

Having only taught through the Book of Revelation... it is a book of the Bible that I have never preached through. ... There have been so many differing interpretations through the ages... and positions that people take... which have divided believers... and caused many negative emotions.

Back in the 1970's... when Hal Lindsay wrote "The Late Great Planet Earth" it revived a world-wide interest in Biblical end-time prophecy... known as "eschatology." A few years after it's release... I was being mentored by a pastor who had previously served on the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ with Hal Lindsay. ... But I noticed that Gene did not share an interest in eschatology with Lindsay. ... One day I asked him why this was. Gene's answer was...there is too much of the Bible that is clear and needs to be proclaimed and followed – why venture into an area of so much guesswork? ... I'm too busy with what I know the Bible teaches... to concern myself with end-time matters which we may not fully understand.

Perhaps my early mentor's influence had predisposed me from preaching through this book... but as I have studied other sources beyond "The Late Great Planet Earth"... and as I look at our world today... I believe we need the message of this book... more than ever. Recent Russian aggression... North Korea's muscle flexing... China's military expansion and South Pacific Island grab... Iran's disregard for agreements and treaties... World-wide Islamic terrorism... Court decisions here in the US that deny religious freedoms of born-again Christians... an election primary season unlike any ever seen before... a culture that increasingly sees our faith as contemptible and Christians as a public enemy... and much more... All of this shouts to me... that we have abundant need for Revelation's message.

Revelation's primary message is **not at all** uncertain. God has given us the book of Revelation so we can know Him in His glorious justice and mercy and live worshipfully by faith. ... I have given a title to this new series (which may take a few years) "Living Faith in a Hostile World."

We progressively face the same kind of hostile environment that the original readers of Revelation faced. ... John wrote Revelation about a.d. 95... during the reign of the Roman emperor Titus Flavius Domitian.

First century Roman historian... Suetonius... and others have preserved for us a rather consistent picture of the emperor... Titus Flavius Domitian (a.d. 51-96). Suetonius wrote that he "made himself free with the wives of many men..." and that he even went so far as to marry Domitia Longina... who was (at the time) the wife of Aelius Lamia."

Suetonius also relates that when his brother Titus "was seized with a dangerous illness," Domitian "ordered that he be left for dead, before he had actually drawn his last breath." When Cornelia... a woman of his court... was found guilty of having a lover... Domitian had her "buried alive". He seduced his niece, who was married, and eventually "became the cause of her death by compelling her to get rid of a child of his by abortion."

Domitian was a moral catastrophe of a man, and he was also physically unimpressive. There is an account of him vigorously scratching a festering wart on his forehead and drawing blood. He is described as being "sensitive about his baldness" and as having "a protruding belly, and spindling legs."

This weak and wicked Caesar insisted on being addressed as "Lord and God" (Dominus et deus).

Now... perhaps you have been concerned about the prospects of our nation's next leader. (I know that I have.) But I don't think we have quite stooped this far down. Almost! And maybe it is where we are headed... But the Roman Caesars were pictures of absolute human depravity.

Imagine living in a world ruled by a man who would leave his brother to die, seduce his own niece, kill people for making jokes about him, and then demand to be addressed as "Lord and God."

The early church father... Irenaeus... tells us that Domitian jailed the Apostle John and banished him to the Island of Patmos... where John wrote the Book of Revelation... towards the end of Domitian's reign." ... Christians were facing severe persecution around the Roman Empire that was unleashed by Domitian.

Persecuted people are not *normally* inclined to feel that God has blessed them... and persecuted people are not *normally* inclined to praise God. But God had John write Revelation to induce His blessed and persecuted people to praise Him. ... It gives us great reason to do so! The churches that received the book of Revelation needed to know *how* God had blessed them—because by the world's standards they did not seem blessed. We too need to know how God has blessed us.

At this point in our experience most of us are probably not facing exile, like John experienced... and while the news media only shows Christians being martyred for their faith today... in other countries... most of us are not

facing the threat of being killed for our faith... just yet. But this does not mean that we face *no* persecution for our faith. Have you ever had family members resent your presence—even if you haven't said anything—because they know what you believe? Have you ever been accused of being judgmental? Have you ever been called "narrow-minded," "arrogant," "self-righteous," "intolerant," "bigoted," or "unenlightened" because you believe that the only way to be right with God is to trust in Jesus?

Even if these mild forms of persecution have not resulted in exile or physical violence... our culture communicates to us that our Christian values and morals will not be tolerated. ... The original audience that John wrote to... was being wooed toward lives of compromise that might soften the persecution. ... Although Christians in today's world often face different specific temptations... the basic temptation to succumb to the world's pressure remains the same... as in John's day... when he wrote this.

When we face such temptation... Christ's revelation to us can put everything back into perspective. ... No matter how difficult our situation... Revelation announces that God is still in control and that He will conclude this stage of history the way He has promised. ... He often provides happy endings to our individual trials... but even when God does not... we have the assurance that a time is coming when everything will be as it should be. Precisely because Christ rules history... He can assure us of its outcome.

The Bible is **one book** ...from the first book to the last. Genesis is completed by the book of Revelation. The tangled threads of Bible history flow into Revelation like the Mississippi River flows into the Gulf of Mexico.

- In Genesis, we find the *entrance* of sin and the curse; In Revelation, its *end*.
- In Genesis, we find the *dawn* of Satan and his activities and his *doom* in Revelation.
- In Genesis, the Tree of Life is *relinquished* and in Revelation, it's *regained*.
- In Genesis, Death makes its *entrance* and in Revelation, its *exit*.
- Genesis records the *beginning* of sorrow and in Revelation, it's *banished*.
- Genesis records the *commencement* of prophecy and Revelation records the *consummation*.

The Book of Revelation does not provide a lot of new information. Instead it takes about 500 prophecies that are scattered throughout the Old Testament... Genesis only starts it off. This book catches up and weaves together all the Bible's lines of prophetic revelation. This book is the capstone of all the prophecy in the Bible. Revelation puts it all in a chronological order... so that we have a sequence of the events. It gives us a framework for all of the prophecies.

The study that we begin today – “Living Faith in a Hostile World” will use Revelation as our base... but we will be all over the Old Testament. This will be a study where you and I will get to know our Old Testaments... as well as the very last Book of the Bible - Revelation. (That is another reason why this study may take a few years of Sunday mornings.)

Many people have said that they are afraid of Revelation because it speaks of the future. ... Let me say... we are not to fear the book of Revelation,

avoid it, ignore it, belittle it or dread it. We are to embrace it, study it, be blessed by it... and warn the lost of what it contains.

Revelation is the record of the ninth inning... or fourth quarter of world history... and it shows that Jesus wins and Satan loses. ... I am convinced that we are (today) in the 9th inning. For this reason... its truths should motivate us as believers to live our lives for Christ till He returns... or we go home to Heaven.

One more thing before we turn to the opening verses of this book. ... I would like to try and answer a question that many may have. **Why did John use symbolism?** If he wanted to be encouraging the saints who were suffering... wouldn't it have been better to write more plainly... in a manner that leaves no confusion...?

For one thing, this kind of "spiritual code" is understood only by those who know Christ personally. If any Roman officers had tried to use Revelation as evidence against Christians, the book would have been a puzzle and an enigma to them.

But an even greater reason is that symbolism is not weakened by time. John was able to draw on the great "images" in God's revelation and assemble them into an exciting drama that has encouraged persecuted and suffering saints for centuries. However, you must not conclude that John's use of symbolism indicates that the events described are not real. They are real!

There is a third reason why John used symbolism: symbols not only convey information... but also impart values and arouse emotions. John could have

written... "A dictator will rule the world," but instead he described a *beast*. The symbol says much more than the mere title of "dictator." ...Instead of explaining a world system, John simply introduced "Babylon the Great" and contrasted Satan's "harlot" with Christ's "bride."

In understanding John's symbolism, however, we must be careful not to allow our imaginations to run wild. Biblical symbols are consistent with the whole of biblical revelation. Some symbols are explained in close proximity of their use (such as Rev. 1:20; 4:5; 5:8). Others are to be understood from Old Testament symbolism (Rev. 2:7, 17; 4:7). But there will be a few symbols are that not explained at all (the "white stone" in Rev. 2:17). ... So to the best of our ability... we will anchor our interpretations to what God has already revealed... in order to minimize misinterpretations of this important prophetic book.

Now let's get started. We will not get far today... perhaps only the first 8 verses... but these have more than enough for us to chew on...

Rev 1:1

First of all... please note that the title of this book is Revelation – singular... not plural... "Revelations" ... The word **Revelation** comes from the Latin "re" meaning "*back*," and "*velum*" meaning "*veil covering*." ... It means to *pull back the veil* or *to uncover*.

The Greek word is "apokalopsis" and means to "*unveil, lay bare, expose*." In Revelation the veil is pulled back and we see that which has been hidden up till now. You will notice that it is the "*Revelation of Jesus Christ*."

It is all about Him. ... In the Revelation we can see His **Person, Plan, Purpose, Promise, Priorities, and Power.**

The message to Daniel in the Old Testament... during the time Babylon flourished was...

Daniel 12:4 (ESV)

But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end.

The prophecies of Daniel were sealed. ... But Praise God! - He has now pulled the veil back and declared the unfolding of His plan for the future. Compare what God told Daniel... with what He told John... It is the exact opposite!

Revelation 22:10 (ESV)

And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

It is not intended that this book be mysterious or confusing... to the servants of Christ... but illuminating and revealing. ... God wants His bondservants to understand what this book is about... and what we have to look forward to... and what is the destiny of unsaved men and women. ...It is an open book in which God reveals His plans and purposes to His church.

The revelation is to be shown to particular people. The word "servants" refers to believers. Referring to believers as "servants" gives us a lesson here on revelation and submission. Those who submit to Jesus Christ will receive and perceive revelation. ...The message of Revelation is for God's servants and not for the unsaved man. The unsaved cannot fully

understand this book because it is revealed to His servants... to show them His plan.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV)

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Eight times in the book we find the admonition... "*He that has an ear, let him hear*" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9). ... It takes the dedicated ear of a willing bondsman to Jesus Christ... to understand the truths set forth in this book.

Verse one (in the ESV) refers to "*the things which must soon take place...*" Perhaps a better translation would be "*the things which must shortly... or quickly... take place...*" The word that the ESV translates as "soon" is the Greek word *en tachei* which forms our English word "tachometer." (A tachometer is an instrument used to measure speed or velocity.) The Greek word "en tachei" indicates swiftness. The events in this book will come to pass swiftly when they begin to unfold. ... So this is a statement – not-so-much-about "when" the events will occur... but "how" they will occur. They will occur very speedily. ...It is a warning that the Divine judgment will come so fast... that the sinner will not have time to repent. ...Therefore... be ready always.

Rev 1:2-3

John intends the book of Revelation to produce a radical change in perspective. ... He intends persecuted believers to feel the reality that we

are blessed. ... In spite of the fact that we may be at odds with our reigning culture... and in spite of its hostility against us... we are blessed! ...

But this pronouncement of blessing means more than just that. God has promised a special blessing to those who read... who hear... and who keep its inspired truths. ... Now...if God promises a blessing to those who read, hear and keep its words, then can you imagine how cruel it would be... if it was not understandable...? ... It simply must be comprehensible. ... And it is a sad thing that many of God's people know little or nothing of the Revelation... and have such little motivation for trying. ... Revelation is the only book in the Bible that both opens and closes with a blessing.

Revelation 22:7 (ESV)

“And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

The word for “keep”... *“Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy...”* means to watch. After reading and listening to the Book of Revelation... the believer should have a longing for the return of the Messiah. And those believers who love and look for His return are promised a special crown – which we will discuss later on in the study of this book. But for now... please notice that... 1) there is promised special blessing... 2) it is attached to a study of the Book of Revelation... and 3) it is a conditional blessing. The condition is that we allow it to develop in us a longing for Christ’s return.

Rev 1:4

The author is the Apostle John... and his original audience was THE seven churches that are in Asia – **THE** seven churches! Now... the region that

was in John's day known as Asia had more than seven churches... but John used here... and will continue to use a definite article ("THE").

The church at Colossae... to whom Paul wrote the Book of Colossians... was located in Asia... but it is not one of THE seven churches that John writes to. Another one was Troy... which is where Paul spent some time during his missionary travels. These were significant churches. And by the time that Revelation was written... there were more than the seven churches that John addressed in this letter – specifically in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation.

Why does John only address 7 churches on the Asian province... mention them specifically in chapters 2 and 3... refer to them as "THE 7 churches"... and after he finished addressing each one specifically... he always wrote – "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches..." ... Now it is not "the seven churches"... but simply "the churches..."

I am convinced that John wrote to seven specific churches of Asia... who faced contemporary situations at the time he wrote this letter from the island of Patmos... But their contemporary situations also characterize seven definite periods of church history... from the time of Pentecost... to the time when the rapture will happen and the church is taken up. The things that were happening in those seven churches... perfectly correspond with what would be occurring in seven distinct historical eras of the church on earth. We will see... when we come to chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation... how the situations that John wrote about... match and parallel... in perfect sequence... seven distinct periods of church history. (And just wait until you see how perfectly the last situation... in the final

church... which represents the final church period before the rapture... matches the church age that we are in now...)

So chapters 2 and 3 are about the church on earth - through the ages. Revelation is intended for Christ's church on earth... until we are taken up... into glory at the rapture.

The number seven is important in this book because it signifies fullness and completeness. In Revelation, you will find seven seals (Rev. 5:1), seven trumpets (Rev. 8:6), seven vials (Rev. 16:1), seven stars (Rev. 1:16), and seven lampstands (Rev. 1:12, 20).

In this very same verse of Revelation 1... where we first see "the seven churches"... the number seven is used twice. At the end of this verse it is used again by the Holy Spirit being referred to as the SEVEN Spirits. Isaiah 11:2 also mentions seven spirits and... and Bible interpreters say it is a reference to the Holy Spirit. When Zachariah used a seven lamp candelabra in Zech 4:2,6... it is also seen as a reference to the Holy Spirit. Seven is symbolic for fullness and completeness in Revelation - **and** throughout the Old Testament.

So from Revelation 1:4... we learn that John wrote Revelation to the Church through the ages... offering grace and peace from God, the Father... Who is referred to as "*Him Who is and Who was and Who is to come*" ... and from the Holy Spirit... (the seven Spirits)... and in verse five... from Jesus Christ.

Rev 1:5

John comforts his persecuted readers with the truth that Jesus has triumphed over death (the firstborn of the dead) and that he is sovereign

over all earthly powers... even Caesar... since he is the ruler of kings on earth... and He has made us a kingdom of priests.

Rev 1:6

After God redeemed Israel from Egypt He also called them “a kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:6)... thus indicating that all of them were holy to him.

Look what Peter wrote in his letter...

1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

If you are saved - you are a Priest in God's eyes.

This points to two things Christians do. First, Christians serve and worship God. Second, we mediate the knowledge of God to others. We proclaim the saving good news.

Are you living like a priest, worshiping God and helping others know God? Does your life announce that glory belongs to Jesus? Are you telling others that Jesus is coming back...?

Rev 1:7

Jesus is coming. The coming of Christ will be in two stages. His first coming would be better called His appearing. He will appear in the clouds, in a moment in a twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:52); like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2). It will happen with such great rapidity that many will not know what has happened. Only the saved will honestly

understand and experience that miraculous event. This is the next event in prophecy to occur.

The clouds which attend His Coming are symbols of His glory and majesty... just as we have seen many times in the Old Testament... like when the clouds filled the Temple in Isaiah 6... and the cloud that led the Israelites through the desert.

Jesus is going to come and get His church, His bride, and every true believer, who knows the Lord Jesus Christ, will be taken from the earth. After this (the rapture), there will be a period of seven years of tribulation. At the close of that seven year period of time, Jesus will come back again.

Revelation 19:11-21 gives a picture of that occasion which will be discussed in that context. Revelation 1:7 pertains to the second stage of His Second Coming, because the verse says "**that every eye shall see him.**"

When He appears the first time this would not be a valid statement, as every eye will not see Him. But when He comes at the close of the tribulation every eye shall see Him... and every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess (Romans 14:11). At His Second Coming the Jews and all those who inhabit the earth will realize what they did to Him on the Cross and they will wail because of this knowledge.

- The first time the Lord arrived, He was veiled in the body of a little child. When He returns, He will be unveiled and seen as He really is, the Son of God.

- The first time He came, a star marked His arrival. The next time He comes, the Heavens will roll up like a scroll and the stars will fall out of the sky.
- The first time He came, gifts were brought to Him by wise men and shepherds. When He returns, He will bring gifts and rewards with Him for His servants.
- The first time He came, there was no room for Him in the inn. When He returns, the whole Earth will not be able to contain His glory and majesty.
- The first time He came, only a few attended His arrival. The next time the Lord comes, every eye shall see Him.
- The first time He came as a baby. Soon He will return as King of kings and Lord of lord.

Rev 1:8

The titles given to God in Revelation 1:8 make it clear that He is certainly able to work out His divine purposes in human history. *Alpha* and *Omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet... so... God is at the beginning of all things... and also at their end. ... He is the eternal God unlimited by time. We know that what the Lord has begun... He will finish!

He is also the *Almighty*, able to do anything. *Almighty* is a key name for God in Revelation. This name of God appears at least 48 times in the Old Testament. It is applied to Jesus here. This is a direct claim that Jesus is God. Don't let anyone tell you that the Bible never says Jesus is God.

It is the Hebrew word "**Shaddai**" meaning "The Sufficient One or the One who Satisfies."

“Shaddai” several scholars believe was derived from another Hebrew word – “Shad.” “Shad” refers to the breast of a nursing mother. The picture is that the Lord is our satisfier and that He is all we need. He is our encourager and giver of strength. What a comfort to any believer who faces persecution! He is the all-sufficient, powerful One. This is the relationship that every believer can have with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient to meet every need you and I have if we will let Him meet our need.

... ..

As I close this morning... I want to address every believer... who understands that God has made you a priest.

We all know what took place September 11, 2001. Nineteen terrorists. Four planes. Two towers of the World Trade Center. The Pentagon. An open field. Nearly three thousand people dead.

What if you had known about all that with absolute certainty on September 10, 2001? What if you had gotten information on the afternoon of September 10, 2001, about what was going to happen the next morning? What if your wife or your son or your mother or your brother-in-law was going to be on one of those planes? Would you not do absolutely everything in your power to use the information you had received to help people avoid the fiery destruction that was coming? What would your life look like if you made use of what God has revealed about what is to come?

Something is coming that is going to be infinitely worse than 9/11, eternally worse — the judgment of God.

As we begin, let's ask the Lord to use this book to fire us with the same urgency we would have if it were September 10, 2001, and we had just learned what was going to happen the next morning. You would not rest with that information. So may it be with this information.