

The Gospel *From* Patmos



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 1:1–8; John 14:1–3; Deut. 29:29; John 14:29; Rom. 1:7; Phil. 3:20; Dan. 7:13, 14.*

Memory Text: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (*Revelation 1:3, NKJV*).

The prophecies of Revelation were revealed in vision to the apostle John more than nineteen centuries ago during his exile on a small rocky island known as Patmos in the Aegean Sea (*Rev. 1:9*). Revelation 1:3 pronounces a blessing on those who read the book and hear and obey the teachings (*compare Luke 6:47, 48*). This verse refers to the congregation assembled in the church to hear the messages. However, they are blessed not only because they read or listen, but also because they obey the words of the book (*see Rev. 22:7*).

The prophecies of Revelation are an expression of God's care for His people. They point us to the shortness and fragility of this life, to salvation in Jesus and His work as our heavenly High Priest and King, and to our calling to spread the gospel.

Biblical prophecies are like a lamp shining in a dark place (*2 Pet. 1:19*). They are intended to provide guidance for our life today and hope for our future. We will need this prophetic guide until the coming of Christ and the establishment of God's everlasting kingdom.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 5.

The Title of the Book

Read Revelation 1:1, 2. What is the significance of the full title of the book? What does the title teach us in terms of whom the book is really about?

Revelation 1:1 states the title of the book as “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” The word “revelation” comes from the Greek word *apokalupsis* (apocalypse), which means “uncovering” or “unveiling.” The Apocalypse is an unveiling of Jesus Christ; it is both *from* Jesus and *about* Him. While it came from God through Jesus Christ (*see Rev. 22:16*), the book testifies that Jesus also is the focus of its contents. The Apocalypse is His self-revelation to His people and an expression of His care for them.

Jesus is the central figure of Revelation. The book begins with Him (*Rev. 1:5–8*) and concludes with Him (*Rev. 22:12–16*). “Let Daniel speak, let the Revelation speak, and tell what is truth. But whatever phase of the subject is presented, uplift Jesus as the center of all hope, ‘the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright and morning Star.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 118.

Also, the Jesus of the Apocalypse is the Jesus of the four Gospels. Revelation continues the description of Jesus and His work of salvation on behalf of His people as first depicted in the Gospels. The book of Revelation focuses on different aspects of His existence and ministry. Essentially, it begins where the Gospels end, with Jesus’ resurrection and ascension into heaven.

Together with the Epistle to the Hebrews, Revelation emphasizes Jesus’ heavenly ministry. It shows that, after His ascension, Jesus was inaugurated into His royal and priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Without Revelation or Hebrews, our knowledge of Christ’s high-priestly ministry in heaven in behalf of His people would be very limited. And yet, besides Hebrews, the book of Revelation provides us with a unique look into the ministry of Jesus Christ in our behalf.

Read John 14:1–3. How does the very broad promise here help us better understand what Jesus is doing for us in heaven right now? What hope can we draw from this wonderful promise?

The Purpose of the Book

Revelation 1:1 also tells us that the purpose of the book is to show future events, *starting from the time when the book itself was written*. Anyone familiar with Revelation will notice that the prediction of events—whether those already fulfilled (at least from our perspective today) or those events still future (again, from our perspective today)—occupies most of the book’s content.

The primary purpose of biblical prophecies is to assure us that no matter what the future brings, God is in control. Revelation does just that: it assures us that Jesus Christ is with His people throughout this world’s history and its alarming final events.

Consequently, Revelation’s prophecies have two practical purposes: to teach us how to live today and to prepare us for the future.

Read Deuteronomy 29:29. How does this text help us understand why some things are not revealed to us? According to this text, what is the *purpose* of the things that are revealed to us? That is, why are we told them? *See also Rev. 22:7.*

Revelation’s end-time prophecies are not revealed to satisfy our obsessive curiosity about the future. The book reveals only those aspects of the future important for us to know. They are disclosed to impress upon us the seriousness of what will happen so that we will realize our dependence on God and, in that dependence, obey Him.

For centuries, speculation—and even more sensationalism—has accompanied so much of the teaching regarding end-time events. Fortunes have been made by those who, predicting the immediate end, have scared people into giving money to their ministry because, well, the end was near. Each time, though, the end didn’t come, and people were left disillusioned and discouraged. As with all of the good things God has given us, prophecy can be misused, and misinterpreted, as well.

Read John 14:29. What crucially important principle for the purpose of prophecy can we find here in this verse?

The Symbolic Language of Revelation

Read Revelation 13:1, Daniel 7:1–3, and Ezekiel 1:1–14. What is the one thing that all these visions have in common?

Revelation 1:1 further states: “And He sent and *signified* it by His angel to His servant John” (*NKJV, emphasis added*). Here we find a very important word in the book. The word “signified” is a translation of the Greek word *semainō*, meaning “to show by symbolic signs.” This word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) in which Daniel explains to King Nebuchadnezzar that, by the statue made of gold, silver, bronze, and iron, God signifies to the king “ ‘what will take place in the future’ ” (*Dan. 2:45, NASB*). By employing the same word, John tells us that the scenes and events of Revelation were shown to him in vision in symbolic presentations. Guided by the Holy Spirit, John faithfully recorded these symbolic presentations as he had seen them in the visions (*Rev. 1:2*).

Thus, for the most part, the language used to describe Revelation’s prophecies must not be interpreted literally. As a rule, the reading of the Bible, in general, presupposes a literal understanding of the text (unless the text points to intended symbolism). But when we read Revelation—unless the text points to a literal meaning—we need to interpret it symbolically. While the scenes and events predicted are real, they usually were expressed in symbolic language.

Keeping in mind the largely symbolic character of Revelation will safeguard us against distorting the prophetic message. In trying to determine the meaning of the symbols used in the book, we must be careful not to impose on the text a meaning that comes out of human imagination or the current meanings of those symbols in our culture. Instead, we must go to the Bible and to the symbols found in its pages in order to understand the symbols in the book of Revelation.

In fact, in trying to unlock the meaning of the symbols in Revelation, we must remember that most of them were drawn from the Old Testament. By portraying the future in the language of the past, God wanted to impress upon our minds that His acts of salvation in the future will be very much like His acts of salvation in the past. What He did for His people in the past, He will do for them again in the future. In endeavoring to decode the symbols and images of Revelation, we must start by paying attention to the Old Testament.

The Godhead

Revelation begins with a greeting similar to the ones found in Paul's letters. The book was sent ostensibly as a letter to the seven churches in Asia Minor in John's day (*see Rev. 1:11*). However, Revelation was not written for them only, but for all generations of Christians throughout history.

Read Revelation 1:4, 5 and Romans 1:7. What common greeting is found in both texts, and from whom is the greeting given?

Both texts offer an epistolary greeting: "Grace and peace to you." This phrase consists of the Greek greeting *charis* ("grace") and the Hebrew greeting *shalom* ("peace," "well-being"). As we can see from these texts, the Givers of grace and peace are the three Persons of the Godhead.

God the Father is identified as the One "who is and who was and who is to come" (*see Rev. 1:8, Rev. 4:8, NKJV*). This designation refers to the divine name Yahweh, "I AM WHO I AM" (*Exod. 3:14, NKJV*), referring to God's eternal existence.

The Holy Spirit is referred to as "the seven Spirits" (*compare with Rev. 4:5 and Rev. 5:6*). In Scripture, seven is a number of fullness. "The seven Spirits" means the Holy Spirit is active in all seven churches. This image refers to the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit and His constant work among God's people through history, enabling them to fulfill their calling.

Jesus Christ is identified by three titles: "the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth" (*Rev. 1:5, NKJV*). They refer to His death on the cross, His resurrection, and His reign in heaven. Then John states what Jesus has done: He "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father" (*Rev. 1:5, 6, NKJV*).

In the original Greek, He "loved us" refers to Christ's ongoing love, which embraces the past, the present, and the future. The One who loves us has released us from our sins by His blood. In the Greek, the verb "released" refers to a completed act in the past: when Jesus died on the cross He provided a perfect atonement for our sins.

Ephesians 2:6 and Philippians 3:20 describe the redeemed as citizens of heaven who are raised up and made to sit with Jesus in heavenly places. What might these texts mean, and how do we presently enjoy this glorious status in Christ as "kings and priests" (*Rev. 1:6, NKJV*) while still in this sin-cursed world? How should this answer impact how we live?

The Keynote of Revelation

The conclusion of the prologue of Revelation points to the true focus of the whole book: the return of Jesus in power and glory. Christ's promise to come again is reiterated three times in the conclusion of the book (*Rev. 22:7, 12, 20*).

Read Revelation 1:7, 8. The wording of this text is derived from several prophetic texts: Daniel 7:13, 14; Zechariah 12:10; and Matthew 24:30. What do these texts tell us about the certainty of the Second Coming?

In Revelation, the second coming of Christ is the end point toward which history moves. The Second Coming will mark the conclusion of this world's history and the beginning of God's eternal kingdom, as well as freedom from all evil, anguish, pain, and death.

Like the rest of the New Testament, Revelation 1:7 points to the literal, visible, and personal coming of Christ in majesty and glory. Every human being alive on the earth at the time, as well as "those who pierced Him" (*NASB*), will witness His coming. These words point to a special resurrection of certain people right before the return of Christ, including those who crucified Him. While Jesus will, with His coming, bring deliverance to those people waiting for Him, He will bring judgment to those inhabitants living on the earth who have spurned His mercy and love.

The certainty of Christ's coming is affirmed with the words "Even so, Amen" (*Rev. 1:7*). The words "even so" are a translation of the Greek word *nai*; and *amen* is a Hebrew affirmative. Together, these two words express certainty. They also conclude the book in two similar affirmations (*see Rev. 22:20*).

"More than eighteen hundred years have passed since the Saviour gave the promise of his coming. Throughout the centuries his words have filled with courage the hearts of his faithful ones. The promise has not yet been fulfilled; the Life-giver's voice has not yet called the sleeping saints from their graves; but none the less sure is the word that has been spoken. In his own time God will fulfill his word. Shall any become weary now? Shall we lose our hold on faith when we are so near the eternal world? Shall any say, The city is a great way off?—No, no. A little longer, and we shall see the King in his beauty. A little longer, and he will wipe all tears from our eyes. A little longer, and he will present us 'faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Nov. 13, 1913.

A promise is only as strong as the integrity of the person giving it and his or her ability to fulfill it. How does the fact that the promise of the Second Coming has been given by God, who has kept all His promises in the past, provide you with assurance that Christ will return as He has promised?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Study of the Books of Daniel and the Revelation,” pp. 112–119, in *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*.

“This revelation was given for the guidance and comfort of the church throughout the Christian dispensation. . . . A revelation is something revealed. The Lord Himself revealed to His servant the mysteries contained in this book, and He designs that they shall be open to the study of all. Its truths are addressed to those living in the last days of this earth’s history, as well as to those living in the days of John. Some of the scenes depicted in this prophecy are in the past, some are now taking place; some bring to view the close of the great conflict between the powers of darkness and the Prince of heaven, and some reveal the triumphs and joys of the redeemed in the earth made new.

“Let none think, because they cannot explain the meaning of every symbol in the Revelation, that it is useless for them to search this book in an effort to know the meaning of the truth it contains. The One who revealed these mysteries to John will give to the diligent searcher for truth a foretaste of heavenly things. Those whose hearts are open to the reception of truth will be enabled to understand its teachings, and will be granted the blessing promised to those who ‘hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 583–585.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 If Revelation is the unveiling of Jesus Christ, why does the word *apocalypse* have a negative meaning today? What does this negativity tell us about the popular perception of Revelation among Christians? Why is the word *fear* often associated with Revelation’s prophecies?
- 2 Think about some of the failed predictions that certain people have made just in the past 20 years regarding end-time events and the second coming of Jesus. Regardless of the hearts or motives (which we can’t know anyway) of those individuals who make them, what are the negative results of these failed predictions? How do they make the ones who believed in those predictions feel? How do these failed predictions make Christians in general appear to those on the outside who see these failed predictions? As a people who believe in prophecy and who look for end-time events as waymarks, how do we strike the right balance in how we understand prophecy and how we teach it to others?

Power of a Testimony

By MIGUEL MANUEL MAFUGULA

I was born into a Sunday-keeping family in Milange, a town located just 2 miles (3 kilometers) from Mozambique's border with Malawi.

My introduction to the Seventh-day Adventist Church came through a girl named Adelina. She was 16 and in the seventh grade, and she asked me for help with her homework. I was 21 and in the 10th grade.

After I helped her, she started talking about the Adventist Church. She told me about the Sabbath and explained that God set aside Saturday, not Sunday, as the day of worship.

Later, Adelina presented me with a Bible. She had underlined the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:8 and Ezekiel 20:20, which says, “ ‘ ‘Hallow my Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you’ ’ ” (NKJV). On one page of the Bible, she wrote, “Go read Mark 2:27, 28.”

I turned to Mark and read Jesus' words, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”

When I read this, I realized that I had been observing the wrong day of the week.

I decided to go to church with Adelina to learn more, and soon I was worshipping on Saturday.

This decision caused problems at my Sunday church, where I had been serving as youth director. The church's pastor went to my father, and my father ordered me to return to my former church. When I refused, my father declared, “If you can't obey your parents, then you can't live with them.” He kicked me out of the house.

I told Adelina's parents what had happened, and they gave me a place to live until I finished high school. I was baptized two years later.

God helped me to graduate from high school and college and to get hired as a chemistry teacher at the public high school in Milange. Later I married Adelina, the girl who introduced me to the Sabbath.

God has been able to use my personal testimony in amazing ways. I've shared it with the young people from my former Sunday church, and two have become Adventists. I also told my parents, and they were baptized.

I tell everyone: trust in the Lord daily. Nothing is impossible for Him.



Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open the first Seventh-day Adventist elementary school in Miguel's hometown of Milange. Thank you for your mission offering.