



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist

Church

Volume 9 Issue 7



July 2022

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

The Prologue of Christ's Revelation

Many people are fascinated with the future. They faithfully read their horoscopes, seek out tarot-card readers, have their palms read, or consult psychics. All such attempts to discern the future, however, are in vain. God is the only One who knows and declares the future (Isaiah 44:7; 45:21; 46:9–10). Only in Scripture can truth about the future be found. The Old and New Testament writings provide glimpses of the future. The book of Revelation provides the most detailed look into the future in all of Scripture, unveiling the future history of the world, with the return of Christ and His glorious kingdom.

John begins his Revelation in 1:1–8 with two major sections. **First**, he presents the specific characteristics of this unique book. **Second**, he provides a preview of the second coming of Christ.

THE PROCLAMATION OF REVELATION'S SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS (1:1–6)

Many people are confused by the book of Revelation, viewing it as a bizarre mystery. However, far from hiding the truth, the book of Revelation reveals it. It tells how everything ends. Just as the creation account was written in clear detail, God has given a detailed record of the ending. Verses 1–6 provide eleven specific characteristics that reveal the uniqueness of Revelation.

1. Its Essential Nature

The Revelation (1:1a)

The Greek word for “revelation” appears eighteen times in the New Testament. In Luke 2:32, Simeon praised God for the infant Jesus, describing Him as “a Light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.” Simeon exulted that the Messiah had been made visible to men. Paul spoke in Romans 8:19 of the transformation of believers in glory as “the revealing of the sons of God.” Both Paul (1 Corinthians 1:7) and Peter (1 Peter 1:7) used the word to refer to the revelation of Christ at His second coming.

Revelation shares several significant divine truths. It warns the church of the danger of sin and instructs it about the need for holiness. It reveals the strength Christ and that believers have to overcome Satan. It reveals the glory and majesty of God and depicts the reverent worship that constantly attends His throne. The book of Revelation reveals the end of human history, including the final political setup of the world, the career of Antichrist, and the final battle of Armageddon. It reveals the coming glory of Christ’s earthly reign during the millennial kingdom, the great white throne judgment, and depicts the eternal joy of the new heaven and the new earth. It reveals the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ over all human and demonic opposition.

Yet overarching all those features, Revelation communicates the majesty and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. It describes in detail the events associated with His second coming, revealing His glory that will blaze forth as unmistakably as lightning flashing in a dark sky (Matthew 24:27).



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2. Its Central Theme

of Jesus Christ (1:1b)

While all Scripture is revelation from God (2 Timothy 3:16), the book of Revelation is *of* Jesus Christ. While this book is certainly revelation *from* Christ (22:16), it is also the revelation about Him.

Even a cursory glance through the book of Revelation reveals that Jesus Christ is its main theme. He is “the faithful witness” (1:5); “the firstborn of the dead” (1:5); “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5); “the Alpha and the Omega” (1:8; 21:6); the one “who is and who was and who is to come” (1:8); and “the Almighty” (1:8). Eight references can be found in just the first chapter! (See additional references in 1:17, 18.) The book of Revelation reveals the majesty and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in song, poetry, symbolism, and prophecy. In it the heavens are opened and its readers see, as did Stephen (Acts 7:56), visions of the risen, glorified Son of God.

3. Its Divine Source

which God gave Him (1:1c)

The book of Revelation is the Father’s gift to the Son in a deep and marvelous sense. As a reward for His perfect, humble, faithful, holy service, the Father promised to exalt the Son:

Christ Jesus, ... humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5, 8–11)

Christ’s exaltation, promised in the last three verses of that passage, is described in detail throughout Revelation. The book of Revelation chronicles the Son’s inheritance from the Father, ending in the showing of the full glory of Christ.

4. Its Human Recipients

to show to His bond-servants (1:1d)

To further exalt and glorify His Son, the Father has graciously granted to a special group of people the privilege of understanding this book. John describes those people as Christ’s “bond-servants,” from a Greek word literally meaning “slave.” The bond-servant was a special type of slave, one who served out of love and devotion to his master (cf. Exodus 21:5–6). This is why unbelievers find the book of Revelation such a mystery. It was not intended for them. It was given by the Father to the Son to show to those who willingly serve Him. Those who refuse to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord cannot expect to understand this book. “A natural man,” explains Paul, “does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Corinthians 2:14). The unbelieving skeptic finds Revelation as nothing but confusion. Yet for willing bond-servants of Jesus Christ, this book unveils prophetic truth about the future of the world.



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5. Its Prophetic Character

the things which must soon take place; (1:1e)

Revelation's emphasis on future events sets it apart from all other New Testament books. The first four books of the New Testament are about the past, especially the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the next twenty-two are about the present, especially the life of the church. Revelation, though it contains some information about the past (Revelation 1) and the present (Revelation 2–3), focuses on the future.

A dual emphasis can be found in Revelation. **One** emphasis is the portrayal of Christ in His future glory with the blessedness of the saints. The **second** emphasis is the judgment of unbelievers to eternal punishment. The profound and compelling truths in the book of Revelation result in both sorrow and joy.

Believers are not to try to set the “times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (Acts 1:7). Instead, they are to follow the Lord’s warning to “be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:42). The knowledge that the events depicted in the book of Revelation are soon to take place should motivate Christians to live holy, obedient lives (2 Peter 3:14).

6. Its Supernatural Delivery

and He sent and communicated it by His angel (1:1f)

Revelation is unique in the New Testament because it is the only book sent and communicated by angels. As Jesus declared, “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches” (22:16). Angels were involved in the giving of the book of Revelation to John, just as they were in the giving of the Law to Moses (Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19; Hebrew 2:2). Not only were angels involved in transmitting the book of Revelation to John, but they also play a prominent role in the scenes it portrays. Angels appear in every chapter of Revelation except 4 and 13. The words “angel” or “angels” are used seventy-one times in the book of Revelation—more than in any other book in the Bible. In fact, one out of every four uses in Scripture of those words is in the book of Revelation. This book thus serves as an important source of information on the ministry of angels.

7. Its Human Author

to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. (1:1g–2)

The human agent to whom the angelic messengers communicated the book of Revelation is here identified as “His bond-servant John.” This was John the apostle, the son of Zebedee and brother of James. John wrote the book of Revelation while in exile on the island of Patmos (1:9).

The enormity of the visions John received on that barren island staggered him. Throughout his gospel, John never directly referred to himself. Yet here he bookends his vision with the statement, “I, John” (1:9; 22:8)—an exclamation that expressed his amazement that he was receiving such overwhelming visions.



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As he had loyally testified to the first coming of Christ (John 19:35; 21:24; 1 John 1:2; 4:14), so John faithfully proclaimed all that he saw concerning His second coming. The word of God expressed in the book of Revelation is the testimony about the coming glory of Christ given to His church and recorded by His faithful witness, John.

8. Its Promised Blessing

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; (1:3a)

The book of Revelation begins and ends with promises of blessing to those who read and obey it. In total, the book contains seven promises of blessing. (See “The Seven Beatitudes of Revelation.”)

Reading, hearing, and obeying the truths taught in the book of Revelation are to be a way of life for believers. Revelation is God’s final word to man, marking the completion of the canon of Scripture (22:18–19), and its scope encompasses the entire future of redemptive history (1:19). It is imperative that believers follow the truths it contains.

9. Its Compelling Urgency

for the time is near. (1:3b)

This phrase restates the truth taught in verse one. The Greek word for *time* here does not refer to time on a clock or calendar, but to seasons or eras. The next great era of God’s redemptive history is near. The imminent return of Christ has always been the church’s hope. Jesus commanded His followers to watch expectantly for His return (Luke 12:35–40). The apostles Paul, Peter, James, and John all wrote that the day of His return is near. (See, for example, Romans 13:12; 1 Peter 4:7; James 5:7–9; 1 John 2:18.)

THE SEVEN BEATITUDES OF REVELATION

- 1. “Blessed is he**
who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it. (1:3a)
- 2. “Blessed are the dead**
who die in the Lord from now on!” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.” (14:13)
- 3. “Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one**
who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.” (16:15)
- 4. “Blessed are those**
who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” (19:9)



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5. **Blessed and holy is the one**
who has a part in the first resurrection. (20:6)
6. **“Blessed is he**
who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.” (22:7)
7. **Blessed are those**
who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. (22:14)

Despite the skepticism of the scoffers, who demand, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:4), the Lord Jesus Christ will return. And His return is near.

10. Its Trinitarian Benediction

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. (1:4–5a)

Ancient letters named their writers at the beginning. John identifies himself as the author and names the seven churches in 1:11 as the recipients. “Grace to you and peace” was a standard greeting in New Testament letters, used here by John with an added Trinitarian conclusion.

The phrase “Him who is and who was and who is to come” identifies the first Person of the Trinity, God the Father, described here in humanlike terms. The eternal Father God is the source of all the blessings of salvation, all grace, and all peace.

“The seven Spirits before His throne” refers to the Holy Spirit. The number seven depicts Him in His fullness (5:6; Isaiah 11:2; Zechariah 4:1–10). Grace and peace also flow from “Jesus Christ.” It is only fitting that John mentions Christ last, and gives a fuller description of Him, since He is the theme of Revelation.

Jesus is labeled as a “faithful witness,” One who always speaks and represents the truth. **Next**, He is “the firstborn of the dead.” Of all who have ever been or ever will be resurrected, He is the premier one. **Third**, He is “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” He is Lord, who according to the Father’s plan and the Spirit’s work, grants believers His royal blessing of grace and peace.

11. Its Exalted Doxology

To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1:5b–6)



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The work of Christ on behalf of believers caused John to burst forth in inspired praise to Him. In the present, Christ loves believers with an unbreakable love (Romans 8:35–39). The greatest expression of that love came when He released us from our sins by His blood—a reference to the atonement provided by His sacrificial death on the cross on our behalf.

John concludes his doxology with the only proper response in light of the magnitude of the blessings Christ has given believers: “To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” This is to be the response of all who read Revelation with this future glory in mind. ~ ***Because the Time is Near - Dr. John MacArthur - An Explanation of the Book of Revelation - The Prologue of Christ's Revelation***

The Dobbs Decision - The State Being the State

R.C. Sproul offered a succinct and profound statement on the relationship of church and state when he said, “The church is not calling the state to be the church. The church is calling the state to be the state.” When the state, and specifically the Supreme Court of the United States, decided *Roe v. Wade*, the state abdicated its role as the state. The decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson* is a major leap back to the state’s rightful position.

That rightful position of the state can be found in the opening chapters of Genesis and also in what may very well be the most brilliant documents in the history of political philosophy—namely, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments to the Constitution, ratified in 1791). The Declaration of Independence’s opening sentence appeals to “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” That is the most stable, worthy, and certain foundation for all the particular laws that govern a body politic. The very next sentence enumerates particular “unalienable rights”—that is to say, rights that are absolute. They are not invented or created by human institutions. They exist. They are. Those rights govern men and are “endowed by their Creator.” Those rights are “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Liberty was the watchword of the modern revolutions, overthrowing the rule of the monarchies for the rule of law. But notice what comes first in the list of rights: life. The right to life is the fundamental and foundational human right. The founders of the United States may very well have invented a government with its three branches and bicameral legislature, but it did not invent the right to life. The Declaration merely declared what is already reality.

The right to life stems from one unalterable truth: All human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27; 2:7–8). That means one unalterable conclusion: Murder is a violation of nature (Genesis 4; Ex. 20:13). That all human beings are created in the image of God means that all of human life is to be preserved and protected, and every body politic has the main function of protecting life. Governments that protect life are good, honorable, and just. Governments that don’t protect life are not good, are dishonorable, and unjust.

This is why governmentally sanctioned abortion is so egregious. This is why abortion is the abdication of the state’s role. Abortion is especially egregious because of the victim, who is powerless and vulnerable. The Supreme Court suborned injustice in the *Roe* decision.



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The Dobbs Decision - The State Being the State

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One thing we know is that sin has consequences. The *Roe* decision had consequences not only for the tens of millions of lives aborted, but it also had consequences for the broader culture. R.C. Sproul, Francis Schaeffer, and others spoke of the culture of death. This is clearly illustrated in the work of Peter Singer, a longtime professor of ethics at Princeton University, who wrote,

I do not deny that if one accepts abortion on the grounds provided in chapter 6, the case for killing human beings, in other circumstances, is strong. Euthanasia is not something to be regarded with horror.

Singer refers to chapter six of his book, in which he argues that the unborn child (he exclusively uses the word fetus) is not a life, and Singer further argues that the entire notion of sanctity of life is wrong. Then he moves from the fetus to the infant: "*If we can put aside these emotionally moving but strictly irrelevant aspects of the killing of a baby we can see that the grounds for not killing persons do not apply to newborn infants.*" We need to follow Singer's train of thought. He denies the sanctity of human life. Then he justifies abortion as perfectly fine, even required in some cases. Then he justifies infanticide. Then he justifies euthanasia. This is "Exhibit A" of the culture of death, and this is the consequence of an unjust decision like *Roe*.

Dobbs is not a perfect decision. As many have observed, Dobbs returns the issue of abortion to the states. The political battle over the abortion pill has already started. That is sadly true. Some also have pointed out that some elements of the concurrences of the Supreme Court Justices of the majority opinion were weak (Justice Clarence Thomas being the notable exception). Dobbs is not the end of the legal battles, but merely the beginning of a new phase. All that to say, the fight for life and the end of legalized abortion is not over.

Nevertheless, there is much to celebrate here. The Dobbs decision is a giant step back to the culture of life declared in Genesis 1–2 and beautifully echoed in the founding documents of the United States. The decision of Dobbs holds, "*The Constitution does not confer a right to abortion.*" Those few words overturn decades of injustice and the murder of tens of millions of lives. Those few words uphold the Constitution, which is the singular task of the judicial system. The Dobbs decision is the state being the state—as ordained by God.

Genesis 1–2 does not present an exclusively Christian ethic. These two chapters present the foundational ethics that govern human beings and their interaction with one other. Genesis 1–2 is the basis of ethics and law. Genesis 1–2 is what lets the state know that the state is to uphold the sanctity of all human life. For decades, faithful Christians have advocated for the state to be the state on the issue of abortion and to reverse *Roe*. Dobbs is the state fulfilling its obligation as the state. ~ **Dr. Stephen J. Nichols - President of Reformation Bible College**



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If you have a July birthday or anniversary that is not posted here or is listed in error or you do not want to be published please e-mail Walt at gwlclf0415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner July 2022

Birthdays

Sadie H. (13) **Teresa H. (21)**
Elijah D. (16) **Emily L. (25)**
Jubilee H. (18)

Anniversaries

Dave and Jennifer A. (4)
Les and Jessica T. (17)

The Apologist's Task: Proof and Persuasion

Apologetics, however, does not just entail defense. It also involves offense, the positive task of constructing a case for Christianity that shows itself to be applicable to every culture, as well as being the only (and therefore the best) alternative to the world's philosophical and theological systems of thought. In other words, apologetics can be used to show that Christianity is true and that all non-Christian worldviews are false. Not all Christians agree on where to start this task. But we do all agree on this: non-Christian thinking, according to Scripture, is "folly" (Psalm 14:1; 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16; 3:18–23). ~ *Defending your Faith: An Introduction to Apologetic* ~ Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.



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The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.

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