its final twenty pages. I started with Revelation 1:1, and we worked through each of the twenty-two chapters as we drove through the night. As I thumbed through one chapter after another, reading it aloud, going verse by verse, I saw something I’d never noticed. I was astounded I had never seen a particular pattern so clearly before.

What I discovered I consider to be the key to decoding Revelation—but it isn’t original to me. Many expositors have pointed it out before; it’s one of the most obvious features of the book. But I had never seen it myself before that long drive with Carson.

The very next day when I left to lead a tour to Israel, I took my Bible with me and pondered the book of Revelation the whole

way. Standing on the Mount of Olives with its million-dollar view of Jerusalem, I gathered my group and taught as clearly as I could what the Bible predicts about the future. Throughout the trip, I kept thinking through the contents of Revelation, and my conviction grew stronger that there is a simple arrangement to the book that is often overlooked.

Here, I believe, is the key to decoding the book of Revelation and unlocking its truth: There is an alternating pattern from passage to passage throughout the book of Revelation. The scene shifts from heaven to earth and from earth back to heaven. The action fluctuates between what's happening below and what's happening above. It's as though a spotlight rhythmically pivots up and down, transmitting insights from heaven regarding events down here. In learning to appreciate this pattern, we can learn to interpret not just future events but also present circumstances in light of heaven's wisdom.

## **The Undergirding Structure of Revelation**

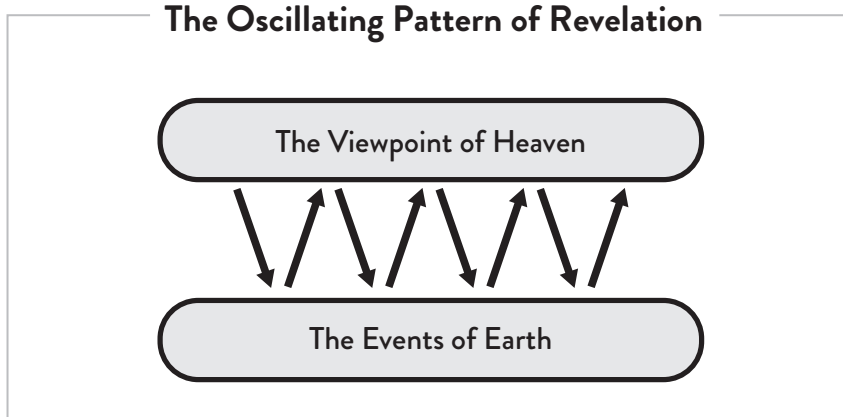
Let me show you in abbreviated fashion how this unfolds throughout Revelation. If you want to open your Bible, you can trace this for yourself using the following bullet points as a guide, or you can scan these points below and easily comprehend the pattern. Don't worry about the content of each passage. We'll deal with that later. For now, just notice how the point of view zigzags back and forth from heaven to earth.

- **On Earth: John on Patmos (Revelation 1:1–11).** The action begins on earth as the book opens with John's description of his exile to the penal island of Patmos. As John was the last surviving member of the original twelve apostles, his presence in the city of Ephesus was problematic to Roman officials, who banished him to this small island in the Aegean.

- **In Heaven: The Glorified Christ (Revelation 1:12–20).** In Revelation 1:12, the scene changes to heaven, where John saw the glorified Christ. *I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me*, John wrote. *And when I turned I saw . . . someone like a son of man* (Revelation 1:12–13). Suddenly Patmos didn't seem so bad, for it was illumined by heaven.
- **On Earth: The Seven Churches (Revelation 2:1–3:22).** In chapter 2, the scene shifts back to earth and to the condition of the seven churches in John's congregational circuit, which is described in Revelation 2–3.
- **In Heaven: The Throne at the Beginning of the Tribulation (Revelation 4:1–5:14).** Then the action shifts back to heaven and to the future. In chapters 4–5, John witnessed the glorious celebration that will occur as the heavenly hosts hail the beginning of the onset of events leading to the second coming of Christ. These two chapters describe the greatest scene of worship we have in the entire Bible, but they also represent a courtroom scene in which God is preparing to judge evil on the earth.
- **On Earth: The Seven Seals (Revelation 6:1–7:8).** The camera pans back to earth in Revelation 6–7 as the seven seals are opened, giving us the course of events composing the first part of the tribulation period. The outpouring of judgment begins.
- **In Heaven: The Great Multitude (Revelation 7:9–8:5).** Once again we're caught up to heaven to see the great multitude of angels and tribulation martyrs around the throne of God.
- **On Earth: The Seven Trumpets (Revelation 8:6–11:14).** In Revelation 8:6, the focus shifts downward again to show the unfolding events on earth during the blasting of the seven trumpets.
- **In Heaven: Thunderous Praise Around the Throne (Revelation 11:15–19).** In the last half of Revelation 11, the action shifts

back to heaven as resounding praise accompanies the events taking place on earth, because *the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever* (v. 15).

- **On Earth: The Anti-Trinity (Revelation 12:1–13:18).** These passages return us to earth as we watch the formation of a diabolical trinity, an evil trio of agents who will unleash a reign of terror that will turn the last half of the tribulation into a period of great tribulation.
- **In Heaven: The Lamb Is Worshiped (Revelation 14:1–5).** Then we're again caught up to heaven to witness the arrival of the 144,000 faithful witnesses who have escaped the carnage of earth.
- **On Earth: Angels of Judgment, Bowls of Wrath, and the Collapse of Babylon (Revelation 14:6–18:24).** The last catastrophic events of the great tribulation unfold in chapters 14–18, as seven angels pour out their bowls of wrath on the earth, climaxing in the battle of Armageddon and in a global earthquake that will obliterate the great cities of the world.
- **In Heaven: The Hallelujah Chorus (Revelation 19:1–16).** As the final cataclysms devastate our planet, the scene shifts back to heaven where a hallelujah chorus bursts forth from every voice of the angelic hosts. Amid their praise Christ will descend to earth, returning as He promised.
- **On Earth: The Return of Christ and Its Aftermath (Revelation 19:17–20:15).** The next passages are focused on earth as Christ returns, takes charge of planet earth, and ushers in a thousand years of peace.
- **In Heaven: Eternity Begins (Revelation 21:1–22:21).** At the end of the book of Revelation, heaven and earth are merged together as one in the new heaven and the new earth. Eternity arrives for the children of God.



### The Underlying Lesson for Us

Now that you clearly see this alternating pattern between the action on earth and the response in heaven, I hope you can see I'm not giving you a conspiracy theory, a wild idea, or some strange new way of interpreting the future. This pattern is clearly woven into the structure of the Bible's last book.

When things look darkest on earth, they seem brightest in heaven. As earth churns through its terrible tribulations, heaven erupts in celebration because evil is collapsing and sin and suffering are slipping away.

This isn't just a literary formula for understanding the Bible's most baffling book. It's the scriptural way to decode the baffling events of life. The pattern of looking at earthly events from a heavenly point of view has significance for us beyond the contents of Revelation. The earthly/heavenly perspective can provide a scaffolding for the totality of our thinking about all of life. Everything changes when we view the events here *below* with a perspective from *above*. We begin thinking like Christians, like Christ. Seeing things as they appear from above changes our attitudes about everything every day.

The Bible says, “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17–18).

The apostle Paul wrote, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

God has said to humans, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. . . . As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

And James 3:13–18 says there is wisdom from below and wisdom from above. We achieve true wisdom only when we view the events of earth from the perspective of heaven. We must understand, as best we can, our daily affairs from God’s vantage point.

Recently I was at the Houston airport when I received word that my first and oldest friend had been diagnosed with cancer. He and I are the same age, and when we were young our dads had adjoining orchards on the Tennessee–North Carolina border. We played among the apple trees and worked together in the packinghouse. Hearing the news, I immediately called him. I was unprepared for what he said. “Yes, and my cancer is rapid and terminal. I’ve chosen to bypass treatment. I watched my dad go through cancer treatments, and I don’t want to go through what he did, especially since my condition is so advanced.”

My eyes filled up and I couldn’t respond. But David continued, “It’s all right, though. I’m sad about leaving my family, but I trusted Jesus as my Savior when I was nine years old. I’m excited to see what’s next. I’m ready for heaven.”

Shortly afterward, my friend slipped from earth to heaven as he held in his mind the truths and joys and reunions and promises contained in our heaven-sent book. When I spoke by his graveside, I recalled our conversation and spoke of his divine perspective.

Across all the vectors of life, God's Word gives us heaven's commentary on our earthly days, and by reading His sixty-six books—including the last one—we look at life with wisdom from above. We can't deal adequately with world events or personal crises unless we increasingly see things from Christ's perspective on the throne. When we view things horizontally, we feel confusion; but when we see things vertically, life makes sense—including the direction of history. Everything changes when we interpret events below with wisdom from above and see things as the Lord does in heaven.

Every day is different when lived with anticipation. Every situation changes when viewed through the lens of Scripture. Every circumstance is manageable when we see it from the perspective of the eternal throne of our soon-coming Christ. The book of Revelation may appear to be filled with apocalyptic catastrophes, unrivaled since the beginning of the world and never to be equaled again—a world torn apart at the seams. But from the Divine Author's vantage point, it's a celebration of evil defeated, earth redeemed, Christ enthroned, and paradise regained.

And that brings us to the first verse of the first chapter—Revelation 1:1:

*The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.*

## Next Stop: Patmos

### *Revelation 1*



Over the years, I've had opportunities to travel widely, and I always ask myself if I'd enjoy living in whatever location I'm visiting. Everyone occasionally wonders what it would be like to live elsewhere. Sometimes we watch real estate shows on television and fantasize about buying a home in an exotic locale. *Would I enjoy island life? What about living in the heart of a pulsating city? How about a village in the Alps or along the California coast?*

Where would you live if you could choose any destination on earth?

*Forbes* magazine published an article on Europe's most idyllic locations—places that are tranquil, beautiful, and rich with heritage. Their top suggestion was a small island in the Aegean Sea known as Patmos. With a population of about three thousand on thirteen square miles, Patmos offers peace and quiet. It has no airport; the only way to get there is by ferry. The interior of the island is beautiful, and its beaches are pristine. The temperatures are moderate all year, and most days are sunny. The cost of living is relatively low, and the island bears a rich heritage of religious significance.<sup>1</sup>

Much of that religious significance is bound up with the story of the book of Revelation. In biblical times, Patmos wasn't a



fashionable location. The Romans used it to banish those, like Saint John, whom they wanted to silence or cancel.

As we've already seen, God views the circumstances of life differently than we do, and He chose this small island to reveal His panorama of the future and provide His last surviving apostle with apocalyptic truth about the fifty final events in world history. This is the place God chose to conclude His written revelation—the Scriptures—by revealing the course of earth's dying days.

The first chapter of Revelation serves as a prologue that sets the stage for the entire book and orients us to all that follows. It not only provides the background for the book but also gives us the key for interpreting the symbolism that characterizes the material to follow. If we understand the first chapter, we can correctly interpret the subsequent visions. Chapter 1 is made up of (1) the introduction in verses 1–8 and (2) the opening vision of Christ in verses 9–20.

Let's begin with the introduction of the book—Revelation 1:1–8—which is as simple and concise as any paragraph of Scripture. Packed into these verses are the title and purpose of the book, its transmission, its blessing, a greeting, a doxology (an exclamation of praise), and an opening hymn and response.

### ***The Prologue of Revelation***

1. Introduction (vv. 1–8)
  - Title and Purpose (v. 1)
  - Transmission (vv. 1–2)
  - Blessing (v. 3)
  - Greeting (vv. 4–5)
  - Doxology (vv. 5–6)
  - Hymn and Response (vv. 7–8)
2. Opening Vision (vv. 9–20)

## **Title and Purpose**

The title of Revelation is given in the first verse: *The revelation from Jesus Christ*. John wrote Revelation in the common language of his day—Greek—and the word *revelation* is translated from the Greek term *apokalypsis*, from which we get our English word *apocalypse*. In Greek, this term doesn't mean "disaster" but "unveiling." The prefix (*apo*) means "from," and the root word means "to hide." So the term actually means "to remove something from hiding, to reveal, to unveil."<sup>2</sup>

My sister and I commissioned our friend Ken Simmelink to create an oil painting of our family home in Roan Mountain, Tennessee. Though the house has been enlarged, it had a humble beginning—a log cabin constructed by hand during World War II for my elderly grandmother. We had some old photographs and a

lot of memories, and we wanted people to see it as we remembered it from childhood.

When the painting was finished, we went to Ken's home to view it. He had it sitting on an easel in his living room, covered with a cloth and hidden from view. We took our seats as Ken explained how he had gone about crafting the work and the approach he had taken in creating the image. We could hardly wait until the moment he lifted the covering and revealed the beautiful painting he'd created. We loved it, and it now hangs on the dining room wall in the enlarged cabin.

This moment of Ken revealing his painting shows the meaning of the word *apokalypsis*. God knows exactly what's going to happen in the future. He has already painted the picture, and the history of the world is moving along a preordained route toward its total fulfillment. He knows everything to come, which we could never foresee by our own intuition. In the book of Revelation, God lifts the cloth and shows us His plan for tomorrow.

That leads us to the last half of verse 1, which sums up the book in one phrase and serves as its statement of purpose:

*The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.*

Notice the phrase *his servants*. The information in Revelation isn't for the world, which disregards it. It's for us—for Christ-followers—who value its message and long for our Lord's appearing. It's for those who know Jesus as their Savior and who are eager for details about His return. This is information for the saints, for those who realize they are citizens of heaven traveling through this troubled earth as ambassadors for the King.

Notice the word *must*. The verse says *to show his servants what must soon take place*.

The events described in this book are preplanned and preordained

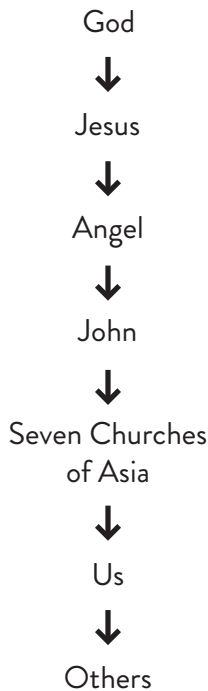
by the Author of time and eternity, and they will happen exactly as announced. They *must* happen. No unexpected contingencies can delay or derail them. God's plans are irreversible and unchangeable, inscribed in stone on the walls of His firm and fixed decrees.

Don't overlook the word *soon*—to show his servants what must soon take place. Perhaps you're thinking, *But it's been nearly two thousand years since these words were written! That doesn't seem "soon" to me.*

The word *soon* could be translated *quickly*, *suddenly*, or *swiftly*, indicating these events, once unleashed, will come with sudden force.

It's also true that *soon* is a relative term, and the speaker is the eternal God. To Him, a thousand years are like a day and a day is like a thousand years (2 Peter 3:8). He views the calendar from the perspective of eternity, and to Him a thousand years pass as quickly

as a mere day. The book of Revelation is given from God's viewpoint, which means Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven only a couple of days ago, as it were. The interim between our Lord's first and second comings is very brief from the vantage point of eternity. The unfolding of history may not seem "soon" to us, but from God's standpoint things are moving quickly—more quickly now than ever.



## Transmission

Continuing through verses 1 and 2, we learn the book of Revelation is to be shared, and there's an interesting chain of transmission. It has come to us in a deliberate way. God the Father gave this information to Jesus Christ, who gave it to an angel, who gave it to the

apostle John, who wrote it down for seven churches in Asia Minor; and from them it came to us via the inspired Word of God. This indicates it shouldn't stop with us. This is a pass-along book, a pulse-quickenning, heart-lifting message to be shared.

## Blessing

Verse 3 continues with a blessing for those who read and study the final pages of the Bible. As I said in the introduction, Revelation is the only book in the Bible with a specific blessing for those who read and heed it. Revelation 1:3 says,

*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.*

A similar blessing occurs near the end of the book too, in Revelation 22:7.

As Dr. W. A. Criswell pointed out, if we are so deeply blessed by the Gospels and strengthened by the message of our Lord's first coming—when He came as a suffering servant and His deity was veiled and He died a torturous death—how much more should we be blessed by contemplating His second coming, His return in power and glory?<sup>3</sup>

***Revelation is the only book in the Bible with a specific blessing for those who read and heed it.***

This is a great encouragement for us. We're often stressed by political pressures and the unfolding events in the news. Our private worlds easily come unraveled. Just today, I realized I had too many demands for an allotted time, and a sense of panic swept over me. Later in the day I was gripped by news of a terrorist attack at an airport I've frequented in the past. We're constantly on edge in this world. But the therapy of studying Revelation is like oil on troubled waters. In times like these we need the blessings of this book and

the anticipation of its message. How much better we sleep at night with the sure and certain hope of our Lord's soon return!

## Greeting

Having opened his book with its title, purpose, transmission, and blessing, John then introduced himself with an opening greeting, or salutation, in verses 4–5:

*John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.*

The writer is the apostle John, the author of the fourth gospel.

The original recipients of this book were attendees of the churches in Ephesus and other nearby cities along the western coast of modern Turkey. Notice the Trinitarian nature of the greeting John gave. Grace and peace come from:

- God the Father (*him who is, and who was, and who is to come*).
- God the Holy Spirit (*the seven spirits before his throne*).
- God the Son (*Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth*).

Why is the Holy Spirit referred to as *the seven spirits before his throne*? In Revelation, John frequently used the number seven, indicating completion or perfection. He was referring to the perfection of the Holy Spirit and perhaps thinking of the sevenfold description of the Holy Spirit given in Isaiah 11:1–2, where the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit (1) of the LORD, (2) of wisdom, (3)

of understanding, (4) of counsel, (5) of might, (6) of knowledge, and (7) of the fear of the LORD.

Alternately, John may have been thinking of Zechariah 4, which describes a seven-branched golden lampstand, accompanied by the words “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty” (v. 6).

Revelation was originally sent to seven churches, which, as we’ll see, are described as lampstands. The Holy Spirit was present in all seven congregations—a sevenfold Spirit—representing the fact that He dwells among all churches of the Lord Jesus everywhere on earth. So we have several ways of looking at the Holy Spirit using the number seven—in His perfections, in His attributes, and among His churches.

## Doxology

Verses 5–6 burst into doxology, an exuberant expression of praise:

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

Though exiled on the island of Patmos, John was bursting with praise because God had loved him, freed him from his sins by the blood of Jesus, and included him as part of His kingdom and His priesthood that serves the Lord, to whom belongs glory and power forever and ever. Even when we’re exiled by circumstances and stranded on islands of difficulty, we can worship and praise God. That changes our attitudes in every situation. The entire book of Revelation brims with praise and rings with joyful songs of worship.

***The entire book of Revelation brims with praise and rings with joyful songs of worship.***

## Hymn and Response

The introduction of the book concludes with the first of many hymns in Revelation. In modern translations, we can recognize these hymns by their formatted arrangement in the book. You'll see them indented or centered like a poem or like the lyrics of a song. Verse 7 says,

*“Look, he is coming with the clouds,”  
and “every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him”;  
and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”  
So shall it be! Amen.*

How much we can learn about our Lord's return in this short stanza! At the moment of His return, He will descend through dramatic clouds of glory and somehow become visible to everyone on earth and to everyone from human history, including those who crucified Him, wherever they are residing. His coming will anguish those who have rejected Him and thrill those who love Him. And nothing can change the certainty of His return—so shall it be! Amen.

In verse 8, the Lord responded to this hymn, saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

## The Opening Vision

The second part of the prologue of Revelation, which makes up chapter 1, brings us to the opening vision of the book. In verse 9, John paused to introduce himself again, saying,

*I, John . . . was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God  
and the testimony of Jesus.*

In his later years, we believe the apostle John was headquartered in the city of Ephesus and served as the overseer, or bishop, of the churches in that area. Wanting to minimize his influence, Roman authorities banished him to Patmos, probably during the reign of Emperor Domitian, who ruled from AD 81 to 96.<sup>4</sup> Patmos was an island in the Aegean Sea only sixty miles from Ephesus.<sup>5</sup>

John continued in verse 10, saying,

*On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit.*

Some interpret this as “I was caught up by the Spirit and transported into the visions of the end of the age connected with the Lord’s return, that is, the Lord’s Day of Judgment.” But the simplest understanding is that John was worshiping as a Spirit-filled believer on Sunday when he began receiving this series of visions.

In verse 11, John addressed his readers, members of the seven churches in Asia Minor. As bishop of Ephesus, John probably kept an itinerary and preached regularly in these churches.

Beginning in verse 12, we have the foundational vision of the book—a glimpse of the Lord Jesus Christ as He now appears in all His glory. This was the first time John had seen Jesus since the Lord ascended into heaven sixty or so years before. John now saw Jesus, enthroned, resplendent in glory. I believe this vision contains some literal elements of the present appearance of Christ, though symbolism is overlaid across it. One of the things we should bear in mind while reading Revelation is that an object can be both literal and symbolic at the same time (just as the American flag is, for example).

John said,

*I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to*

*his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. . . . His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.* (vv. 12–16)

Reading those words reminds me of dramatic passages from earlier books of the Bible. The images in Revelation are consistent with what we see in many of the Old Testament visions, especially when God's throne is pictured, often surrounded by angelic beings of various kinds. Some scholars say John borrowed heavily from Old Testament passages, and that's true. But perhaps it's better to state that John was seeing new, original visions. The images were simply consistent with the ones seen by Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and others.

What John saw in this vision is remarkably similar to Daniel's vision of the throne of God in Daniel 7:9–14, which is another powerful apocalyptic scene related to the last days.

I'm also reminded of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew. On that occasion, John, James, and Peter glimpsed something of our Lord's intrinsic and eternal glory. "There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light" (17:2). The disciples saw a partial manifestation of the essential glory of Jesus.

In his Patmos vision, John saw even more of His glory. He saw the resplendent Christ walking among seven golden lampstands, which, according to verse 20, represented the seven churches of Asia.

It's glorious to think that the eternal Ruler of the Universe loves to walk among us and be present in His churches. When we gather for worship with other believers, Jesus is there, walking among us by means of His Holy Spirit. When we labor alongside other believers for the expansion of the gospel, there He is among us; and our work is done not by might or power but by His Spirit.

As I said, this passage shows how John interpreted the metaphor of the candlesticks, so we don't have to guess about their meaning. The last phrase of the chapter is *and the seven lampstands are the seven churches*. As we'll see, Revelation is a book of symbols, but much of its symbolism is interpreted in the text, so the book isn't as perplexing as it first appears.

John's view of Jesus was heart-stopping:

*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!"* (vv. 17–18)

Jesus opened His book of revelations to us by telling us on the first page about the two responses we should have: (1) don't be afraid and (2) remember Jesus died for us and is now alive—forever!

We don't know what tomorrow's headlines will bring, nor can we anticipate what will befall us today or tomorrow. But one reality overrides everything else—Jesus is alive, so we needn't fear. When He rose from the dead, He overcame every challenge, overthrew every enemy, and overturned every affliction. He stripped away any reason for sleepless nights or fretful days. He set the stage for the righteous consummation of all His intentions and paved the way for the new heaven and new earth.

## The Outline

The prologue of Revelation ends with a simple outline that shows us how the book will unfold. The Lord told John in verse 19,

***When we gather for worship with other believers, Jesus is there, walking among us by means of His Holy Spirit.***

*The 50 Final Events in World History*

*Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.*

This verse gives us the threefold outline to Revelation.

1. *What you have seen* refers to what John had just seen, the opening vision of the glorified Christ in chapter 1.
2. *What is now* involves the current condition of the seven churches to whom John addressed his book. The seven brief messages to these congregations occupy Revelation 2–3. These messages also speak to us and to our churches now, in the present time.
3. *What will take place later* is the prophetic and predictive portion of Revelation, which presents fifty events that will dramatically conclude the annals of human history and usher in the endless ages of the eternal state. This material spans chapters 4–22.<sup>6</sup>

Chapter 1	Chapters 2–3	Chapters 4–22
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Before we go further, let me suggest you read the first chapter of Revelation repeatedly until you have a firm grasp of its simplicity and splendor. Put yourself in John’s shoes. Imagine the distress of being exiled to an island far from friends and family, not knowing what will happen to the churches for which you’re responsible, not knowing whether the Christian movement will survive the terrible persecutions of Rome.

There, amid all your loneliness and uncertainty, your dearest friend, Jesus, makes a special visit in His resurrected and glorified state, and He tells you, in essence, “Don’t be afraid. Remember, I was dead but I’m now alive—and I’m alive forever. Everything will

end as I intend, and My intention is to bless you. Let Me give you the details. I'm going to show you what must soon take place. I will unveil the world of tomorrow. I'm going to fill you with hope for the coming days—for both time and eternity.”

Jesus was speaking not only to John but to us as well. We have the book of Revelation—all twenty-two wonderful chapters—because we need its message in times like these. How sad to have this book but not study it. How sad to study it but not understand it. How sad to understand it but not obey it.

On the other hand, how wonderful to trust its message, look forward to its fulfillment, and prepare for the sensational events about to engulf the world and lead us into eternity!