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Malvern Mashal 128 REVELATION 1:1-4

This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the events that must soon take place. He sent an angel to present this revelation to his servant John, who faithfully reported everything he saw. This is his report of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

God blesses the one who reads the words of this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to its message and obey what it says, for the time is near.

Alpha and Omega

The book of Revelation completes the Bible. To put that the other way round, the Bible would be incomplete without it. As surely Genesis gives us understanding of how things were at the very beginning, so the book of Revelation shows us where history is heading. Both books take us far beyond information we can acquire by our own knowledge.

The Bible opens in Genesis with things we could not possibly know by our own understanding. It closes likewise with a revelation from God, which leads up to the new heaven and the new earth which, as we have explored on the first CD of *Reawakenings*, itself leads on to a whole new era. The main message however, concerns what happens between the first and second coming of Christ: to show (as much by symbols as by literal descriptions) key events, and to prepare God's people

for both the tribulation and the glory that is to come.

If there is perhaps one word above all others that would describe the book of Revelation it is the need for patient endurance. If that doesn't sound the most dynamic or attractive of qualities, don't switch off . . . read on. It is the very word of God that is going to speak to us afresh! Other key words: Glory, Kingdom and tribulation!

The Lord gives eternal hope here for the future of churches that are facing enormous dangers, promising wonderful rewards for those who prove themselves overcomers over the spirit of the world. But there are also numerous warnings, that every church, and every individual in every age needs to heed.



Although we are only going to be studying the opening chapters, the central message of the Revelation is that the Lord Almighty reigns, even though those who follow the Lamb will experience immense conflict with the one who is described as the 'prince of this world.' It provides profound

insight into the nature of the battle and the tactics of the enemy, as well as the clearest details in the Bible of his final overthrow.

Are the things Revelation describes time-specific or cyclical?

Many of the events described have been repeated many times throughout the Church age, and will continue to do so until the Lord's return ushers in an entirely new age. The letters we will be looking at in chapters two and

three were likewise given in an historical context but intended to have practical applications in every generation.

Why is the book also known as the 'Apocalypse'?

The title refers to the unveiling or disclosing of spiritual truths that were not previously known: aspects about what is going on in Heaven, as well as references to specific events on Earth.

Authorship

Let's be very clear that encounters and revelations of this significance are very specifically *accorded* by God the Father. This one was given at a time when the Church was facing satanically inspired attacks from Rome *externally*, and considerable immorality, worldliness and false teaching *internally*.

Although much of the book takes the form of visions seen by John, what is so unique about it is that it is a revelation communicated not by any mortal man but by the Lord Jesus Christ, who had Himself received it from His Father. In Revelation 5 we see Jesus taking the scroll (or book) to show His servants what must soon take place. The sequence continues as Jesus sends an angel to present the vision to His faithful servant and friend.¹

John, who had spent many years ministering to the seven churches we will be hearing so much about, now found himself imprisoned on the Roman penal colony of Patmos. The churches, which had doubtless been grieving the loss of their leading light, would have been greatly encouraged to know that God had met with their friend and senior pastor. And what a miracle it is that the messages and visions He gave on that remote island should have survived the ravages of time for us to benefit from today!

For Reflection:

How faithful are we in recording the things the Lord shows us?

¹ The interpreting angel appears from time to time in the narrative, Eg Rev. 17:1,7; 19:9ff; 22:6ff)

How imaginative, persistent and determined are we to pass on what the Lord has shown us?

How is big is your God?

Well though he already knew the Lord Jesus, the vision of Him in glory in Heaven introduced John to entirely new dimensions of His rule and reign. This is a very different account from the priceless one we find in the Gospel of John in that it features on the Messiah King – who has made us, too, a kingdom of priests.

What the Lord revealed to John on Patmos had a powerful impact not only on him but also, as it was intended to, on his readers too. Jesus wants us to know Him as He Jesus really is, and to remain faithful in the face of extremely challenging circumstances.

For Reflection:



JB Phillips once wrote a book entitled *Your God is too Small*. Its very title is a challenge to consider Jesus as He is in glory and to embrace the bigger picture.

Take that question into your heart and see where the Lord leads you with it.

Symbols and Visions

The purpose for which the revelation was given to John was to inspire and inform true believers with what must take place between the first and second coming. Because much of the message was given in symbolic form – as for instance in the picture of a sword proceeding from the mouth of the Risen Lord – many have felt overwhelmed, either because they cannot make much sense of it (as though the code

was too difficult to crack), or because it speaks of such serious things that we prefer not to look at them too closely.

We will get most out of our study of the book if we look on it as something God uses to feed hearts that are hungry for Him, even if we do not understand every symbol. Most of the references in the letters in chapters two and three, however, are relatively easy to track down. Their historical and geographical significance cannot fail to increase our appreciation of all that God was, and is, saying through them.

There have been countless 'schemes' for understanding the book of Revelation. Suffice it for the moment to remember that the basic rule for interpreting Scripture is that an idea should be considered to be literal unless there is a clear reason why it should not be. One of the Greek words used in the opening verse in Chapter 1 is that the Lord intended to 'show' his servant what was soon to take place. The word 'show' means to 'signify' or to 'set forth in symbols'. May the Lord help us to interpret symbols! As Scotty Smith reminds us,

God is such an artist that He speaks on many different levels. There is poetry as well as narrative, prophecy as well as prose, parable, history, proverbs, song, didactic theology, onomatopoeia, assonance, simile, allegory, metaphor, alliteration, hyperbole and acrostics.

The better we know the whole of the Bible the more sense we will make of the Book of Revelation.

Of the 404 verses that constitute Revelation, 278 of them contain at least one allusion to an Old Testament passage. The picture of Christ in Revelation 1, for instance, matches that of Daniel's 'Ancient of Days'. We dare not miss this point. John's only code language is that of God's word. (Unveiled Hope. Scotty Smith and Michael Card. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997)

Rather than thinking that we need to be a very learned scholar to understand Revelation, we just need an open heart!

Something to consider:

Have you noticed examples of how God uses symbols and visions in your own life, rather than by speaking on a purely literal level?

He often prefers to point us to things rather than spelling them out directly. This is the power of the riddles we read about in Numbers 12 : the Hebrew word *chidah* literally means a 'knot' that needs to be undone. Ponder possible reasons why the Lord prefers to speak at this level rather than in more direct face to face ways.



Grace and Peace to you from the Alpha and Omega

As we make our way through these chapters, we'll be discovering interesting historical details, touching on the geography and prevailing spirits of the towns themselves, and hearing the Lord speak sharp and direct insights that will also speak to our own condition. We shall explore the spiritual cultural in which Christians found themselves some thirty or forty years after the churches had been founded, and in many cases find them remarkably germane to our own situations today.



Because some of the messages are indeed 'strong meat', it is vital to remember how the apocalypse opens: 'Grace and Peace to you from God.' As we continue our journey, let those precious words sink in deep.

What kind of a welcome do you expect to receive from the Alpha and Omega? He has nothing to say to the self-satisfied and the self-righteous – but what a welcome He gives to those who acknowledge their need for Him! Men praise and bless those with honour and renown; but Jesus blesses those who know that they are poor in spirit. It is the meek and merciful He raises to the highest point of Heaven, not the brash and self-sufficient. The Spirit of God Almighty lies behind the welcome Christ offers to those whom no one else would even think of welcoming. A look or a glance from Him is worthy anything, penetrating to the heart of the way things are, and revealing His heart.

Every glance becomes a lesson, and every word Jesus speaks to us has more wisdom than an entire set of books. And when He sees those who are habitually busy still and silent, He is well pleased, for now there is room for His grace to work and for His peace to be experienced. It is so much better to sit at Christ's

feet and receive His peace than to trust in ourselves. It is above all to the broken and contrite heart that Christ is able to give Himself – and to all who will listen and respond He says "*Grace and Peace.*" the vital foundation from which we can do our many and varied works for Him.

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