

((PREACHING *the* WORD))

REVELATION

The SPIRIT SPEAKS
to the CHURCHES



JAMES M. HAMILTON JR.

R. Kent Hughes
Series Editor

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REVELATION

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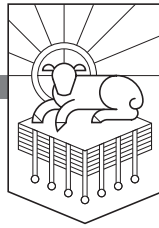
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Revelation

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For Jake, Jed, and Luke

May the High King on the white horse
capture your imagination
and lay claim to your allegiance

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins
by his blood.*

REVELATION 1:5b

*Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,
has conquered. . . . I saw a Lamb standing,
as though it had been slain.*

REVELATION 5:5b, 6b

*And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony,
for they loved not their lives even unto death.*

REVELATION 12:11

*Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready.*

REVELATION 19:7

*. . . and behold, a white horse!
The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True,
and in righteousness he judges and makes war.*

REVELATION 19:11

*They will see his face,
and his name will be on their foreheads.*

REVELATION 22:4

*“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me,
to repay everyone for what he has done.
I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last,
the beginning and the end.”*

REVELATION 22:12, 13

*The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.”
And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one
who is thirsty come; let the one who desires
take the water of life without price.*

REVELATION 22:17

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A Word to Those Who Preach the Word

There are times when I am preaching that I have especially sensed the pleasure of God. I usually become aware of it through the unnatural silence. The ever-present coughing ceases, and the pews stop creaking, bringing an almost physical quiet to the sanctuary—through which my words sail like arrows. I experience a heightened eloquence, so that the cadence and volume of my voice intensify the truth I am preaching.

There is nothing quite like it—the Holy Spirit filling one’s sails, the sense of his pleasure, and the awareness that something is happening among one’s hearers. This experience is, of course, not unique, for thousands of preachers have similar experiences, even greater ones.

What has happened when this takes place? How do we account for this sense of his smile? The answer for me has come from the ancient rhetorical categories of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*.

The first reason for his smile is the *logos*—in terms of preaching, God’s Word. This means that as we stand before God’s people to proclaim his Word, we have done our homework. We have exegeted the passage, mined the significance of its words in their context, and applied sound hermeneutical principles in interpreting the text so that we understand what its words meant to its hearers. And it means that we have labored long until we can express in a sentence what the theme of the text is—so that our outline springs from the text. Then our preparation will be such that as we preach, we will not be preaching our own thoughts about God’s Word, but God’s actual Word, his *logos*. This is fundamental to pleasing him in preaching.

The second element in knowing God’s smile in preaching is *ethos*—what you are as a person. There is a danger endemic to preaching, which is having your hands and heart cauterized by holy things. Phillips Brooks illustrated it by the analogy of a train conductor who comes to believe that he has been to the places he announces because of his long and loud heralding of them. And that is why Brooks insisted that preaching must be “the bringing of truth through personality.” Though we can never perfectly embody the truth we preach, we must be subject to it, long for it, and make it as much a part of our ethos as possible. As the Puritan William Ames said, “Next to the Scriptures,

nothing makes a sermon more to pierce, than when it comes out of the inward affection of the heart without any affectation.” When a preacher’s *ethos* backs up his *logos*, there will be the pleasure of God.

Last, there is *pathos*—personal passion and conviction. David Hume, the Scottish philosopher and skeptic, was once challenged as he was seen going to hear George Whitefield preach: “I thought you do not believe in the gospel.” Hume replied, “I don’t, but he does.” Just so! When a preacher believes what he preaches, there will be passion. And this belief and requisite passion will know the smile of God.

The pleasure of God is a matter of *logos* (the Word), *ethos* (what you are), and *pathos* (your passion). As you preach the Word may you experience his smile—the Holy Spirit in your sails!

R. Kent Hughes

Preface

Jesus is Lord—crucified, risen, ascended, reigning, and returning. All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable—including John’s Apocalypse. It was my privilege to preach the book of Revelation to the saints at Baptist Church of the Redeemer in Houston, Texas, from March 12 to August 14, 2005. I did not manuscript those sermons, and as the church plant was at that time in its infancy, the sermons were not recorded. At that time the congregation consisted of twenty to thirty people (including children!), and the church had no sound system. We were small, but the Word of God is big. I went through the book then in larger units of text than I have done so in the sermons in this volume. There is more than one way to preach through a book. The sermons in this book were preached at Kenwood Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, from April 5, 2009 to April 4, 2010. I chose smaller units of text for the sermons in this volume so that more detail could be included, but the book of Revelation has by no means been exhausted, nor can it ever be.

The sermons in this volume have a straightforward structure: Introduction, Body, Conclusion. In the *introduction* I seek to do five things: (1) Grab attention. (2) Raise awareness of a real need that people have, a need that is addressed by the teaching of the text. The goal is to make people feel that they need to listen closely. Ideally, the need we have will be connected somehow to the opening attention-grabber. (3) State the main point of the text. The main idea of the text is the main idea of the sermon. This main idea seeks to meet the need that has just been raised. (4) Preview the structure of the text that will be preached. The structure of the text will then become the structure of the sermon. (5) Give the wider context of the passage at hand. Depending on the details of the text, the discussion of the wider context will focus on either the book of Revelation or the whole canon of Scripture, and relevant information from the historical background might be introduced here as well.

The *body* of the sermon then proceeds through the structure of the text. There are as many points in the sermon as there are sections in the text being preached. In addition to expositing the meaning of each section of the passage, I seek (1) to connect the main ideas in this section to the main point of the passage, and (2) to apply the teaching of this section of text to the congregation. In thinking about how to apply texts, I have benefited from Mark Dever’s “Application Grid.”¹

The *conclusion* of the sermon seeks to restate the key ideas in the sections of the text, which should naturally lead to a restatement of the main idea of the passage. A sermon might also conclude with some poignant example or illustration that communicates the burden of the sermon.

Expository preaching happens when the main point of the text is the main point of the sermon and the structure of the text is the structure of the sermon. More gifted expositors may be able to exposit texts in a variety of ways. The rest of us are helped by “cookie-cutter” structures like the one I have just outlined.

I wish to thank Kent Hughes for inviting me to contribute this volume to the Preaching the Word series, along with Justin Taylor and the others at Crossway. Tom Schreiner discussed the details of the book of Revelation with me at many points, and my gratitude for his friendship goes beyond what I can put into words. Several of my PhD students were kind enough to work carefully through the manuscript, saving me from many errors and improving the project in many ways. Hearty thanks to Mitch Chase, Cameron Jungels, Nick Moore, and Dieudonne Tamfu. My parents heard many of these sermons, and my father’s encouragement and my mother’s love plant joy’s roots way down deep.

If marriage is about the relationship between Christ and the church (cf. Ephesians 5:21–33), the epic task of my life is to love my sweet wife as Christ has loved his bride. No undertaking could be more thrilling to me. In Marilynne Robinson’s *Gilead*, John Ames remarks, “In eternity this world will be Troy, I believe, and all that has passed here will be the epic of the universe, the ballad they sing in the streets.” The good gift of my wife makes our song sweeter than I can say. It is our nightly prayer that God would be pleased to extend his mercy to our sons, that their eyes would be opened to the glory and trustworthiness of the one who redeemed us from our sins by his blood (Revelation 1:5). I dedicate this book to Jake, Jed, and Luke, with the prayer that they will swear fealty to Jesus the great King, Lord of the world, the Conqueror coming on the white horse.

Praise God for the Bible! And thanks be to God for sending his angel to his servant John, to show his servants what must soon take place. What a blessing to study and proclaim this revelation of Jesus the Messiah, to love God and his people by expositing the riches of this portion of holy writ, and to say with John, the Spirit, and the Bride, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:17, 20). May ours be the blessing on those who read, hear, and keep the words of the prophecy of this book of Revelation (Revelation 1:3; 22:7).

Jim Hamilton, Easter 2010

1

The Revelation of the Glory of God's Justice and Mercy

REVELATION 1—22



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?

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

God has given information in the past that has helped people escape the coming conflagration, and there have been times when people have made powerful use of what God revealed about the future. Why couldn't something like that happen today? What would your life look like if you made use of what God has revealed about what is to come?

In Moses' day the Lord revealed himself to Israel, creating them as a nation, reshaping their lives around his word. We have the Bible. Why not today?

Samuel faithfully proclaimed the word of God for twenty years, and then revival came. We have the Bible. Why not today?

The Bible was rediscovered in Josiah's day. The priest Hilkiah found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord, and once again society was reshaped around the Word of God. We have the Bible. Why not today?

In Ezra's day he faithfully proclaimed the word of God for thirteen years. Nehemiah came on the scene, and the people turned their hearts to the word of the Lord proclaimed by Ezra. The society was reshaped around the word of God. We have the Bible. Why not today?

We could go on and on giving examples of times when things were awful, and then people got serious about God's revelation of himself, and so many lives were changed that society was transformed. It happened in Luther's day, in Whitefield's day, and in some places it is happening today. Why not here? Why not today?

What would it look like for this to happen today? What would it look like for God to become the dominant reality in your life, in my life? What would it look like for the things in the Bible to be more real to you than the things on television or the things on the Internet?

God has revealed himself to accomplish this very thing. God reveals himself so that we will know reality. In the book of Revelation, God unveils the world as it really is.

Need

We have been lulled to sleep by the ordinariness of our lives. Our senses have been dulled by the humdrum of one day after another. We need to see God as he is. We need to be convinced that Jesus is reigning as the risen King. We need to have him speak to the situation in our churches. We need to know that God is right now on his throne, in control in Heaven, worshiped by myriads upon myriads of the heavenly host. We need to see the way that God will pulverize wickedness, obliterate those who oppose him, and set up his kingdom. The book of Revelation has exactly what we need.

Main Point

The Lord gives us this “*revelation* of Jesus Christ” and of what will “soon take place” (1:1) so that we can know and enjoy him by living in light of reality and in light of the way history will be brought to its consummation. More specifically, God wants us to know the glory of his mercy and his justice, and that is what we see in Revelation: history culminates in climactic demonstrations of the glory of God in salvation through judgment.¹

To say it another way, God has given us the book of Revelation so we can know him in his glorious justice and mercy and live worshipfully by faith.

Structure

Broadly speaking, we can break the whole book of Revelation down into three parts:

Revelation 1:1–8	The Opening: the Apocalyptic Prophecy's Epistolary Opening
Revelation 1:9–22:9	The Vision: John's Vision on the Lord's Day
Revelation 22:10–21	The Closing: the Apocalyptic Prophecy's Epistolary Closing

We can also break the body of the book, John's Vision (1:9–22:9), down into three large sections:

1:9–3:22	Jesus and the Letters
4:1–16:21	The Throne and the Judgments
17:1–22:9	The Harlot, the King, and the Bride

Context

The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is appropriately placed at the end of the canon. This book catches up and weaves together all the Bible's lines of prophetic revelation. John writes in such a way that his book is the capstone of all the prophecy in the Bible.²

Table 1.1: The Structure of Revelation

1:1–8, Revelation, Blessing, and Epistolary Opening
1:9–22:9, John's Vision on the Lord's Day
1:9–3:22, The Risen Christ to the Seven Churches
4:1–16:21, The Throne and the Judgments
4:1–5:14, The Throne Room Vision
6:1–17, Six Seals
7:1–17, The Sealing of the Saints and Their Worship
8:1–5, The Seventh Seal
8:6–9:21, Six Trumpets
10:1–11:14, Prophetic Witness
11:15–19, The Seventh Trumpet
12:1–14:20, Conflict Between the Seed of the Woman and the Seed of the Serpent
15:1–16:21, Seven Bowls
17:1–22:9, The Fall of the Harlot, the Return of the King, and the Descent of the Bride
22:10–21, Revelation, Blessing, and Epistolary Closing

In this chapter we will overview the book of Revelation in order to prepare us for the immediate future, the distant future, and the eternal future. We want to get the weight and balance of the whole book.³ We want to understand the book's flow of thought, its structure, and the main points made in each section. This will help us rightly understand the smaller units of the book in context when we study them in coming chapters. So we'll look at the Opening (1:1–8), the Vision (1:9–22:9), and the Closing (22:10–21).

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.

Revelation 1:1–8: The Apocalyptic Prophecy's Epistolary Opening

One of the most important things to do when trying to understand any piece of writing is to understand the genre of what it is we are reading. We know what to expect from comic strips, blogs, novels, and nonfiction books. So it's important to understand the genre of Revelation to know what to expect.

The opening words of the book identify it, literally, as an "Apocalypse of Jesus Christ" (1:1). An *apocalypse* typically concerns itself with what will take place at the end of history, whereas *prophecy* usually deals with what will take place in the flow of history before it reaches its consummation.⁴ That the book of Revelation is an apocalypse, then, leads us to expect that it will "unveil"—which is the etymological meaning of the term "apocalypse"—what will take place at the end of history.⁵ This Bible book claims to "uncover" how history will be concluded.

John also pronounces a blessing in 1:3 on those who read, hear, and keep what is written in "this prophecy." So John not only describes his book as an apocalypse, he also tells us that it is a prophecy. Revelation, then, is an apocalyptic prophecy.

And there is more. Beginning in 1:4 John takes up the same format that we see in Paul's letters: the author identifies himself, identifies the recipients of the letter, and wishes them grace. The book also ends in a way that is similar to the way many New Testament letters end, with the words, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen" (22:21). The churches mentioned as the recipients of the book in 1:4 are further identified in 1:11, and then they are directly addressed in chapters 2, 3. These churches appear to be named in the order in which a letter carrier would have gone from one church to another, starting from Ephesus.⁶ What we have in Revelation, then, is "an apocalyptic prophecy in the form of a circular letter."⁷

This book is a circular letter addressed to Christians in churches. That means it is written to encourage Christians. The whole book was probably intended to be read aloud, in one sitting, in a worship gathering of the local church.⁸ In writing to seven churches, seven being a number of completion and wholeness, John writes to all the churches.⁹ Being an apocalyptic prophecy, this letter reveals the future to us; it pulls back the veil and lets us see the world as it truly is. The book of Revelation is meant to help us see reality. And the truth about this world is that it is a world in which the glory of God will be seen in his justice, which in turn will highlight the gracious and free character of his mercy. Knowing that it is God's purpose to display his glory in these ways is one of the blessings of reading and studying this book.

Revelation 1:9–22:9: John's Vision on the Lord's Day

John has tipped us off as to the structure of the book of Revelation by using the phrase "in the Spirit" near the beginning of the major sections of the body of the book (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10).¹⁰ Beginning in 1:9, John recounts the way that Jesus appeared to him in glory (1:9–20), dictated to him specific letters addressing the seven churches (2:1–3:22), and called him up into the heavenly throne room to see the worship of God there (4:1–5:14). In the throne room, John sees Jesus take a scroll from the Father, and from what happens when the scroll is opened, we know that the writing on the scroll describes the events that will bring history to its appointed consummation. Jesus opens the seals on the scroll (6:1–8:1); then seven angels blow seven trumpets (8:2–11:19).

John describes the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent in cosmic terms in chapters 12–14. Then the final seven bowls of God's wrath are poured out in chapters 15, 16.

In chapters 17–22 we have a harlot, the King, and his bride. Revelation 17:1–19:10 personifies the wicked world system as a prostitute named Babylon, and the outpouring of God's wrath results in her fall. King Jesus then comes and sets up his kingdom in 19:11–21:8. His coming is followed by the description of the people of God personified as the pure bride of the Lamb, the new Jerusalem, descending from Heaven for the marriage supper of the Lamb (21:9–22:9).

Let's look more closely at each of these sections to see the overarching point of each part of the body of Revelation.

Revelation 1:9–3:22: Jesus and the Letters

There is a striking contrast between the obvious glory and authority of the risen Christ in 1:9–20 and the beleaguered, persecuted, oppressed, sinful,

unimpressive, insignificant state of the churches addressed in chapters 2, 3. Five of the seven churches are rebuked for some specific sin and called to repentance. The two churches that are not rebuked are opposed by the “synagogue of Satan” (2:9; 3:9) and are told that they will suffer (2:10). Jesus promises to preserve them through suffering (3:10).

Most of us are probably not facing life-threatening persecution like the church in Smyrna was facing (2:10), but we are probably all aware of plenty of reasons to be discouraged about the state of the church. Like Ephesus and Laodicea, we either know that our love is not what it was at first (2:4), or we know those in the church who are lukewarm (3:16). We don’t have to look far, either, to find false teaching, idolatry, immorality, and spiritual death in churches (cf. 2:14, 20; 3:2). Until Jesus comes, as long as there are people in churches, there will be problems in churches.

We might be discouraged by the letters to the seven churches. They tell the truth about the sinful, challenged, seemingly weak state of the churches. On the other hand, the vision of the risen Christ in 1:9–20 shows that Jesus is standing among the churches, holding the angels of the churches in his right hand, attending to their well-being, and possessing all glory and power and authority. Then as Jesus addresses the churches, the opening of each letter proclaims some aspect of his glory. He shows his love for the churches by disciplining them (3:19), and then he promises breathtaking rewards to those who overcome.

When seemingly weak Christians who are unappreciated by the wider society maintain their faith and continue to proclaim the gospel in spite of every temptation and opposition, God shows his glory in his ability to preserve his people. These people also testify that Jesus is their treasure, which condemns the treasures of the world as worthless. And when the unimpressive, insignificant church is vindicated, the things that are impressive by worldly standards are condemned, and the wisdom and power of God are displayed.

As the churches are compelled by the glory of Christ (1:9–20) to obey what he calls them to (2:1–3:22), we see that in spite of the way things seem now, God is the central reality of life. He is going to save the righteous and judge the wicked. And the righteous are those who have been freed from their sins by the blood of Jesus (1:5).

If it seems to you that the church is unimpressive, may I suggest that this is the way God intended the church to seem. Jesus, too, was unimpressive by worldly standards. He has now been exalted, and the promises he makes to those who overcome guarantee that exaltation will follow humiliation. We see in 2:7 that the overcomers will eat of the tree of life; in 2:11 they will not be

hurt by the second death; in 2:17 they are promised hidden manna and a new name on a white stone; in 2:26 they are promised authority over the nations; in 3:5 they are promised white garments and Jesus' acknowledgment before the Father; in 3:12 they are promised the right to a place in God's temple with the name of God and Jesus written on them; in 3:21 they are promised the right to sit with Jesus on his throne.

Are you suffering? Are you persecuted? Do you feel that Christianity ruins your reputation? My friend, as a Christian you follow Jesus, who was humiliated before he was exalted. That sequence will be your sequence: first humiliation, then exaltation. God is going to make the wisdom of the world into foolishness and will reward those who trust him; which is to say, God will display his glory when he saves his people by condemning the wicked. Endure the cross, scorning its shame, empowered by the joy set before you in these promises of future exaltation.

Revelation 4:1–16:21: The Throne and the Judgments

Just as there is a stark contrast between the exalted Christ in chapter 1 and the lowly churches in chapters 2, 3, there is a similar contrast between the lukewarm, sinful churches in chapters 2, 3 and the throne room of Heaven in chapters 4, 5. This contrast is intended to jolt the churches out of lukewarmness into the same passionate worship of God that is happening even now in Heaven. The description of the radiant glory of God in chapter 4 is meant to put the spotlight on the beauty of holiness and the wretchedness of sin, and this is meant to purify the churches.

Flowing out of the heavenly worship scene are the judgments of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls. In 4:5 we read that "From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder," and then we find lightning and thunder after the seventh seal (8:5), after the seventh trumpet (11:19), and after the seventh bowl (16:18). This is one of the features in Revelation that connects the judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls with the throne: these judgments come from God himself. When we feel the magnetic force of temptation, we need to visualize the inescapable judgment of God described in chapters 6–16. We need to pray that God will use the revelation of his wrath to bulldoze the wickedness that is wooing us.

Interspersed through these chapters are also several sections that show God's ability to preserve his people. Between the opening of the sixth seal in 6:12–17 and the seventh seal in 8:1, chapter 7 describes the saints of God being sealed (7:1–8) and worshiping God in Heaven (7:9–17). Similarly, between the sixth trumpet in 9:13–21 and the seventh trumpet in 11:15–19,

10:1–11:14 presents the divine origin and protection of the church’s prophetic witness.

God’s protection of his people is also dramatically illustrated in chapters 12–14 where the cosmic conflict between Satan and the people of God is described. Satan presents a cheap imitation of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lamb of God in the form of a seven-headed beast with one head that was mortally wounded and then healed (13:1–3). Everyone worships the beast, the fake christ (13:3)—everyone, that is, except those whose names God wrote in the Lamb’s book of life before the foundation of the world (13:8). God protects his people from all Satan’s schemes.

Satan then counterfeits the Trinity (cf. 12:17; 13:1, 11; 16:13). He has faked the crucifixion, and now he produces a cheap imitation of the Holy Spirit (13:11–14). This beastly fake holy spirit then produces a cheap imitation of the sealing of God’s saints when he compels the world to receive the number of the beast (13:16–18). Satan is a fake. Don’t be taken in by his schemes. Don’t be tempted by his false offers. See him for what he is—for what Revelation reveals him to be: a perverse twister of the beauties of God.

As we proceed through chapters 6–16, the judgments get progressively worse. The seals affect one fourth of the world (6:8), the trumpets affect one third of the world (9:18), and the outpouring of the bowls will complete God’s wrath as no one escapes his judgment (16:1–21).

God’s justice is perfect. He is holy. All deserve to be consumed by it. But again and again in Revelation we see that God spares some, and we see them declaring in 7:10, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” In 5:9 we see that Jesus “ransomed people for God.” In 14:4 we read that they “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” and were “redeemed from mankind.” So we must ask: is it possible to join the ranks of those described in 7:3, who receive the seal of God on the forehead? Is it possible to become one who is redeemed, as 1:5 describes, one who is freed from sin by the blood of Jesus?

First, let’s look at what Revelation shows us *not* to do. We should not be like those who see the outpouring of God’s wrath and refuse to repent. After the sixth trumpet, we read in 9:20, “The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent.” After the fourth bowl is poured out, we see in 16:9, “They did not repent and give him glory.” After the fifth bowl is poured out, in 16:11, “They did not repent of their deeds.” And after the seventh bowl, in 16:21, “they cursed God.”

These who refused to repent failed to see the mercy God folded into his judgment. The outpouring of God’s wrath is meant to condemn everything else that you trust. God’s judgment is actually his kindness in disguise. He

uses it, while we live, to lead us to repentance and salvation. God judges us so that he can save us.

We see a universal proclamation of the gospel in 14:6, 7: “Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.’”

Revelation 1:3 promises a blessing to those who “hear, and keep what is written” in the book. Through this book you are intended to *hear* of the coming judgment, *believe* what it says, and *keep* the words of this book by repenting of sin and worshiping God. And God will be glorified in your salvation, which came through the judgment of all the false things you trusted.

Have you noticed how nothing seems to last in this world? Have you noticed how nothing works out exactly the way we hoped it would? Have you noticed how all your best intentions often come to nothing? Jesus is your only hope. If you don’t already trust him, turn to him now and place your faith in his ability to save you.

Revelation 17:1–22:9: The Harlot, the King, and the Bride

Chapters 17—22 tell us about the harlot, the King, and the bride. The section on the King is in the middle, and John marks off the boundaries of these three sections by using similar language at the beginning and end of the sections on the harlot and the bride.¹¹

So the wording of the beginning of the section on the harlot is matched by the wording of the beginning of the section on the bride.

Table 1.2: Matching Language Opening the Sections on the Harlot and the Bride

Revelation 17:1, 3	Revelation 21:9, 10
“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you . . . And he carried me away in the Spirit.”	“Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls . . . and spoke to me saying, ‘Come, I will show you . . . And he carried me away in the Spirit.”

Similarly, the wording of the ending of the section on the harlot is matched by the wording of the ending of the section on the bride.

The harlot is a symbol for the world system that is opposed to God. She is called Babylon because in the Bible Babylon is the capital of those who rebel against God. Chapters 17, 18 show her debased and exposed, and all her seductive power comes to nothing.

Table 1.3: Matching Language Ending the Sections on the Harlot and the Bride

Revelation 19:9, 10	Revelation 22:6, 8, 9
"... And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God.' Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.'"	"And he said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true.' ... I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.'"

Let me put that another way: the things that tempt us are exposed. They are nothing but the devil's attempt to make the bride of Christ into a harlot. We who believe are the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan wants to make us common whores. He wants to lure us into spiritual adultery with his cheap imitations of true pleasure. The book of Revelation shows us that these pleasures will not satisfy and do not last. They will be destroyed with the wicked world system ranged against God.

Then the King comes, conquers his enemies (19:11–21) and sets up his kingdom (20:1–21:8), and his glorious bride descends from Heaven (21:9–22:9). The bride is a symbol of the people of God, the redeemed, those who trust in Jesus. She is called the new Jerusalem because Jerusalem was the dwelling place of God in the Old Testament, the city where the Lord chose to put his name, and in the new covenant God's *people* are his dwelling place.¹²

We would do well to take to heart the splendor of the wedding of the Lord Jesus Christ and his pure bride. Jesus cleanses his bride with the water of the Word. He laid down his life for his bride (cf. Ephesians 5:22–33). Fix your heart on the glory of that wedding day. Point your whole life toward that glorious consummation, and let everything you do between now and then be informed by that moment when Jesus will come. Live for him now so that you will enjoy him then. Meditate on these texts until the blazing purity of the Lord Jesus is more desirable to you than the filthy pleasures that are nothing more than twisted parodies of his good gifts. And do everything you can to make sure that your day-to-day activities are done in a way that honors the King. God has given the book of Revelation to us so that we will live in light of the punishing and rewarding Jesus will do when he comes.

We want everyone we know to enjoy Jesus with us. We want everyone we know to escape the judgment of God. We want everyone we know to realize that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Something worse than 9/11 could happen to them at any moment. Is your heart hardened to what could happen to people you know? If it was September 10, 2001, and someone you knew worked at the World Trade Center or was

scheduled to be on one of those planes, you would communicate with them, wouldn't you? Any minute now something worse could happen to every unbelieving person you know.

Revelation 22:10–21: The Apocalyptic Prophecy's Epistolary Closing

The future has been unveiled. This book is "The revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1). And it is given to us because the angel speaking to John told him what we read in 22:10, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near."

Why could that not happen today? Why not thousands converted? Why not the Bible preached and the gospel cherished and the churches full to bursting? Why not so many people in so many gospel churches that the whole society is reshaped around God's Word? Why not today? God's arm is not too short to save.

Is your imagination too small? Is your love too little? Is your Bible reading too infrequent? Are your evangelistic efforts too seldom? Are your prayers too self-centered? God's arm is not too short to save!

Jesus your Savior and Lord? Why not today?

The power of sin broken in your life? Why not today?

Devoted to prayer and Bible study? Why not today?

Eager to tell others about God's work in salvation and their need to respond in faith? Why not today?

Hell is real, and it never ends. The Savior has been slain, and he rose from the dead. God warns you of judgment to come. Faith in Christ saves. Jesus is King.

Our task is to live in a way that matches what the unveiling, the book of Revelation, has shown us about the way things really are. Jesus is coming quickly, bringing his recompense (22:12).

"Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him" (1:7). Every knee will bow and every tongue confess him as Lord (Philippians 2:10, 11). Every action, word, and thought will be measured by the standard of God's glory. Every transgression or disobedience will receive just retribution (cf. Hebrews 2:2). You will either be among those praising God for saving you from his wrath through the judgment of Jesus on the cross, or you will be judged to display the eternal, almighty justice of God. Trust in Jesus. He is humanity's only hope. If you trust him, live for him. He asserts in 22:20 that he is coming soon.

May you know him in his saving and judging glory, in his awful wrath that highlights his tender mercy. May you abide in this Revelation, and may "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen" (22:21).

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