

“Foundations for Study” (Revelation 1:1-3)

You are “End Times” Impressionable” if...

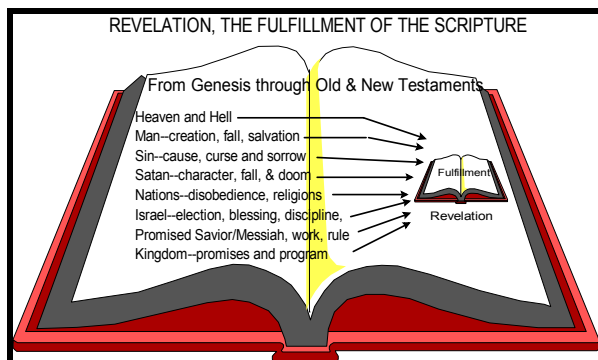
1. You don't shop at Costco because you don't think you'll be around long enough to eat a 37-pound box of cornflakes.
2. You are afraid to get money from the automated teller machine because the bank assigned you the PIN number of 666.
3. After watching one of those global-disaster movies, you boldly proclaim: “That could never really happen,” and then you quickly glance around to see if anyone is nodding in agreement.
4. You freaked out when you went to church and found no one there (only to realize later that you showed up an hour early because you forgot to change the clock for daylight savings time).
5. An earthquake had you scrambling to find that Bible you haven't read since eighth grade.

You are “End Times” Insensitive” if...

1. You think the “Apocalypse” is a car manufactured by Toyota.
2. All of the talk about the “Doomsday Event” has you baffled. You can't figure out why everyone is making such a fuss about a WWF wrestling match.
3. You ignore people when they fret about the political turmoil in the Middle East because you don't vote in New York.
4. The increasing frequency of flood, earthquakes, droughts, and other environmental disasters is of no concern to you (except for ruining the coffee bean harvests and raising the cost of a Starbuck's latte).¹

The Purposes

1. **Revelation exalts Jesus Christ.** The prophetic portrayal of Christ in Revelation is different than that of the Gospels, which tell the wonderful story of His humiliation, including His birth, suffering, and death. It reveals Him as the Lamb of God and King of Kings who, in the consummation of His program of salvation, restores to man what was lost by the fall and much more.
2. **Revelation reveals the power and wisdom of God.** Revelation conclusively demonstrates how God continues to control the affairs of this world in spite of the great and constant opposition of both Satan and man to the purposes of God.
3. **Revelation manifests the plan and purposes of God.** Without the book of Revelation, the Scriptures would leave us hanging. Yet Revelation tells us that there will come a day when Christ will wipe away every tear. Eventually, there will be no death. Every wrong will be righted and every right will be rewarded.
4. **Revelation validates the accuracy of the Bible.** The book of Revelation has been called “The Grand Central Station of the Bible” because it's where all the trains of thought from the whole Bible meet. It confirms and completes the other 65 books. This is demonstrated in the follow chart.²



5. **Revelation promotes holiness.** It is no secret that we live in an unholy age. Unfortunately, much of this godlessness is found in the church. Yet the book of Revelation provides a wake-up call for all of us. Many Christians, myself included, have in a moment of temptation, thought, “Do I want to be doing this when Christ returns?” When the answer is a resounding, “NO!” it is easier to reject the temptation. Instead, we are challenged to so love that when He comes we will be found doing the things that earn His praise, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” (Matthew 25:21) rather than the rebuke that will be extended to those who are ashamed at His coming (1 John 2:28).
6. **Revelation encourages evangelism.** If time is short and hell is hot, we need to be telling others about Jesus. Revelation should motivate us to share with others the answers to life’s questions: What’s going to happen to the world? Are we in the last days? Is Jesus really coming back? Will the human race survive? Is there life after death? Are heaven and hell real?
7. **Revelation comforts believers.** When we hear of wars, rumors of wars, and natural disasters, the knowledge of Revelation can give comfort by reminding us of God’s plan and that He is still on the throne, in control, and carrying out His purposes and plans.
8. **Revelation protects believers from Satan’s counterfeits.** Jesus predicted that many “false christs and prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24).³ Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, David Koresh, the Heaven’s Gate cult and countless others have propagated bizarre end-times scenarios. They have also been successful at deceiving many, as a result. If a Christian doesn’t have a biblical understanding of the end times, he/she is susceptible to deception.

The Dangers

1. The danger of sensationalism (Acts 17:21; 2 Timothy 4:3). We must not become mere specialists in the unusual and fanciful.
2. The danger of dogmatism (1 Corinthians 8:1). We must be careful not to become proud and divisive.
3. The danger of escapism. We must love and serve our community instead of running to the hills and forming our own Christian militia (i.e., stockpiling food, water, and guns).
4. The danger of pessimism. We must be full of joy and hope instead of buried in hopelessness and discouragement.

The Solutions

1. Major on the majors, not the minors. In essence, this book says: “Jesus is going to win!”
2. Determine to understand opposing views better and why they are held.
3. Hold beliefs and convictions in love.
4. Worship the God of Revelation. If you have all the “end-times” knowledge in the world but it hasn’t led to an increased desire to worship God, it is worthless.

The Certainties

1. Life as we know it will come to an end...and there is such a thing as life after death.
2. Jesus is coming again. More than ¼ of the Bible consists of prophecy. In the Old Testament there are over 1,800 references to the return of Christ. Of the 260 chapters in the New Testament, there are more than 300 references to the Lord’s return—one out of every 30 verses. Twenty-three of the 27 New Testament books give prominence to this subject. For every prophecy in Scripture concerning Christ’s first coming, there are eight prophecies about Christ’s second coming.
3. God will judge all people. Unbelievers at the great white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) and believers at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10).
4. Believers will live forever. Unbelievers will suffer eternal separation from God.
5. Evil will be punished. Every wrong will be made right.
6. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. God will return the world to its original creation.

1:1a: I hope you are convinced that Revelation is relevant. Now, let us begin our study with the first three verses of Revelation. The Apostle John wrote these opening verses to introduce the main subject, the purpose, and the theme dealt with in this book. This is all found in the following phrase: “**The revelation of Jesus Christ**” (1:1a), which informs us that this Revelation is directly from Jesus Christ and about Him.⁴ Revelation is relevant! Our greatest spiritual need is to know Jesus Christ...and NO book reveals His majesty, as does Revelation.

“**Revelation**”⁵ is the translation of the Greek noun, *apokalupsis*, meaning “a disclosure, an unveiling.” The term “**revelation**” itself is derived from the Latin word *revelatio* (from *revelare*, “to reveal or unveil that which has previously been hidden”). This was the title given to the book in the Latin Vulgate (a Latin translation of the New Testament by Jerome in A.D. 400). The Greek title is Apocalypse, taken directly from the first word in the Greek text, *apokalupsis*.⁶

Apokalupsis means “to expose to full view what was before unknown, hidden, and secret.” In its first appearance in the New Testament (Luke 2:32), it is used of Simeon who, taking the baby Jesus in his arms, blessed Him and spoke of Him as “a light of revelation (*apokalupsin*) to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel.” John’s choice of this particular word assures us that God intends for this book to bring light and be understood by its readers. This means we must understand, from the very beginning that the book of Revelation is NOT a riddle; it’s a revelation.

I have something hidden under this veil and we cannot clearly see it! I can tell you about it: this object is pink, white, and brown. It is bearded. One last hint, it is considered blameless (Genesis 6:9). You may be able to guess what it is but until I unveil it completely you cannot understand everything about it. Take off the veil and it’s...Noah. This is what the book of Revelation does for us. It takes off the veil and reveals more than any other book in the Bible—Jesus Christ.

1:1b-2: In the next verse-and-a-half, John describes how the book of Revelation was communicated. This section can be properly understood as God’s chain of communication. First, God’s message proceeds from the Father to the Son. Second, the communication proceeds from the Son through an angel. Third, the communication comes from the angel, as the Lord’s messenger, to John. Finally, the communication of the book is from John to the body of Christ. This can be easily understood as a simple hierarchy. Although all three members of the Godhead are equal, each has His own role and various responsibilities. While on earth, Christ submitted to God and the Holy Spirit submitted to Christ. Now if this is true with the Godhead, how much more should it be true of us?⁷

John is called “**a bond-servant**” (*doulos* = “a slave”). The word *doulos* is a significant term when it is applied to believers. The *doulos* was the one who was owned by his master, lock, stock, and barrel. He was totally under the authority and power of his master and dependent on him for everything—his responsibilities, his daily food, housing and supplies, and his purposes in life. Ironically though, only when we become slaves to Christ do we ever find true freedom from sin, self, Satan, and the world. The simple truth is: everyone is a slave to someone or something. The only question is, who is your master? It was Bob Dylan who sang the well-known song, “You Gotta Serve Somebody!” The chorus of this song was simple: “It may be the Devil, it may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody!” I’d like to say something very important as we inaugurate this study: You will not understand or fully appreciate this study unless you are a “bond-servant.” Revelation was written to “bond-servants.” So let us surrender ourselves to Jesus Christ as His slaves.

Before we move on, it is important to observe that in 1:1b, John wrote that this book was unveiled or disclosed and given to Jesus Christ and then to John **“to show His [Jesus’] bondservants the things which must shortly take place.”** The word **“show”**⁸ means “to exhibit, disclose, or point out.” Once again, the meaning of the word *apokalupsis* (“Revelation”) is brought to bear. God could not be clearer: He intends for the book of Revelation to be understood by His bond-servants! His desire is for us to understand His overarching plan. That is why He has given us this book.

John stresses the events that the Lord wants to show us must **“soon take place.”** In this context, the word **“soon”** (*en tachei*) means imminent.⁹ The term “imminent” points to an event that could occur any day. Of course, many raise the question: If these events were supposed to happen soon and they haven’t occurred in over 1,900 years, what in the world is going on? When speaking about the end of the world in 2 Pet 3:8, Peter reminds us that “with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.” He also says, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). If God is to be considered “slow,” it is as a result of His patience and mercy.

The manner of communication is brought out in 1:1c. The word **“communicated”** (*esemanen*) means “to show, signify, reveal by signs or symbols.” But this word can also mean to reveal by words without the use of signs or symbols. John was communicated to by both the spoken word and by visions in which he saw things that were full of symbolic meaning, as in 1:10-12, but these symbols are designed to be understood according to the normal meaning of the symbols. The key message is delivered in the visuals, not the spoken word—it will be in what John sees and only second in what he hears.

1:2: That which was communicated was **“testified”** by John (1:2). The word **“testified”** comes from a root word that means “to be a witness, act as a witness, testify or bear witness.” It carries the idea of “attestation, verification, and validation” and stresses that John was bearing testimony as a witness of what he received. That witness is defined and described in a three-fold way which shows its importance and why we need to pay attention to its message: (1) **“The Word of God”**¹⁰: this book with its visions is called the Word of God and provides us with an inspired conclusion to the Bible; (2) **“The testimony of Jesus Christ”**: the words directly from Jesus to John; (3) **“And of all the things which he saw”**: the many events and persons that John observed. Note the parallelism here. John is not speaking of three different things, but rather one thing, described in three different ways.

1:3: John begins 1:3 with the word **“blessed”** (*makairos*, Matthew 5:13). This is the first of seven usages of **“blessed”** in Revelation.¹¹ This is a promise of the happiness, spiritual blessing, and joy that will come from knowing and obeying the truth of this book. This is an amazing verse. No other book of the Bible promises us a blessing for reading, hearing, and heeding its contents.

This blessing is given to **“he who reads.”** Note that this is singular while the next clause, **“those who hear”** is plural. This reflects the early form of taking in the Word. In the early church Christians did not have their own copy of God’s Word. They were not as fortunate as we are today. Rather, the Scripture was publicly read and expounded to the congregation by an elder or qualified teacher.¹²

Today, we can be blessed by simply reading through the book of Revelation AND hearing and heeding its contents. The words **“hear”** and **“heed”**¹³ are linked together by the word **“and.”** These two terms form one concept, not two. The person who “hears” in the biblical sense of the word “heeds.” Hearing MUST be combined with obedience.¹⁴

In this context, the main idea is that of obeying “the words of this prophecy” and “the things which are written.” Notice that both “words” and “things” are plural. These two words point us to the importance of perceiving and obeying all the contents of this book (i.e., the person of Christ, the church, the saints, the tribulation, witnessing, faithfulness, overcoming, angelic warfare, Israel, Satan, demons, judgments, the millennium, the resurrection, the eternal state, etc.).

Again, it is important at this point to recognize that Revelation must be clearly understood. A “blessing” can be promised to those who read, hear, and heed because of two truths: The book of Revelation is a “revelation” (apocalypse), which means an unveiling (contrast an apocryphal book which is hidden). Second, Revelation is not a sealed book (22:10).

The knowledge and application of this book is so urgent because “**the time is near.**” The Greek word translated “**time**” (*kairos*) describes a period of time rather than a point in time. The time in mind is the time of Christ’s return marked out by all that will happen just before, during, and after (1:19). The time when God will fulfill these prophecies was “**near**” when John wrote this book. “**Near**” (*engus*) means “at hand.”¹⁵ Or if you prefer “NEXT!” It means relatively near in God’s timetable in which a thousand years are as a day (2 Peter 3:8).

It is said that Satan once called his demons and said he wanted to send one of them to earth to aid women and men in the ruination of their souls. He asked which one would want to go. One creature came forward and said, “I will go.” Satan said, “If I send you, what will you tell the children of men?” He said, “I will tell the children of men that there is no heaven.” Satan said, “They will not believe you, for there is a bit of heaven in every human heart. In the end, everyone knows that right and good must have the victory. You may not go.”

Then another came forward, darker and fouler than the first. Satan said, “If I send you, what will you tell the children of men?” He said, “I will tell them that there is no hell.” Satan looked at him and said, “Oh, no; they will not believe you, for in every human heart there’s a thing called conscience, an inner voice which testifies to the truth that not only will good be triumphant, but that evil will be defeated. You may not go.”

Then one last creature came forward, this one from the darkest place of all. Satan said to him, “And if I send you, what will you say to women and men to aid them in the destruction of their souls?” He said, “I will tell them that there is no hurry.” Satan said, “Go at once!”

Satan has successfully duped the church and the world into believing that there is really no hurry. He has robbed us of a sense of urgency. As believers we assume that we can get serious about Christ once we have grandkids and retire. Unbelievers have been led to believe that, if they need to, they will be able to trust Christ at will, when they are old and decrepit and in some rest home. What a mistake! We must realize that our day of reckoning with the Lord Jesus Christ is imminent. Final accountability is on the horizon. We must urge believers and unbelievers to prepare to face the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There is a hurry. Revelation is relevant. Prepare for eternity TODAY.

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Notes

¹ Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz, *Bruce & Stan's Guide to the End of the World* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), 7-8.

² This helpful chart is found in the following book: Hampton Keathley III, *Studies in Revelation* (www.bible.org: Biblical Studies Press, 1997), 16.

³ In 2 Thess 2, Paul corrected a false teaching that the day of the Lord, or the tribulation period, had already come. As a result of this false teaching, Paul also had to correct errant action. In chapter 3, he commanded some of the people to go back to work and quit sponging off of other believers. Apparently, they had applied the false teaching about the tribulation period to their lives and quit working since Christ's coming was very soon.

⁴ This phrase is what Greek grammarians call either a genitive of object meaning a revelation "about Jesus Christ," or a genitive of subject meaning a revelation "from Jesus Christ." Grammatically, it is likely that this phrase includes both concepts.

⁵ It is not "Revelations," but "Revelation." It's singular, not plural. It's "The Revelation of Jesus Christ."

⁶ In this noun form the word is not found anywhere else in Greek literature, but as a verb it is continually used in the Gospels and the Epistles.

⁷ The apostle Paul certainly understood this. In the first verse of Paul's message to the Romans he identified himself as a "bondservant of Jesus Christ" and then as one "called to be an apostle" (Rom 1:1). Paul was awesome in his effectiveness as a preacher/teacher because he understood that he was first and foremost a *doulos*! Paul was utterly surrendered to Christ, who also came as a *doulos*. Though being God, He became a bondsman when He took on the form of humanity and humbled Himself to die in our place, that we might have life (Phil 2:6-8). In Mark 10:45 we read, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Jesus came to earth to show us who God was and to die. That is the reason He came. If the Lord Jesus Christ was able to become a *doulos*, what is keeping us from the following His example?

⁸ Gk. *deiknumi*: Rev 1:1; 4:1; 17:1; 21:9-10; 22:1, 6, 8.

⁹ Gk. *en tachei* can also mean "rapidly, quickly, speedily." Throughout the Scriptures, *en tachei* frequently refers to events that will occur rapidly (Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rom 16:20). This leads some to understand this phrase to mean that when the events of Revelation do begin, they will run their course very quickly. John uses a similar word, *tachus*, in Revelation, which is translated six times as "quickly" (2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20). However, in view of the phrase, "the time is near" in 1:3 (cf. 22:10) it may be best to take *en tachei* as "soon" and understand it to refer to the imminent return of Christ. A major thrust of Revelation is its emphasis upon the shortness of time before the fulfillment. In the midst of persecution God's people do not have long to wait for relief to come. To say that the relief will come "suddenly" offers no encouragement, but to say that it will come "soon" does.

¹⁰ Rev 1:9; 3:8, 10; 6:9; 12:11; 17:17; 19:9; 20:4.

¹¹ Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14.

¹² Keep in mind; in order to be counted among "those who hear," one must be present in the home church gathering. In biblical times, there was no Christian radio, television, or books, every Christian was expected to be present every Sunday!

¹³ Gk. *terountes*: "to guard, watch over, preserve" or "observe, apply, obey."

¹⁴ We find this theme throughout Jesus' messages to the seven churches: "He who has an ear, let him hear."

¹⁵ The "nearness" of the Lord's return is used frequently in the New Testament to call believers to live responsibly toward God (e.g., Rom 13:12; Heb 10:25; Jas 5:8; 1 Pet 4:7).