***The Revelation of Jesus Christ

RV01-02***

We are looking at the opening verses of Revelation 1. We have found thus far that Revelation gives believers a clear picture of coming world events. That's what this book is all about. Of course, this information will be the clearest and the most important to the believers who will be living in the tribulation period when most of the things recorded in the Revelation will be fulfilled.

Bible prophecy is a light which is supposed to illuminate our understanding. This is a book of prophecy. Strangely enough, most of Christendom; most churches; most preachers; and, most Bible teachers treat this book as a source of great darkness. But 2 Peter 1:19 tells us what prophecy is all about, when Peter says, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy unto which you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arises in your hearts." So Peter says very clearly, "We have a word of prophecy, and it is a certain word. And the reason we have it is to give us illumination to help us to understand ourselves; to see what the world is all about; and, where human events are moving. Revelation is one of the outstanding illuminators that God has provided for us in the form of prophecy. So we expect to be enlightened from Revelation – not to be confused.

**Principles of Interpretation**

We have noted several methods for arriving at the meaning of the Revelation – the principles of interpretation.

**The Allegorical Method**

Briefly, we looked at, first of all, the allegorical method. This was the method that undermined the original literal interpretation of the early church from the apostles on down for the first two centuries. The allegorical method is a non-literal approach. What it looks for is the mystical meanings of the words that are written on the page rather than for the literal meaning. The allegorical school of interpretation, out of Alexandria in North Africa, said that the literal is just milk, but if you want the meat of the Word of God, you must go beneath the literal to the mystical meaning (the symbolic meaning) of those words.

For example, the allegorical school of interpretation came up with things like this. All of you are acquainted with the journey that God directed Abram to make from his native city Ur of the Chaldees to Heron. This is described by the allegorical method as not an historical event, but as an imaginary trip of a stoic philosopher who leaves central understanding and arrives at his senses. That's what Abram's trip from her Ur to Heron meant. You misunderstood it all this time. You thought he actually got on his horses; camels; and, donkeys, and collected his family and said, "Let's go," and they walked out across the sand along the Fertile Crescent. That's what you thought, wasn't it? The allegorical methods says that that's because you're listening to the word – the literal stuff. But the real meat was that this was a stoic philosopher learning what he should know and getting back to his senses. That's the allegorical interpretation.

How about those two pence that the Good Samaritan gave to the innkeeper? What did you think the two pence were? You thought it was money, didn't you? The allegorical says, "No, the two pence stood for water baptism and the Lord's supper." Isn't that clear to you now? Doesn't that enrich you? That's very meaningful, isn't it?

What about the River Euphrates in Mesopotamia? When the Bible talks about that, is it talking about that river in Mesopotamia? No, the allegorical method says that it's talking about the outflow of manners and practices of the times.

Pope Gregory the Great had a marvelous interpretation of Job, for this method was, of course, followed by the Roman Catholic Church as allegorizing. The three friends in the story of Job (and the record of Job) denote heretics. The seven sons are the twelve apostles. That's obvious, isn't it? The 7,000 sheep are the totality of God's faithful people, and the 3,000 thousand humpbacked camels are the depraved gentiles. Now what could be clearer? The allegorical method was very exciting. It came up with tremendous insights.

The amillennialists, in the same way today, however, follow this allegorical method because they see Israel as the church. When the Bible says "Israel," they say, "Oh, that doesn't mean those Jews. That means the church." When they read about the first resurrection, the amillennialist says, "Oh, that doesn't mean physical resurrection. That means the new birth." When they read about the Messianic Kingdom in Scripture, they say, "That's heaven – not an earthly kingdom." When they read about David's throne, as was told to Mary that her baby would rule on, they say, "That's God's throne in heaven. I don't know whether you've ever run across amillennialists who actually look you eyeball-to-eyeball and say these things you, but I have. That's the allegorical method that the amillennialists use.

However, the liberals follow the same pattern in the same way. They take the Genesis creation account, and they say it's a myth. They take the fall into sin of Adam and Eve, and say that was not an historical incident. That's just a poetical description – a symbolic expression of an attitude of a problem. They don't take any of this as literal history. The whole purpose of the allegorical method was this:

It started way back there about the third century when the church fathers were just enthralled with Greek philosophical thought. As they read the Greek philosophers, they saw tremendous beauty, and it was very beautiful. They saw concepts of thought that were just fantastic. They were very exciting to them. Consequently, they began a system of allegorizing in an attempt to bring what the Bible said together with what the Greek philosophers taught. They tried to bring the Bible, the revelation of God, under the beauty of the ideas of Greek philosophy. So Plato and Aristotle became the standards by which the Roman Catholic Church began viewing theology. They would cast theology in terms of Greek philosophical thought. Now, the only way you can do that is by ignoring the meaning of words. You have to have some system by which you could say, "Well, here's a philosophical idea from Aristotle or Plato. What he meant was this – that the Bible teaches." So they would combine them. You could not go with the actual words.

So the allegorical method was a terrible blow to early Christianity into the knowledge of the Word of God. It was not until centuries later, when we finally abandoned that allegorical technique, and came back to letting the Word of God speak for itself that we began to find the marvelous things that it revealed to us in the prophetic areas. That was the allegorical approach.

**The Preterist Approach**

The preterist approach was also a non-literal approach. We looked at that. It applies the whole book of the Revelation simply to the first century. So it's something that's already passed. There's nothing future about it. It portrays the conflicts of Christianity with Judaism and paganism. The historical approach is non-literal. It applied the book to the whole history of Christianity, from the time of Christ to the Second Coming. Of course, there are all kinds of viewpoints here. For example, who is the antichrist in your generation? It's this personality. In somebody else's generation, it's somebody else's personality. That's what the historical method is constantly doing. It is looking out around itself in history, and trying to attach these things in Revelation to those events.

Obviously, again, you cannot do this by taking the words literally. You have to simply take words and say, "Well, this represents this. This represents ... a certain attack, the coming of the Mohammedans into the Holy Land, and it represents this and that." It is never anything definitive.

**The Futuristic Approach**

The futuristic approach, which we hold, is a small little dot in the mass of Christendom who holds the futuristic approach. It takes the literal analysis of Scripture and applies the Revelation as future to the time of the rapture of the church. Now, how is this literal method of interpretation handled among various groups? We have these schools of thought concerning interpretation:

How does the liberal theologian look at this method of literal interpretation? Well, he depends on his reason to interpret prophecy. Therefore, he rejects anything supernatural because, by reason, there is no such thing as anything supernatural. Anything contrary to human reason must be rejected. Revelation is filled with things that are contrary to human reason. They are absolutely staggering to the human imagination. Therefore, the liberal simply rejects them because he cannot take them at their literal face value. Bible prophecy is really viewed by the liberal as mere speculation.

Or, when he has a book like Daniel, that obviously says there are going to be four world empires that progress one after another; then they are described; and then, sure enough, history has seen four world empires come on the scene from Babylon; Media-Persia; Greece; and, Rome, then the liberal cannot simply dismiss the literal words there. So he says, "Well, that was written after the Roman Empire came into power, and some man looked back and saw how these world empires came on the scene. He wrote the book of Daniel and then put Daniel's name on it. But history and scholarship has demonstrated that the book of Daniel was written in the time of Daniel. But this is the best that the liberal can do to dismiss the supernatural prophecies of Scripture.

Then there is the mystical theologian. He depends on an inner light to interpret them. The literal meaning of the words and rules of grammar are ignored. Their bible prophecy is interpreted according to how they feel about it at the moment.

Then we have various denominations. Denominations interpret the Bible in various ways. You may be part of a denomination that has a way of interpreting Revelation. It'll be either by the pronouncement of external authorities, such as the pope; a church council; the denominational founders; or, some system of theology that you begin with. Then everything must fit that preconceived system of theology. What they are doing is attributing to a spiritual leader (a religious leader, like the pope), the ability to be able to speak for God. What they're actually trying to do is to make the future fit what they have conceived that future to be. Of course, this method among denominations is the reason there is such a multiplicity of explanations as to what Revelation is saying.

**Literal Interpretation**

When we say we're going to interpret it literally, that might be misunderstood. So we need to stop and be sure you understand what we mean by literal interpretation. The literal method of interpreting prophecy is the only way that produces a consistent, meaningful analysis of this book. It's the only method by which the mind of God can be communicated through a written revelation. The only way God can talk to anybody is by talking to us in words which we can understand. Otherwise He cannot communicate to us.

The meaning of prophecy comes from the words and the grammar that the Holy Spirit used. It does not come from human imagination and speculation. Every thought we think is thought in words. Therefore, God must speak to us in words, and those words must fit together according to certain grammatical structures so that we know what He is saying. If we don't know how words fit together, then we cannot understand what He is saying.

Literal interpretation takes into account, of course, the historical and cultural background of the time in which the prophecy was written. That's called isagogics. You're acquainted with that word. It means the background and the conditions. Well, obviously, John, as he recorded this book and as God spoke to him in terms of what John could understand, used certain terms. He used language in the way that it was understood in that day. He used references to certain things that were understood in that day. So we have to go back to that time, and see what the condition was to understand what the meaning of some of these things are. So we take into account the background of the time. When we say "literal," we mean "literal" in terms of how they understood and what the conditions were under which these things were written.

**Figurative Language**

So the book of the Revelation does not mean many things in each verse. The Holy Spirit has one intended meaning, and only the literal method can determine this. The literal method assumes that prophecy is a revelation that's to be understood, and not a riddle that we are to guess at and never be sure of. However, having said that, we must also observe that the Bible sometimes does use figurative language to convey actual literal concepts.

For example, Jesus Christ, in John 8:12 is called a light – the light of the world. He is not literally a lamp with a flame burning, is He? But he is called a light. He is a lamp. It's a figure of speech. Jesus Christ is called the Bread of Life in John 6:35, though He's not a loaf of bread which has been baked in the oven. Jesus Christ is called the Lamb of God, though he is not an animal (John 1:29). These are all figures of speech. Jesus Christ is called "the door into the sheepfold," though he's not literally a slab of wood on hinges (John 10:7). Psalms 72:6 gives an interesting description of the Messiah in figurative language, but describing a literal actual coming of that Messiah. Well, this psalm uses figures to try to convey these ideas, but it is talking very clearly about an actual coming. These symbols all convey literal concepts, but when you use a symbol, it's conveyed in a more graphic way.

One excellent example of this conveying of an idea symbolically where the idea still has an actual literal meaning is demonstrated to us in Acts 21 when the apostle Paul was determined to make a trip to Jerusalem. He was being warned by the Christians at Tyre that he should not go. Acts 21:4 says, "And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days, who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem." You know what happened to Paul. He did go to Jerusalem. He fell into a legalistic expression, and it cost him four years out of his life in the imprisonment in Rome, and almost cost him his life. Well, these believers at Tyre were saying, "Paul, God the Holy Spirit has spoken to us (as He used to speak directly to people then). We have a message for you. The Spirit of God says, 'Don't go to Jerusalem.'" Paul went anyhow. Then God gave Paul a message in graphic form. This was the kind of form that we have in the book of the Revelation, in symbolic form.

He sent the prophet Agabus, and in Acts 21:11, we read, "And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's belt (that is, Agabus the prophet), and he bound his own hands and feet and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, so shall the Jews of Jerusalem bind a man that owns this belt, and shall deliver him into the hands of the gentiles.'" Agabus, in verse 11, was conveying the identical message which was conveyed literally in words to Paul in verse 4 by taking Paul's belt and Agabus tied his hands and feet and said, "I am demonstrating to you in a pictorial way what the Holy Spirit says is going to happen to the man that owns this belt – you, Paul, if you persist in going to Jerusalem." And, of course, that's exactly what happened. So there you see how the Bible uses symbolic figurative words and actions to convey really literal ideas. All symbols in Revelation convey an actual real situation.

Now, what is not clearly a figure of speech, however, must always be treated as literal – not as a symbol. If it's clearly not a symbol, you cannot assume it is. So when Psalm 122 says, "Pray for Jerusalem," that does not mean "pray for the church." But the non-literalist comes along and says, "That's what that means. That means pray for the church." No, it means just what it says, "Pray for Jerusalem."

Turn to Revelation 20:1-3 for just a minute. Here is an area that is greatly challenged by the non-literalist. They reject these first three as being in any way possibly literal. John says, "And I saw an angel come down from heaven." What did he see? What do you think he meant when he said, "I saw an angel come down from heaven having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his hand, and he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, who is the devil and Satan?" Now there you see a symbol – that dragon, the old serpent. Then it tells you what that means: the devil and Satan. "And bound him 1,000 years." What do you think 1,000 years means? "And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him that he should deceive the nations no more till the 1,000 years should be fulfilled. After that, he must be loose a little season."

As you read those verses, what do you think they mean? Well, there's only one way that we can honestly treat that passage. We have to actually say that an elect angel is going to be dispatched by the Son of God to come down from heaven at a certain point in time. This is following the tribulation. And he will have a key in his hand of some kind – a metal key made out of brass; out of aluminum; out of iron; or, out of what? Well, maybe it's just a spirit key. It doesn't say what it's made out of. The point is that it will unlock something. It will unlock the pit of the abyss – the bottomless pit. "And he'll have a great chain in his hand." The non-literalists say, "Isn't that ridiculous? Can you imagine an angel walking around with an iron chain in his hand?" Well, it might be a spirit chain. It just says "a chain." It's going to be something that can bind Satan. It is going to be something that can be put on him that can restrain him.

"He'll lay hold on the dragon." Well, it tells us who that is. "And he's going to be bound." What do you think bound means, for 1,000 years? "He's going to be bound for 1,000 years." I had a preacher tell me, "That means that Jesus Christ died on the cross, and He conquered Satan on the cross." Well, did he conquer Satan on a cross? Indeed he did. He broke his power and control over humanity. Do you think that that's what that Scripture means – that Satan was bound on the cross?

So I said, "Well, what does 1,000 years mean? Does it mean salvation only for 1,000 years?" He said, "Oh, no, that's just a long period of time. It doesn't mean 1,000 years. "And he cast him into the bottomless pit." What do you think that means? I think it means that the angel unlocks the door; throws the devil (bound up in a chain) in there; slams the door on him; locks it; and, sets a seal on it so nobody can open it. I think it means that Satan can't deceive the nations. I think that means that all during this 1,000 years in the millennium, the devil will not be able to deceive nations like he does today. I think it means that at the end of that time, God is going to test all those children born, during the 1,000 years of the millennium, who have, in their hearts, never really given their allegiance and loyalty to Jesus Christ. He's going to unlock that door. And he's going to let the devil come out, and let them be deceived. They will then expose their true colors, and they will be executed and sent to the lake of fire. There is no reason not to take those verses in a literal way.

So while the Bible does use symbols and while the Bible is figurative, there are times when it is not in the book of the Revelation. And unless it clearly is, we must not assume that it is. Language is the normal vehicle to communicate ideas; and God uses language in a normal sense; and, God always communicates intelligibly. We can understand it.

**Spiritual Meaning**

One of the things that some of your friends may say about the literal interpretation of Revelation, or any part of the Bible, is that you destroy the spiritual meaning: "If you insist on being a literal interpreter, you destroy the spiritual meaning." I want you to understand that when we say the opponents of literal interpretation, we're not talking about some kooks. We're not talking about cultists. We're talking about the finest kind of preachers and teachers: men who are leaders in their denomination; men who are well educated; men who are well-versed in the Word of God; and, men who, as a matter of fact, generally completely recoil from the idea of a figurative allegorical interpretation of the books of the Bible until they come to prophecy.

Only in prophecy do they want to apply the non-literal approach. It is the most intelligent kind of men; men that you would have a great respect for; and, men that you would learn a great deal of the Bible from. Why they go so far off on this can only be explained with each person individually – like what his reason is for this completely illogical change of pace when it comes to prophecy. Very frequently it's simply because they have a denominational theological system that does not permit these literal things in Revelation to come to pass, so they must dismiss them.

One of the reasons that they will give you for dismissing a literal interpretation is that that destroys the spiritual. For example, turn to 2 Corinthians 3:6: "Who also has made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." And they'll say, "Now you see, that's the point we're trying to make the letter – the literal letter – that kills. But if you want the real spiritual meaning, you have to go beyond the letter." Well, that's not what that verse means at all. That verse is saying that the legalisms of the Jews and the legalisms of Christians, where they're having their religious system by the number, that's deadening. That is of the flesh. But what is led of the Spirit of God, that is where real living and real life in spiritual things is to be found. It's got nothing to do with literal interpretation.

Deuteronomy 29:29 gives us a very good warning. It tells us that, "The things that are known are for us and our children, but the hidden things belong to God." This does not speak about what is not revealed in words. The things revealed in words are not hidden things. Those are the things for us and our children.

So anytime you talk about the spiritual meaning (the spiritual application) of a portion of Scripture, it must always be consistent with the literal meaning of the words from which you draw that spiritual idea. It is the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration and the literal method of interpretation. The two go hand-in-hand, and they form the most formidable bulwark against liberalism that there is. That is the thing that has held back the tide of unbelief and the tide of liberal confusion. It has been the verbal plenary inspiration of the Scripture (an inerrant Bible, inspired throughout, in its very words) and the literal method of interpreting that has held off all the liberal attacks upon the Scripture. When that is denied, then you are in trouble.

**Symbols**

So when the Bible uses symbols, what's it actually talking about? It's talking about a pictorial portrayal of some actual event; some truths; or, some object. Sometimes a lion symbolizes Jesus Christ in His power and strength as in Revelation 5:5. He's not actually talking about a lion. It's a symbol for Jesus Christ, but it's clear that that's what he means. The sword symbolizes the Word of God. We're told that in Ephesians 6:17 and Revelation 19:15. The sword is an apt symbol for God's word.

We're told in Galatians 4:24 that Paul is giving us an allegory, and that's what he calls it. He says that Hagar symbolizes Mount Sinai. He's not denying the actual historicity of Hagar (one of Abraham's wives). He is just saying that she represents man's carnal flesh effort as Mount Sinai represents man's attempts to please God.

These symbols may be in the form of words or acts. Acts describe things in the vision which represent something other than a literal object. Proper names sometimes represent other than individual objects. But again, you have to interpret them one at a time. Acts are performed to convey specific messages to the observers, as Agabus did to Paul.

Why would the book of Revelation use so many symbols? That's a very legitimate question. We come to this book, and we find symbols like we don't find anywhere else. Well, for one thing, symbols bring the future forward in time to be seen by the prophet. The prophet is not put in a time machine so that he is put ahead into that situation. The future is not moved up so that it becomes present reality. God actually is simply showing down the tunnel what is coming, and he has to describe it in symbols.

The reason for symbols is that it keeps things hidden from those who could misuse the information against believers. There was that problem in the early church among the believers in the Roman Empire. By using symbols, only those capable of spiritual understanding could know what this book meant. The book of the Revelation could have been read and could have been understood by Roman officials as a conspiracy, or as an expression of disloyalty to the government. They could have taken particular persecution against the Christians because of that. They could, as a matter of fact, have tried to frustrate certain prophecies. From time to time, this is exactly what happens.

Another reason that it's necessary to have symbols is to convey things that are so far in an advanced technological age when there's no other way to describe them. You must remember that John was looking down the corridors of time. He was literally now almost 2,000 years ahead (and that's probably all it's going to be) to a fantastically advanced technological age. Now, if John saw a battlefield filled with helicopters, how on earth was he going to describe it in terms of first century New Testament Koine Greek concepts? Obviously, he had to resort to, "How shall I describe that thing? Well, I'll think of an insect that has a quality that makes it appear like what I'm seeing. These things are like these insects." He saw certain qualities and he said, "How am I going to describe these things?" And he said, "Well it's like a lion," or it's like this, or it's like that. He was trying to put into words what was fantastic to view or what was so technologically advanced that there was hardly any way he could talk about it.

Just because Revelation uses symbols to convey predictions, that doesn't mean that the whole book is symbolical. So we say the first approach is non-symbolical, even if it's staggering to the imagination. Many of these things are. If a thing is not reality, then we say, "That's a symbol." So when we see that Jesus Christ has a sword coming out of His mouth, we say, "That doesn't fit reality. That's a symbolic expression." What it means is determined either by the context, near or far, elsewhere in the Scriptures.

When you have a lot of details given about something, that's a sign that it's not a symbol. For example, the 144,000 is often viewed as a symbol. But you discover that there are a lot of details given about those 144,000: they're Jews; the tribes they're from; and, the mission they're called to do. When you have details, that's never a symbol. The same thing is true about the two witnesses. They're not just symbols. They're actually two witnesses in Revelation 11, because there is too much detail given about them. Symbols do not have details given about them.

Symbols do not separate themselves. What are the 24 elders that John sees in heaven in Revelation 7? Well, they're actually 24 elders, because one of the elders walks up and speaks to John. That's a symbol detaching itself. A symbol never splits itself. That's another clue that we have.

Ezekiel 48:8 and Ezekiel 48:15 describe the temple that will be out in the millennium, and it's separated from the city of Jerusalem. Some people have said, "Well, that temple is just Jerusalem," However, he separates the two. Therefore, they are not a symbol. These 24 elders, while they are actual, may also have a symbolic meaning, and they do, as we shall see.

The number seven is actually the number seven: seven seals; seven trumpets; seven bowls; and, seven churches. The number seven is actually seven, but it also has a symbolic meaning. So it can be an actual meaning with a symbolical meaning.

We interpret the symbols in two ways. The first way is by means of the immediate context of the symbol. That is, a symbol may be given to us, and often is (here in the Revelation), and then John will be told, "Now, here is what the symbol means." So right there immediately that a symbol is presented, the divine interpretation is also given.

The four beasts of Daniel 7, we are told, are the four earthly kingdoms which are described in Daniel 2. Therefore, we know how to interpret Daniel 7, because we're told in the context immediately how to do it. The dragon, that old serpent, in Revelation 20:2 is interpreted immediately for us as being the devil. Sodom and Egypt, referred to in Revelation 11:8 are immediately interpreted for us in the context as referring to Jerusalem. So one of the ways we interpret symbols (we're going to be literal, but the symbols have to have meanings), is that we do it by the immediate context when it tells us here what the symbol means.

The second way that we interpret the symbol is by means of the remote context; that which is not immediate, but more distant. The way that a symbol may be used elsewhere in the Scripture will be a guide to us. Consider the word "sword." The idea of the sword is a symbol. We find that it is used in Revelation 19:5. Well, if we compare that with Hebrews 4:12, we have an interpretation of how the Bible uses the word "sword." The sword is used as a symbol for the Word of God. So we know from Hebrews 4:12 that it's the Word of God. Therefore, when we read about the sword in Revelation 19:5, here in symbolic form, we may conclude that this is what it's referring to in the Revelation passage.

We have the expression "time, and times, and a half-time." We compare that with "forty and two months." We have this in Revelation 12:14 compared with Revelation 11:2 and Revelation 13:5. When we compare these two expressions in these two different passages, we have an indication of what "time, times, and a half-time" means. It means 42 months, or three-and-a-half years. "Time" means one year; "times" means two years; and, "a half-time" means a half-year. We may need to research, therefore, what the pattern is of the symbols used in the Bible in general in order to determine its meaning at any specific place.

So in these two ways, even symbols, we will discover, will have actual real meanings – either from the immediate context, or from the more distant context.

With that much background, I hope that that'll give you some confidence that the literal approach is the approach that we should follow, and that symbols can have actual meanings, because they do.

**The Revelation**

So beginning with Revelation 1:1, we read, "The revelation of Jesus Christ." Now what does that mean – "The revelation of Jesus Christ?" The word "revelation" is the Greek word "apokalupsis." "Apokalupsis" is the first word in the Greek Bible that begins the book of the Revelation. This word means "an uncovering" or "an unveiling." It connotes here a disclosure of divine truth. In 1 Peter 1:7 and 1 Peter 1:13, this word is used to describe the rapture and the Second Coming of Christ. It is an unveiling. It is a revealing of something. It doesn't have the definite article. The Greek doesn't say "the revelation." It just says "revelation," which makes it very emphatic.

You can see that this is the source of our English word "apocalypse" which means literature which is referring to supernatural conditions, and events that are filled with persecution and suffering. This is a book that has heavy use of symbols and voices. We call that an "apocalypse." The book is The Revelation, sometimes referred to as "the apocalypse." Well, it comes from this word "apokalupsis."

Well, this is actually the title of the book. We find that it's the "apokalupsis," the "unveiling of Jesus Christ." That means it comes *from* Jesus Christ. It is not *about* Him, but it is mainly a revelation which He gives. This book, in the nature of the case, is indeed about Jesus Christ, but right here, it means information and a manifestation that comes from Jesus Christ: "which God gave unto Him." The word "God" here, again, which is our familiar "theos", has the word "the" in front of it, so it is "the God," indicating God the Father.

God the Father gave this information to God the Son; that is, to Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ came to heaven and seated Himself upon the Father's throne, the Father turned to the Son and, in His humanity, He said, "I'm going to tell you where history is going. I'm going to give you a picture of the future, and I want You to transfer this down to the believers on earth." God the Father told God the Son the divine plan for human history after the church age.

So we read, "Which God gave unto Him to show." The word "show" in the Greek is "deiknumi." The word "deiknumi" means "to exhibit" or "to make something known." It's in the aorist tense, which means that it's at the point when Jesus Christ passed the information to the Christians through John. It's active. Jesus Christ Himself made this thing known. It's infinitive, indicating that this was God's purpose. God's purpose was for this to be made known.

Notice what that immediately tells us about the book of the Revelation. God wants you to know what He said in His book. I have a hard time understanding how anybody who can read the Greek language, who is a Bible teacher or a preacher, can get this far into the first verse and not suddenly have a considerable conviction of conscience if he suggests that here is a book that we cannot understand. Right off the bat, we have a clear declaration that here is an unveiling. It is the showing of something. That's what "revelation" means. It is from Jesus Christ, the very Son of God. He got it from God the Father who gave it to Him for the explicit purpose of "showing them unto His servants. The word "servants" is "doulos" which means "bond servants" or "bondslaves," namely the Christians – "for giving it unto the Christians." Giving what?

"The things which must shortly come to pass." The word "must" is this word "dei" which means "it is necessary." This is an idiom in the Greek language. When this word appears, it means that there can be no deviation from this course in human history. These things must absolutely come to pass. It says, "They must shortly come to pass." The word "shortly" is the Greek word "tachos." This word means "with swiftness" or "quickly."

What this is telling us is obviously not the idea of "shortly." "Shortly" is a bad translation because these things, when John received them, did not come to pass shortly. 2,000 years have gone by, and that's not very short. But what this Greek word actually means is that once these things (described in this book beginning in chapter 4) are kicked off and once the tribulation begins, these events, which are herein described will swiftly come to pass.

We already know from Daniel that it's going to take only seven years. It's been practically 2,000 years since this information was given to us. But once these events are set in motion, there will be a short seven years, and it's all going to be over. So what this is saying is that very quickly, these things must come to pass. That is, this is God's purpose. "Come to pass," again, is infinitive, indicating that it is His purpose to fulfill these predictions very quickly.

Therefore, Jesus Christ, in turn, took action. The Greek says that He sent "apostello." "Apostello" a word that means being sent in an official capacity with an authoritative message – like an ambassador. This is not just being sent by going on your own or just being sent as a friend. But this is an official representative. Jesus Christ sent an official representative (an authoritative person) to bring this information. This information He sent in a certain way – being signified. He sent this official person, which is his angel here, and he signified it.

Let's take up something that you may have heard. The first time I ever heard this book taught by a very famous preacher, he called attention to the fact that the word "signified" could be divided up into "sign-i-fied." He said, "You may read this as "sign-i-fied." Well, what does "sing-i-fied" mean? Well, he was trying to connect the word "sign" with the idea of "symbol." He made quite a case over the fact that the book is full of symbols, and here is the declaration, right at the beginning, that it is a book of symbols. Unfortunately for that idea, the word "signified" is the Greek word "semaino." "Semaino" means to communicate. It may be communicated in symbols, or it may be communicated in actual words. But that's all it means. It means that Jesus Christ sent an angel to communicate the information that God the Father had given to him.

So what we have here is that "semaino" is in the aorist tense. This is the point when the angel was sent with the content of Revelation. It's active voice. It was done by Jesus Christ Himself. It's indicative of a statement of fact. It says that it was done "by." The word "by" here is "dia" which means "by means of." This was the agent of transmission – "His angel." Here's that Greek word for angel, which we shall run into several times: "aggelos." "Aggelos" comes from "aggello" which means "to deliver a message" or "to make a report." So the word "angel" actually means "messenger." If you were going to translate the word "angel," you would have to translate it as "messenger."

Jesus Christ uses a messenger (a spirit being – the angel being) to bring the contents of the book of the Revelation to the apostle John. He identifies that the person who is receiving it is again His servant. That's the same word again – his bond servant. He calls him John ("Ioannes") – John the apostle. His name occurs not only here in Revelation 1:1, but also in Revelation 1:4, Revelation 1:9, Revelation 21:2, and Revelation 22:8 (five times in this book).

So here is the line of communication. Where does all this information come from? The Bible itself says, first of all, God the Father gave the information to God the Son, Jesus Christ, who then gave the information to an angel, who then gave it to John the apostle, who then gave it to us, the servants of the living God. That's the chain reaction. So we're dealing with something that in a very specific way is clearly from God the Father.

Why would he make such a very careful, authoritative line of information: from God; to the Son; to the angel; and, to John? And John knows all this. John is very much impressed. There is no higher source in all of the universe than God the Father from which this information should come. So it's not symbols which we cannot understand. It is not words that do not mean what they say. It is a message communicated directly from God the Father for our very special blessing.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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