

# (Revelation) 01 Introduction

by David Pawson

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*The book of Revelation is a unique and essential part of the Bible that describes the end of the world and the ultimate destiny of humanity.*

**Duration:** 1:14:08

**Scripture:** John 3:15-17, Revelation 14:12

**Topics:** "Eschatology", "Hope And Warning"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the book of Revelation and its message of hope and warning. The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the entire book as a whole, rather than picking out only the parts that are comforting. The speaker highlights that while there will be difficult times ahead, it is crucial to be prepared and know the truth. The sermon also mentions the ultimate destiny of believers, where the new heaven and earth are described as a beautiful and comforting vision.

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## Transcript

We're starting an exciting three days of looking into this book of Revelation. As far as this book is concerned, I find there are two kinds of Christians in the world. There are some Christians you can't get into the book of Revelation and there are other Christians you can't get out of it.

I think you know what I mean. Some people have a fear of this book and others have a fascination almost to the point of obsession with it. In fact, opinion about this has been very varied from the very beginning.

It was the last book admitted to the New Testament. There was so much argument about it, wondering whether it should be included. So it was the last to get in.

There have been many negative criticisms of this book even by Christian scholars. I just noted a few of them down. This book will either find you mad or leave you mad.

What a comment to make. Another scholar said, there are as many riddles in it as there are words. Another called it a farrago of baseless fantasy.

Well, unfortunately the Protestant Reformers shared this negative opinion and Protestant churches have suffered for the last four hundred years as a result from sheer ignorance of this book. Martin Luther said, it is neither apostolic nor prophetic. He said, everyone thinks of this book whatever his spirit suggests.

There are many nobler books than this. My spirit cannot acquiesce in this book. So Luther never preached on it, sadly.

John Calvin was the other great Reformer and he commented, wrote commentaries on every book in the New Testament except one, the book of Revelation, and he chose to ignore it. The third, less well-known, was Ulrich Zwingli and he simply said, it is not a book of the Bible so we can reject its testimonies. The technical explanation for all that, for those who are interested, was the influence of the Greek philosopher Aristotle through a man called Thomas Aquinas on all the Reformers.

Just another example of how Greek influence has been the biggest danger to Christianity for two thousand years. I'm writing a book called Degreasing the Church to try and expose what has been happening. The separation of sacred and secular is Greek.

The separation of physical and spiritual is Greek. It's not Hebrew, it's not Christian, and this has been the influence on the Protestant Reformers. But thank God there are many positive comments about this book.

One said, it's the only masterpiece of art in the whole New Testament. Another said, it's beautiful beyond description. Well human opinion, I've shown you, has varied enormously.

Some people love the book and others won't touch it. I want to look second at Satan's opinion of this book. I know what he thinks of this book from hard experience.

He hates it. There are two parts of the Bible that Satan hates more than any other, the first few pages and the last few pages. Because the first few pages explain how he got hold of the human race and made this world his kingdom, and he doesn't want you to know how he operates.

But as Paul says, we are not ignorant of his devices. We know how he gets hold of people just by studying what happened in the Garden of Eden. But he hates even more the last few pages of the Bible which describe how he is going to lose the kingdom of this earth, how his doom is written, his days are numbered.

And I can prove that. Thirty-five years ago or more I made my first Bible studies of the book of Revelation, and one of those was on Revelation 20 which describes how Satan will be thrown out of this world, locked up, sealed so that he can deceive the nations no longer. On that tape I spoke for seven minutes about Satan's doom.

As you've heard, my tapes go out in considerable numbers, but there is one tape every few weeks we get it sent back. It's number 596. It's the tape on Revelation 20.

And though it was sent out from Anchor Recordings who deal with my tapes in England and elsewhere, though it was sent out in perfect condition, by the time it reached the people who ordered it the seven minutes was damaged. That happened again just a few weeks ago. It's been happening for thirty-five years.

One family in a town called Brighton in England ordered that tape or the whole series, but they got to that tape and when they played it for that seven minutes while I was trying to describe Satan's downfall they could not hear what I was saying. There was a loud foreign voice shouting and they could just make out my voice in the background, but they couldn't make out what I was saying because of this superimposed other language on the tape. Sometimes it is wiped clean.

I was talking to some pastors and mentioned this about three months back. A pastor came to me afterwards. He said, that explains something.

He said, I had a man in my study who was demon-possessed and I was fighting to release him from the bondage and he suddenly saw two Bibles on my desk. He ran to them and he picked them up and he tore a page out of each Bible and threw it down. He said, after he'd gone and I went to look at the Bibles, I found he had torn out Revelation 20 in each case.

Just a fortnight later I was teaching the book of Revelation in Southend, another seaside town in Britain, and I got to Revelation 20 and I began to describe how Satan will one day be thrown out of the earth and can no longer deceive us. I noticed the man who was operating the tape recorder, as our brother is operating it over there, became agitated and was rushing about. Afterwards I went to him and I said, well why did you get agitated? He said, when you started speaking about Satan, the tape suddenly went backwards through the machine.

He said, it has never done that before. He said, it took me minutes to get it stopped and to get it going forwards again. So he said, I'm sorry but I've lost that bit you said about Satan.

Now I'm telling you this because we're dealing with serious things here. We're not just studying Revelation out of curiosity. Satan hates this book and he will hate it when we get to that chapter because his days are numbered.

What is God's opinion of the book of Revelation? Now there's an interesting question. This is the only book out of sixty-six books in your Bible to which he has attached sanctions. At the beginning in the first chapter he has attached a unique blessing to this book, which is attached to no other book.

And at the end of it there is a curse attached to this book and to no other. The blessing I read to you, blessed is he who reads this prophecy. And the word reads there means to read aloud.

May I urge you, if it's not difficult for you, when you do your private Bible reading, always read the Bible aloud. You will get far more out of it because you will have to put meaning into it, into your voice. It will make more sense to you.

Blessed is he who reads aloud this prophecy and takes it to heart. That means letting the message get very deep into your being so that it becomes part of your motivation, part of your living. What a blessing to attach, and God has attached it to no other book.

But the curse he has put at the end is a horrible one. It's a curse on anybody who tampers with this book, anybody who adds anything to it that it doesn't say, or anybody who takes something away from it that is there. Quite simply, a person who does that loses their salvation.

They have no place in the new city of Jerusalem. So here is a unique book in the Bible to which God has attached a blessing and a special curse. It must be a very important book to God to do such a thing.

Well now, let's turn to the book itself from the opinions about it, the book as a whole. I want you first to see its place in the Bible. Well you know its place, it's at the end.

But why is it there? What function does it fulfill coming right at the end of your Bible? Without this book, the whole story of the world and the story of the people of God would be incomplete. This rounds off both

stories and it ends the story in a wonderfully satisfactory way. I did tell you this last week when I said the Bible is a romance.

It's the story of a father looking for a bride for his son, and therefore like every good romance it finishes with the wedding, the marriage, and the bride and the groom live happily together ever after. But the Bible is not only a romance, it is a history. But it is different from every other history book for the simple reason that it starts earlier and it finishes later than any other history book could, because history is written from records by those who were present when it happened, and therefore historians cannot write about the beginning of our universe.

They were not there to record it or observe it, and yet the Bible begins at the very beginning of our universe. And no historian can write about the future of our world because that hasn't been observed or recorded yet. But the Bible ends with the end of our universe and the beginning of another one.

Only God was there at the beginning to observe and only God knows the end from the beginning, and that is why this is God's history book and therefore bigger than any other history book. I wonder if I could show you that in a little diagram, if I can lay my hands on it. I had to rush away before the meeting to change some of these overheads, but I'll get it.

We're here. I hope you can see these clearly at the back, but I'm going to explain it so you don't really need to see it clearly. Human history books are all written within that small oval circle there.

Human history is only part of the story. It can't be more than that for the simple reason that it can only cover the past up till now, and it can only cover what's happening here on earth. And all history books are written within that little circle.

They cannot tell us what is happening up in heaven and they cannot tell us what is happening in the future. So they describe the past up till now of what has happened on earth. But history is his story, not ours.

And with God's history you get the whole story. You get the story of what has happened in the past up till now and you get the story of what will happen in the future then. You get the story of what's happening down here on earth and you get the story of what's been happening up there in heaven.

And that is why the book of Revelation constantly switches from earth to heaven, because what happens up there affects down here. There are battles up there that are reflected in wars down here and directly relate to them. In chapter twelve of Revelation we'll see that Satan is thrown out of heaven forever, he will never have access again, and he comes to earth frustrated and furious.

And the result, the book of Revelation tells you, those big troubles at the end of the world are the result of Satan being thrown out of heaven. So heaven and earth are constantly interacting, but human historians are totally blind to that. But God tells us the story.

Furthermore, if you want to understand the past, you need to know where it's heading in the future. And when you see the end, you can see the point of the beginning and everything that happens in between. So the Bible is a book of history written by God.

Let's just imagine, for example, that the Bible didn't have the book of Revelation. Do you know what it would end with? A little book you've probably not studied carefully, the little book of Jude. And it's a

dreadful little book.

It's written by the brother of Jesus. His real name was Judas, but for obvious reasons he changed it to Jude. And Jude, the brother of Jesus, wrote to a second-generation church that was falling apart, a church that was being corrupted from the inside, a church cannot be destroyed from the outside.

No matter what persecution comes against a church, it will grow. The church is always destroyed from the inside. And Jude had to write a very different letter from the one he intended to a church that was breaking up from the inside.

They were being corrupted in their creed, what they believed, in their conduct, how they behaved, in their character, what they were like, and in their conversation and what they talked about. And these four corruptions were destroying the church from the inside. It's a typical story of a second-generation church and what can happen to those who didn't start the church with enthusiasm and zeal, who weren't able to pass on to the next generation that enthusiasm for the Lord? Now would you like the New Testament to end on a sad and sorry note like that? What hope is there if churches in the second generation from Christ were already breaking up from the inside? Thank God for the book of Revelation.

Without it, the Bible would be much the loser. Now when people read the book of Revelation, the first part of it is reasonably understandable. It consists of seven letters to seven churches.

Well of course, we're familiar with the concept of a New Testament section being a letter to a church. Paul was always writing letters to churches and we have them as part of Scripture. And there are seven letters to seven churches that form the first three chapters.

However, these are letters of Jesus. And I'm amazed that people pay far more attention to the letters of Paul or even John but don't make themselves familiar with the letters of Jesus himself. They're the only letters he wrote that we have.

They're short letters, but my, when you study them. I took a film crew out to western Turkey a couple of years back. We went in March and when we arrived, the weather was dreadful - wind, rain, cold.

And there we were with a film crew to film all the seven places in Asia to which Jesus wrote letters. But you know, after that initial shock, we had clear blue sky and sunshine for seven days while we filmed. And then the bad weather came back and I stayed on to minister in the Church of Christ in Smyrna.

And when we get to the letter to Smyrna, you'll be astonished how relevant it still is. That little church, every member has been in prison for Jesus. Men with guns and knives burst into their services which are held in an underground cellar.

But to minister to those saints was a sheer privilege. It's one of the few churches that Jesus had no criticism of, only support and sympathy. We'll see more of that tomorrow morning.

Well, those first few chapters are reasonably straightforward. And then as you read on you come into chapters four and five which describe an astonishing scene in heaven. And it's full of music and full of song and full of praise.

And chorus after chorus and hymn after hymn has been based on those two chapters because it's just praising God and we just join in with the praise of God. However many or few there may be at your service

of worship, always tell people there are thousands because we join with the angels and archangels when we worship. We're not alone.

So whenever anybody asks me how many were at the meeting I say, thousands and thousands, myriads of people. Don't forget that. And incidentally, angels study your hairdo.

You read 1 Corinthians 11. Well, there is this chapter, these two chapters of praising God in heaven which have inspired Christian worship. So we're happy with those chapters.

It's when we get to chapter six that we begin to feel a bit uncomfortable. And right through to chapter nineteen there are some pretty horrible things happening and we don't like it one bit. We understand some of it and some of it seems terribly puzzling.

Scarlet women riding dragons, beasts coming out of the sea, what's all that about? Though some of the things, bloodshed, epidemics, locust swarms, we understand. But people feel very uncomfortable in that middle bit. I want to show you that it's an essential part of the picture and vital for you to know.

Though probably from last three evenings you know already. Then finally we come out of the darkness and the sun shines again and the clouds roll away and we see the new heaven and the new earth like a bride adorned for her husband. And it's so often read at funerals and it's so lovely that we love that bit and we feel more at home at the end again and somehow it relieves our anxieties.

But it's all one book, one revelation of Jesus Christ and we need to see it as a whole. Don't pick out the bits you like and leave the rest. See it as whole.

Just as a diamond, to see its real beauty it should be put against a black velvet cloth. So the beauty of the Lord's ultimate destiny for us needs to be seen against the darkness of the destiny of this world if we're really going to appreciate its beauty. I quote another scholar who said, John must have been suffering from either indigestion at the best or insanity at the worst.

What a comment for a Bible scholar to make. He'd obviously missed the point altogether. Now I want to make two introductory remarks.

By the way, tonight is simply introduction. We're not going to get into the book tonight, but tomorrow morning first thing we'll get right into it. I tell you there are some exciting things right at the beginning, some of which you will never have heard.

So let's make two introductory statements now. Number one, this book was written for ordinary people. It is the scholars and professors who've messed it up.

Quite simply, intellectuals mess things up. In fact, I've discovered, I've lived and been teaching long enough and spoken in universities long enough to know that you can fool intellectuals much more quickly than ordinary people. By dressing it up in the right philosophical language, you can convince intellectuals almost of anything.

One of the verses I love in Scripture in the Gospels is, and the common people heard Jesus gladly. That is not only a tribute to Jesus, though it is a tribute to him because they said he speaks as someone who knows what he's talking about. He speaks with authority, not like our preachers who get it all out of books.

But it's a tribute to common people. You can't fool common people. Perhaps that's why we don't see too many of them in church.

You can't fool them, they'll vote with their feet. They will say the emperor has no clothes. To back this up, I quote two Bible scholars.

Here's one, it is one of the misfortunes of our expertise-oriented culture that when anything seems difficult it is sent off to the university to be figured out. I like that comment. That's Eugene Patterson in his book on Revelation.

And here's another written in 1884, we boldly affirm that the study of this book of Revelation would present absolutely no possibility of error if the inconceivable, often ridiculous, prejudice of theologians in all ages had not so trammled it and made it bristle with difficulties that most readers shrink from it in alarm. Apart from these preconceptions, the Revelation would be the most simple, most transparent book that prophet ever penned. That was a great saint in 1884.

Did you get the message? Don't read too many books about Revelation, you'll finish up in confusion. The scholars have got so many different schools of interpretation that you'll wonder if anybody could ever understand it. This book was written for seven little churches in which many of the members were slaves, and yet Jesus expected them to understand it.

Let me tell you a story. I can't guarantee that it's true. It may be a preacher's story.

Do you know what I mean by that? There was a preacher's little boy said to his daddy once, Daddy, was that story true or was you just preaching? And we know the feeling, don't we? There are apocryphal stories that are so useful to preachers that they get handed on and handed round and used in the pulpit. But this is the story I heard and it took place in America in a theological seminary, Freudian slip. There were students there who were having lectures on the apocalyptic literature in the Bible.

A professor was giving apocalyptic lectures and he took them through a bit of Daniel, a bit of Ezekiel, and of course the book of Revelation. The students finished up in despair. So as soon as the lecture was over they ran for the sports hall and had a game of basketball to get it all out of their system.

While they played, they noticed that the janitor, a black man, was sitting at the side of the court waiting to lock up when they'd finished, and they noticed that he was reading the Bible. So they went over to him after they'd finished the game and said, Good to see you reading the Bible. Sure love it.

What part are you reading? The book of Revelation. You don't understand that, do you? Of course I do. Well tell us, what's the message? He said, Simple, Jesus wins.

Now there is a bit more to the book of Revelation than that, but that simple man had got the message. This was written for ordinary people, not for scholars, not for professors. It was written for people who were about to suffer big trouble, and it was to help them.

I have smuggled Bibles into China and it's so exciting to find the believers in China, though they suffer, coming out victorious. And the book of Revelation is their favourite book. And maybe that's why we in the West make such a meal of it, because we're not suffering.

It was written as a manual for martyrdom. It was written to prepare people to be willing to die for Jesus. And since that is a situation we don't even contemplate in the comfort of our Western world, the book of Revelation becomes simply a kind of intellectual puzzle.

We love making schedules about the future so we can work out what time it is on God's clock. That's not why it was written. It was written for ordinary people.

There is, however, one qualification we must add. It was written for ordinary people in Asia in the first century, and so somehow we must get back into their mind, back into their thinking, and then come back into our century and apply it. But it's always best to start with them.

The second introductory remark I want to make is this. It was not only written for ordinary people, it was written for a practical purpose. I've already said its main purpose is not to satisfy our curiosity about the future so that we become a kind of people with secret knowledge, with inside information about the future, a kind of almanac, a detailed forecast about the end of history.

It was not primarily written for that. There are certainly many predictions in it, fifty-six altogether. In fact, over two-thirds of the verses in Revelation have a prediction in them.

That is a record in the New Testament. So it is a book about the future. However, the Lord only reveals the future to help us to get ready for it.

It has an extremely practical purpose and it is to fill people with hope so that they will be motivated to holiness. Those are the two purposes, hope and holiness. Holiness is always the result of having the right hope of the future.

Not so much telling us what is coming, but telling us how to be ready so that we can live in the present in the light of the future. There are plenty of people who live in the past, antique dealers, historians, archaeologists. They love to live in the past, spend their whole lives looking back into it.

Most people today prefer to live in the present for the now, keep up with the fashion, get the latest. It's called existentialism. But Christians are people who live for the future.

We live now to get ready for then. In fact, the whole nature of the kingdom of God is such that it is a future kingdom that has burst into the present. It has been inaugurated by Jesus, but it will not be consummated or universally established until he gets back.

But we're living for the future. We're motivated by the future. We're not living for the now and we're not living for the back then.

We're the people of tomorrow. Now the particular purpose of the book of Revelation is not directly stated at either the beginning or the end as some other books are. It's right in the middle.

And here is the verse which I've already quoted to you last week. But I quote it again. I believe it's the key that opens the whole book.

Before I give it to you, let me tell you that I believe the key that unlocks every book in the Bible is the answer to a very simple question. The question is, why was this book written? And there are sixty-six books in the Bible and sixty-six different answers. And until you find out why a book was written, you will not get the message of that book.

Every verse in the Bible is to be taken in context, and I don't just mean the paragraph or the chapter. I mean the book in which it is written. For the Bible is not a book, it's a library of many different kinds of book written for many different purposes.

The four Gospels were written for four different purposes. And until you know why Matthew wrote and why Mark and Luke and John wrote, you will not understand the message of those Gospels. They were writing for particular people in a particular purpose.

So what is the particular purpose of Revelation? Here is the verse. You'll find it in chapter fourteen. I don't usually give chapter and verse numbers because God didn't give us them, and you need to know your Bible without them.

Shall I prove that to you? How many of you could tell me what John 3.16 says? Put your hands up if you could. I won't challenge you, I won't ask you. Put your hands up if you could, right? How many can tell me what John 3.15 says? One, two.

John 3.17? One, two, a few more, maybe a dozen. Do you see what I'm telling you? You think you understand John 3.16 without John 3.15 and 17. You're taking a text out of context and making it a pretext.

Okay, let's forget that. Let's get back to Revelation. Why was Revelation written? Here's the verse right in the middle.

This calls for endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. And that's what the whole book is about. It's calling Christians to endure trouble, pain, suffering, to keep God's commandments whatever pressures are on, to disobey and to remain faithful to Jesus.

That's why it's written. Verse twelve if you really want to know. I'd rather you read the whole book to find it.

Incidentally, please will you read the book before tomorrow, at least the first few chapters, because you will get much more from my teaching. I'm not going to be reading any more of it to you, we don't have time. I shall be assuming that you're reading it at home privately.

You can read while you eat your meal, but try and keep ahead of me so that you've got it fresh in your mind as I try to open it up to you. The emphasis throughout is on suffering saints to the point of martyrdom. John himself is in prison in a place called Patmos.

It's a little island about eight miles long and four miles wide. It's a horrible place, or it was in his day. It was the kind of Robbins Island, or what's the island off San Francisco? Alcatraz.

That's what it was, and it was a quarry where the prisoners were in chains and were made to chip away at the granite to shape blocks that were used for building. It was a hard place. It was an island that was a prison for only one kind of criminal, those who were regarded as traitors to the Roman Empire.

It was for political prisoners. John the Apostle, would you believe it, the only apostle who was not assassinated. All the other eleven were killed violently, but John lived to old age and even Jesus himself hinted that that would happen.

One reason might just be that he'd given John his mother to look after, but there were other reasons too. John was a political prisoner. What crime had he committed against the Roman Empire? He says, I was in

prison for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

So he has a right to send this book to churches that are going to face suffering. He is already going through it himself. Now other Christians will soon do so and that's why I must give you a little history, forgive me for giving a history lesson.

Julius Caesar was the first Roman Emperor and he was such an admired hero that people treated him as an idol and even a god. They said, he must be God to do the things that he's done, to conquer as he's conquered. Julius Caesar was not offended by that, he was rather pleased.

He was followed by a man called Augustus who took it one stage further. He actually said, I am a god, and he ordered temples to be built all over the Roman Empire so that he could be worshipped as God. The first temple to Augustus was built in Asia, in the very place where these seven churches were.

Emperor worship became the major religion and that was carried further by each succeeding emperor until the end of the first century AD. Around the year 90, Domitian, a dreadful man, was now the Roman Emperor. He commanded that once a year every member of the Roman Empire had to stand before a bust of Caesar, a statue of Domitian, and they had to raise a hand and say three words, Caesar is Lord.

That's all, once a year. Then they had to take some incense and throw it on an altar fire and the smoke would ascend as a prayer to the Emperor, and you had to do that on pain of death. Domitian gave a unique name to the day on which everybody had to do that.

He called it the Lord's Day. John the Apostle says, I was in the Spirit in prison on the Lord's Day. Every Christian reading that thinks it means Sunday.

Sunday was never called the Lord's Day in the New Testament. They called Sunday the first day of the week, and it is a very unusual phrase. It's not two nouns put together as it is in your English version, Lord and Day, the Day of the Lord.

The word Lord is an adjective. It's the Lordy Day or the Lordly Day which is precisely the title Domitian gave, that annual worship of the Emperor Day. And that's why it's called the Lord's Day.

If it was simply a Sunday, John would have said, I was in the Spirit in prison on a Lord's Day. But he said, no, I was there on the Lord's Day. And here he is cut off from the circuit of seven churches that he ministered to in his old age.

He used to walk around a ring road and all those seven churches were on that ring road. And now he's in prison and he can't reach them and it's the Lord's Day. And he realises that this is going to be the greatest test of Christian loyalty so far in the history of the church.

People are going to be killed if they will not say those three words. There are some moving records of Christians who refuse to say them on the grounds that their creed, their simple three-word creed in the early church inspired by the Spirit was, Jesus is Lord. And they would not say that of anyone else.

One was a young mother and they arrested her and her baby and they put her in one cell and her baby in the cell next door and the baby was crying for her milk. And they said to the mother, as soon as you say, Caesar is Lord, you can feed your baby. And the baby cried and cried and gradually the cries became quieter and finally died away altogether.

And that mother refused to say three words in order to breastfeed her own baby. I wonder how many women in churches in America today would pass that test. They were so furious with her they took her out and they made a fire and they put an iron sheet on the fire till it was red-hot and then they fried her alive on the sheet of red-hot iron because she wouldn't say three words.

Already in one of the seven churches one of the members has been martyred. Jesus mentions that in the letter to that church. His name was Antipas.

That's rather a strange coincidence, how ironic, because it means against everybody. Antipas means against all. And against all pressure Antipas had already paid for his faith with his life.

So this is the background to the book of Revelation. And John's heart is with the seven little churches, realizing the enormous pressure that there's now going to be on those churches, the trouble that is coming to them. Are they ready for that? And as he no doubt was thinking of them and praying for them on this terrible day, he heard a voice behind him, write everything down that you see.

That's the beginning and that's how the book of Revelation came to be. The word martyr in Greek originally simply meant witness, someone who gave testimony in a law court. But it changed its meaning very early in the church's history because those who were faithful to give testimony paid for it with their lives.

And the word martyr changed from meaning simply someone who spoke a testimony to someone who was willing to die for their faith. And that's how we've used the Greek word martyr ever since. Big trouble ahead.

Now two things are calls from the Lord Jesus to his church. One, I've already mentioned, to endure, to see it through, to stick it, to remain faithful to Jesus whatever the cost or consequence. But he also called for another response to the trouble.

And again, I've mentioned it to you already last week. The word overcome is a key word throughout this book. Not just to endure under all this pressure, but to come out on top of it.

And in one of the letters, Jesus says, you are to overcome as I overcame. I got on top of trouble and you must too. This is what I'm calling you to do, to become an overcomer.

You see, we're called to follow Christ and Christ's way of suffering is the pathway to glory. It's not popular, but that's what he called us to. And for the joy that was set before him, he endured the shame of the cross, despised it because he was looking ahead, taking the long-term view.

And we are to do the same. The trouble is we want the glory now or by next Tuesday at the latest. That's not God's will for us.

We are called to share his sufferings in order that we share his glory. Paul says, anyone who lives a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. That's the cost of following Jesus here, but the reward later makes it all worthwhile.

Now the book of Revelation offers two incentives to endure and to overcome. There is a negative and a positive incentive throughout the book. Let's deal with the positive one first.

We'll be positive before we're negative. The positive incentive to remain faithful and to see it through and remain faithful even unto death. And the phrase, faithful unto death, is not faithful until death.

It's faithful to the point of dying for Jesus, unto death. What positive incentives are there? Well, Jesus offers reward after reward after reward. Some people say that the principle of reward is immoral.

We should be good for nothing. That's what they usually finish up being. Jesus was not above offering rewards.

He said, blessed are you when you're persecuted for my sakes in the gospel, for great is your reward. And holding the reward in your mind is an essential part of being faithful to Jesus. Here are some of the rewards that he offers the seven churches.

I will give you the right to eat the tree of life in the paradise of God, and that's a tree no one has eaten since the Garden of Eden. You will not be hurt by the second death. Alas, many people are more afraid of the first death than the second, but the second is far worse.

But the reward of those who overcome is they will not be hurt by the second death. He will give them hidden manna and a white stone with a new name written on it. He will give them authority over the nations to rule them with a rod of iron.

He will dress them in white. He will make them a pillar in the temple of his God, never to go out again, never to leave. And above all, he will give the right to sit with him on his throne.

Now go through the book of Revelation and these rewards are just there all the time, waiting ahead for those who are faithful and overcome. The negative incentives are the opposite, not just not getting the rewards, but the negative side is clear and I give you two verses only which make it clear. Here's one from one of the letters he writes to one of those churches.

He who overcomes, I will never blot out his name from the book of life. Now if language means anything at all, that clearly means that those who are not overcomers run the risk of having their name taken out of that book. And it would be better never to have been born and certainly never to have been born again than to have your name removed.

Literally, the word is not blotted out or rubbed out, it's scraped off because in those days they wrote in parchment on ink and they used literally a pen knife to scrape off what they had written and did it carefully so it didn't destroy the parchment. Jesus said, he who overcomes, I will never scrape off his name from my book of life. The book of life is mentioned all the way through the Bible.

It's the book of those whom God will save to the uttermost. But out of four mentions of the book of life in Exodus, in Psalms, in Philippians and in Revelation, three out of the four talk about names being scraped off, blotted out. This is serious.

The book of Revelation we could say is written to help you to keep your name in the Lamb's book of life. There is another verse right at the end, and I want you to remember that the whole book of Revelation is written to Christians. It is not written to outsiders.

I would never give this book to an unbeliever. It's difficult enough for believers to cope, but never give it to an unbeliever. It was written to Christians and there it is, and again I reminded you of it last week.

Right in the chapter where we see the new heaven and the new earth and the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven and the beauty and the breathtaking glory of it is followed by these words, He who overcomes will inherit all this. But the cowardly and the faithless and the immoral and the deceitful, their lot will be in the lake of fire. It is clearly meaning the cowardly believer.

The faithless believer. It doesn't say he who believes will inherit all this. He who overcomes will inherit all this.

See how the book of Revelation, by offering rewards and also reminding us of the consequences of denying Jesus? After all, Jesus himself said, if you deny me before people I will have to deny you before my Father. Paul also picks that up and says this is a worthy saying, a saying worth paying attention to. If we died with him we shall live with him.

If we endure we will also reign with him. But if we disown him he also will disown us. That's a straight statement, isn't it? Nobody has any difficulty understanding that, but it's a serious statement.

Of course it is. So the book was written to help believers keep their names in the book of life and endure and overcome and keep the commandments of God and remain faithful to Jesus. It's time now for us to look at the shape of the book, the outline of the book, so that we get an impression of the whole thing and can see it as a whole.

When you read the book it obviously divides into two parts, two categories. The first we can label as present and the second we can label as future. The first three chapters are about things as they are now in the present and things which must be put right now before the big trouble hits.

That's the main purpose of the seven letters, to churches that were not in a condition to come through suffering successfully. Churches that are compromised inside will not come through, they will fall. I have it on good authority that in my country, England, a private investigation agency has been hired to compile a dossier on every leading Christian in England so that they can be shot down when the time comes.

They've already done it with a bishop and exposed his homosexual activity in a public lavatory. They are compiling a dossier on every leading Christian so that they can shoot that Christian down with the facts of their lack of holiness. That's how we get ready for the big trouble, we live holy lives, untouchable by those who would criticize.

Well now that's the present. Chapters one to three, things must be put right. At the beginning of chapter four, John is called up to heaven.

He is invited, come up here and I will show you things that will happen hereafter. Now the book of Revelation departs from normal history and John is now shown heaven and what is happening up there, and he's shown the hereafter and he's shown what will happen in the future. And from there to the end of the book is all future.

But again, it divides very clearly into two parts, or three parts rather. The first scene is up in heaven and the rest is on earth, and then the last scene is a new heaven and a new earth. What he sees in heaven is this, things are all right up there.

Before we hear of all the troubles on the earth and all the tragedies that are going to break out down here, we're given a picture that God is in perfect peace and in total control. When you read the newspapers you

can so easily think that God has lost control of the situation. Where is he that such things could happen? But he is not surprised, he is not disturbed.

He sits on his throne and before him a great glassy sea without a ripple on it. There is a sense of amazing peace up there. And we need constantly when we read of disasters, when September the 11th happens and the Twin Towers fall, we need to say immediately, God is still on the throne.

Heaven has not been destroyed, God's throne has not been shaken. A little girl went home from Sunday school singing a chorus but she got a word wrong. She went home singing, God is still on the throne, God is still on the throne.

Well that is true and it's a good truth and you can be in touch anytime, anywhere, but you don't even need a mobile phone. But that's not the chorus she was taught, God is still on the throne. And this vision that John has of the peace and the worship and the control in heaven prepares him to face the troubles on earth that are coming.

And then his vision comes back to earth and what is going to happen down here, and it's a pretty grim picture. I summarise that section, things will get much worse before they get better. Not good news, but we need to know.

It's the truth and it's better that we know and prepare. Things will get much worse before they get better. Later we shall move on, things will get much better before, after they've got worse.

And what will make the difference? Things get much better from chapter 20 onwards. What's made the change? What has reversed history? And the answer is in chapter 19, we see Jesus riding out of heaven on the white horse, coming back to deal with evil on the earth. Well that's the outline of the book of Revelation.

Do you notice that it fits very well one of those philosophies of history that I told you about yesterday or the day before? Do some of you remember that? Well let me just remind you of it. There are five different philosophies of history clamouring for your attention in these days. One is very ancient, it's Greek again, and that is that history is going round in circles.

It is the cyclic view of history. Then there is the epic view that history doesn't go backwards, it goes forwards. It doesn't repeat itself in exact detail, but it's simply an up and downer.

Good times and bad times, war and peace, rise and fall of empires and civilisations, and we don't know whether it will end on an up or a down. Then there was the optimistic view of the twentieth century that said, Progress! The twentieth century will be the best century ever. And then came that sinking of the Titanic, World War I, World War II, the Cold War.

I went this morning to Truman's house in Independence and we studied the Cold War that he had to grapple with, but there have been many wars since then. Now most people at the end of the twentieth century have a pessimistic view of history. It's just simply going to get more and more difficult.

And when we took a vote, most of you believed the same. None of that is the Bible view. The Bible view is the apocalyptic view that after things have got much worse, they will get suddenly much better and stay that way.

That view is shared, as I told you, by the Jew, the Christian and the Communist. The Jew believes God will do that in some miraculous intervention. The Christian knows even more and says he will do it by sending Jesus back to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The Communist believes that man will do it by revolution and that has already been proved to be a false dream. But do you see that that outline of history is also the outline of the book of Revelation? The whole book follows that pattern. Things will get much worse before they get better, they will get suddenly better after they get worse, and in chapter 19 what makes the change is the rider on the white horse coming in triumph out of heaven.

I wonder if you'd like to see Patmos? I think you might. Let's have a look at it. That's a view from the air of Patmos and you can see in the middle of the view a kind of... it looks like a castle on the top of the hill.

It's not a castle at all, it's a monastery. But it had to be a fortified monastery because in the days in which it was built it was dangerous to be a monk. And they've built this fortified monastery on top of the quarry where the prisoners were kept in caves, where John was kept in chains.

That's why they built the monastery here. And on the top of this island, it's an even more spectacular view from down below from the shore because it stands up against the horizon. It's still there.

I haven't been myself. I've only flown over it but I saw it from the air, not unlike that. Well that's Patmos and that's just to help you to realise it was a real place, it all really happened.

This is not fairy tales, it's part of the truth. How are we doing for time? Pardon? You have time? We'll go on a little further then. All right, twenty minutes, at least.

You should never say that to me. Do you know what my wife says? She says, generally speaking, my husband is. I'll leave you to figure that one out.

Let's look now, finally tonight, at another question, not just why was this book written but how was it written? Once again, it's a unique book in the whole New Testament because no one decided to write it. Every other book was a conscious decision of the author to set something down on paper for the church. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Paul, Peter, they all decided to write a gospel or an epistle or the book of Acts.

It was a conscious human decision and therefore the books reflect the personality and the temperament and the outlook of the people who wrote them. But the inspiration comes in the fact that God was able to use their personalities and their temperament and their particular insights to be his clear, infallible revelation of himself to us. Inspiration was not using people as a word processor, it was using personalities with insights to reveal the whole truth about God.

Now the book of Revelation starts with a human writer in one sense and he calls himself simply John. No description, doesn't say John the Apostle or John whatever, just simply I, John. Partly of course because the seven churches knew perfectly well who the John was.

He had preached to all of them, they knew him intimately. When he got older he had many texts but only one sermon. They tell us that in his declining years when he was carried to church and invited to preach he always said the same thing, little children love one another.

That was his only message for his last few years, but they knew him. But people immediately have a problem, scholars have a problem. They say the Greek of the book of Revelation is totally different from the Greek of the Gospel of John and the three epistles of John, and it is very different.

And they say, what change could have come over a man to change so much in his style? It's not like his style at all. There are some similarities. For example, there are only two books that call Jesus the Word of God, the Gospel and the book of Revelation.

And there are some things in common, but the style is terribly different and the content is very different. And so scholars have got a theory that there was another John who wrote this called John the Elder, and in many commentaries you'll find that theory. I think they're wrong because they've not taken into account the circumstances in which this was written.

I want you to imagine that you went to see a film, say the Titanic. Any of you seen that? I guess most of you have. And I asked you to do one thing while you watch the film to write down everything you saw and heard.

That's all. Now what sort of writing do you think it would be? Some of you I see are taking notes and I'm sure that every sentence is complete and the grammar is perfect and the prose flows beautifully. Of course it doesn't.

John was going to receive a revelation and it was partly visual and partly verbal. He would receive it in his eyes and his ears and he was told, write it down, everything you see and hear from now on, write it down. And the poor man was scribbling away as fast as he could and not only that, but eleven times in the book of Revelation he's rebuked for not writing it down.

And an angel says, you're not writing. Well, would you if you saw things like that? Oh, all right, Scarlet Woman riding on a dragon. I mean, seeing things like that, it's no wonder.

It's almost in note form. There are incomplete sentences everywhere. Actually, our English translations have tidied it all up and made it read like good prose so that we can read it aloud in church.

But English translations are not true to the dreadful Greek. It's scrappy. But wouldn't it be if you were writing all that down? Hearing loud voices, seeing visions, and eleven times an angel says, you're not writing.

Write this because these words are trustworthy and true. Well, that leads to a very simple question. Then why didn't John, when he got the chance, knock his notes into shape and write it out again in nice, smooth prose? Well, the last thing he wrote was, anybody who tampers with what you've written, he wouldn't dare to touch it again.

I'm serious. This is how it was written. And the scholars have missed the point altogether.

Actually, John didn't write it in the sense of thinking it up, and yet I've read commentaries on it that said, this is the mind of John. It isn't the mind of John at all. It's the nearest actually to a book in the Bible being dictated to someone rather than expressed through their personality and thinking.

Who then is the author of Revelation? John was merely the shorthand typist who took it down without a typewriter. He was simply the amanuensis, to use the old Greek term, the secretary. Where did it come

from? And here is the most amazing way in which any book in the Bible came.

There's no other book came this way. It says, this is the revelation of Jesus which God gave him. So God is the author and he told it all to Jesus and Jesus passed it on to the Holy Spirit so that the letters were what the Spirit was saying to the churches, and the Spirit passed it on to angels and the angels passed it on to John.

What an amazing process. God gave this book to Jesus, Jesus gave it to the Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit gives it to angels, angels give it to John. And then to cap it all, John asks angels to take the letters to the seven churches because he has no other means of getting them there.

And he addresses the letters to the angel of the church at Ephesus or the angel of the church at Sardis. Did you know that there is an angel appointed to your church to report to God? You did? Good. I think some of you didn't.

Did you know that there are angels appointed to children who report to God if they are taught lies? Jesus said, it's better to have a millstone round your neck and be thrown into the sea than tell a lie to children. I tell you they're angels, behold the face of my Father in heaven. This book is full of angels, absolutely full of them.

As indeed the whole Bible is. They are the inhabitants of heaven, though we can't see them all around. They can appear to us.

You know a girl told me recently she'd been to a meeting in a church and had to walk alone home through the darkened streets of the big city and she was frightened. And justly so, because halfway home a young man jumped out of a dark archway or alleyway and proceeded to rip her clothes off her and was clearly intent on raping her. And she cried out in a most unusual way.

She cried out, hosts of the Lord. I think she must have recalled a verse in a psalm that says, the hosts of the Lord encamp around those who fear him. And another young man came out of the dark alleyway and hit the first young man and knocked him down and took her arm and said, I'll see you home safely Mary.

And he took her home to her door and she put the key in the door to unlock it and turned round to thank her benefactor and there was no one in the street. And she said, David, do you think that was an angel? I said, no, I don't think it was an angel. I'm sure it was.

And one day you'll meet him and thank him. We need to remember angels are all around. If one person in this meeting repented of a sin, they'd have a celebration up there.

They're watching. They're around us. They're God's messengers and they're everywhere through the book of Revelation.

But they were everywhere through Jesus' life. They were there at his conception, at his birth. They were there with him in the temptations in the wilderness.

They were there with him in the garden of Gethsemane. They were there at the resurrection. They were there at the ascension.

There's only one place the angels are absent from the life of Jesus and that's when he hung on the cross all alone. Well that's another story. So this is how it was written.

And because it is about the future, it's a very unusual book. The future is always difficult to imagine. My grandfather would have thought I was crazy to tell him that I could sit by my fireside and watch a cricket match in Australia.

He'd have thought I was going mental. Now we accept it. The future is so difficult to imagine and therefore it has to be presented to us in picture language.

And this book of Revelation is packed with pictures, with symbols. And many people dismiss it and say, that's why I can't understand it. It's so full of symbols and I find them difficult.

Actually, they're not difficult at all. Let me just mention four kinds of symbol that there are in the book of Revelation. First of all, there are the symbols that are obvious.

There's a dragon, a serpent running through this book. That's not hard to understand, is it? You know who that is. It's the old devil himself.

There's a lake of flames at the end of the book, a symbol, but it's not difficult to understand. It's obvious. It's hell.

Many of the symbols, the great white throne, many of these symbols are perfectly easy to understand. So don't let people put you off and say, oh it's a symbolic book so it's difficult to understand. The second group of symbols are those that are explained for us within the book.

So they're not difficult to understand. The seven lampstands and the seven stars in the first chapter, Jesus tells John. The seven lampstands of the seven churches and the seven stars of the angels appointed to look after the churches.

So what's difficult with a symbol? The third group of symbols are those that are paralleled somewhere else in the Bible and explained there, which means that you've got to know the rest of your Bible to understand the symbols. Do you know that there are over four hundred allusions to the Old Testament in the book of Revelation? There isn't a single quotation. They're all allusions to a symbol that is explained in the Old Testament.

So all you need to do is look up your Old Testament. Now these three categories cover almost every symbol in the book of Revelation, so I don't know why people make such a meal of the fact that it comes to us in pictures about the future. But there is a fourth group and these are puzzling.

In fact, I don't think with some of these we can explain them until actually we see them. One of them is the white stone that Jesus is going to give each of us. I went to one church and the preacher who liked to do dramatic things had put a white stone on every seat and asked us to pick up and hold it.

He said, one day Jesus will give you one. We sat there looking at this white stone. I'm afraid the reaction was, so what? Who wants a white stone? There are twenty-one separate explanations the scholars have given us.

You can take your pick. I'll guarantee that if I gave you twenty somebody would give me the twenty first on the way out. People have been telling me, I know what it is they'd read in a book.

I don't know what it is, but when I get one I'll tell you because then I'm quite sure I'll understand. But the symbols in Revelation in this category which we will one day understand and don't need to now are very,

very few. Well, I must rush on.

I think my twenty minutes is gone. I think the last thing I want to say is that Jesus in this book is a rather frightening figure. One of the reasons we need to study Revelation is to get a balanced view of Jesus.

If you only take your understanding of Jesus from the Gospels you'll finish up with a rather anemic figure, a gentle Jesus, meek and mild, an effeminate Christ. You see, the whole New Testament gives us different angles on Jesus all the way through. In the Gospels he is presented to us as the prophet who paid for his prophecies with his life.

In the epistles we are presented with Jesus as our priest in heaven. But in the Revelation we're presented with Jesus as the King and also as the Judge. When John turns around to see who it is speaking to him in such a loud voice, he sees a figure so frightening that he collapses, he swoons, he faints and falls as dead.

It is an awesome picture of Jesus. It's the same Jesus that he had known for sixty years and the Jesus he'd been the closest to. He always sat next to Jesus at mealtimes, indeed leaned against him for they didn't sit on chairs.

They reclined on the left arm and that put their feet next to the head of the next person, which is why they had to wash their feet before a meal. You understand now. And leaning against the breast of the next person, John would whisper secrets to Jesus and Jesus to John.

He was the beloved apostle and yet now when he sees his best friend, he's dead on the floor. This figure has snow-white hair and I've never seen a picture of Jesus like that, have you? I've seen many paintings of Jesus but nobody ever dared to paint him with long white hair and his eyes are blazing with anger. John had rarely seen Jesus like that.

He had seen him occasionally like that but not often. And then he has a long white robe with a golden sash across his breast and his feet are like burnished bronze straight out of the furnace. It is an awesome picture.

But do you realize the significance of it? Any Roman would tell you that that is the appearance of a senior Roman judge. The sash, everything says, judge. Because we need to remember that Jesus is judge of all evil as well as Saviour from all sin.

And so we get a much more mature and serious view of our Lord Jesus Christ when we study the book of Revelation. We become much more balanced in our understanding of Jesus, the man who was God. In fact, throughout the Bible, Jesus altogether has over three hundred names and titles.

Nobody in history has ever had as many, and many of them he gave himself. And I suggest to you that if you want to understand Jesus, make a list of his three hundred names and titles. You will probably get stuck about twenty-five if you've been reading the Bible for some years.

But search the scriptures and you'll find over three hundred, and every one of those names and titles tells you something more about the Lord Jesus Christ. Here are some in the book of Revelation that you'll find nowhere else. I am the first and the last, the Living One.

I was dead and behold I am alive forevermore, and I hold the keys of death and Hades. I am the Holy and True One. I am the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Ruler of God's creation, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Ram of God.

I never called Jesus the Lamb of God because in English anyway, a lamb is a little woolly thing a few weeks old. That's not the picture of Jesus in the Bible. The Passover lamb was one year old.

It had horns. A one-year-old male sheep is not a little cuddly thing. And Jesus had seven horns.

He is the Ram of God that takes away the sin of the world. You wouldn't like to be shut in a room with a male ram with seven horns, one year old. But so often Jesus is pictured as a little woolly thing.

What an insult. He's the Lion and the Ram, both strong male pictures. He is the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star.

Now that's a title I love. If you get up at dawn and the sky is clear and you watch the stars, there will be one last star quite low near the horizon which shines after all the others have gone. It's the bright morning star.

I love to tell people when all the pop stars and the film stars have gone, there'll be one star still shining and that's our Lord Jesus Christ. Well, we're going to read the book of Revelation not just to find out about the future, but to find out more about our Lord Jesus Christ who gave this book to us through the angels to John in prison. Amen.

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