**REVELATION: *AN IN-DEPTH STUDY***

**Lesson 1**

**Men’s Ministry**

**INTRODUCTION**

We begin with a note of caution: Revelation is a challenging and complex book and to have a valid understanding of it, our method of interpreting Scripture (i.e., our hermeneutic) must be consistent throughout the book. This is important because the method of interpretation will control the understanding of the text and, ultimately, determine the theological conclusion. On a similar note, our method of interpretation must not be governed by our theological predisposition. I.e., if our interpretation is controlled by our theology, then the understanding of a passage can be manipulated to mean whatever our theology dictates (II Pet 3:15-16); which can easily occur in the study of eschatology and the book of Revelation. Thus, it is easy to see how those with a different hermeneutic or theological predisposition end up with different interpretations and different theology. It is important, then, that we exercise proper principles of biblical interpretation.

There are generally five principles of biblical interpretation we should follow (Van Kampen 27-29). These include:

1. Scripture should be understood in its customary, natural, and normal sense.

2. Scripture must be understood in its context.

3. Scripture explains Scripture.

4. Scripture does not contradict itself.

5. Prophetic Scripture can have both a near and far fulfillment.

**PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION**

Principle No 1: Scripture should be understood in its customary, natural and normal sense, allowing for figures of speech and symbolism. Every passage must be taken at face value whenever possible and be interpreted in its grammatical, historical, and cultural sense. Martin Luther called this the principle of literal interpretation, i.e., interpreting Scripture by its *sensus literalis*. Many great advances in biblical scholarship and theology occurred, e.g., in the Reformation, when this one principle was utilized (e.g., justification by faith). This means that we should evaluate and understand Scripture with the same normal understanding of words, symbolism, and figures of speech that we use with any other serious book or conversation.

This principle has special importance in biblical prophecy and is clearly observed in the way Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in the life of Christ. E.g., Old Testament scriptures contain ~ 300 prophecies pertaining to the first coming of Christ. Many of these prophecies are duplicates but sixty different truths about the life of Christ were predicted, and all of them were literally fulfilled. It is then a matter of biblical principle to expect the prophecies of Christ's second coming to be fulfilled with equal literalness and completeness.

What is the significance of this principle? We can have complete confidence in the truthfulness and reliability of God's word; i.e., that it is true, and can be understood, and that future events will happen according to God's timing and sovereign plan. We look for the literal fulfillment of prophetic events that actually will happen in history.

Principle No. 2: Scripture is to be understood in its context. This has to do with understanding the meaning of a word, idea, or topic in its context, i.e., in the phrase, sentence, or paragraph where it is located. It could even require the understanding of a complete Bible book, carefully examining an idea or principle in light of the overall emphasis of a book. The context includes the persons being addressed in a passage and their historical setting and function. We must not forget the application of an old-time rhyme, "A text taken out of context is nothing more than a pretext".

Principle No. 3: Scripture explains Scripture (I Cor 2:13). A biblical truth or concept is best determined by first studying the context of the specific bible passage where the truth is found and then by studying related information in other passages of Scripture. When a specific passage is not complete or entirely clear about a particular truth, final conclusions cannot be drawn about that truth until related passages are studied. Obviously, some passages of scripture are not as explicit as others, and some truths in passages are only implicit. When this occurs, truths from implicit passages should be understood in light of other passages which are more explicit. In a similar fashion, we can say generally that more important truths require more careful study of related passages. Scripture is the best interpreter of scripture, and comparing scripture with scripture always improves the clarity of our understanding of the biblical topic.

Principle No.4: Scripture does not contradict scripture. I.e., antinomies are not allowable. An antinomy is "a contradiction between two apparently equally valid principles or between inferences correctly drawn from such principles” (Van Kampen 29). This means that after careful evaluation and comparison of relevant biblical passages relating to a specific topic, no interpretation is valid that does not genuinely harmonize related passages. God's word is inerrant and cannot contradict itself. Van Kampen cautions us that some interpreters seemingly compare biblical antinomies to the tracks of a railroad train, which are separate where one is standing, but will converge at the far distant horizon. The implication being that two apparent truths that contradict each other today, someday, in the "sweet bye and bye", will come together and no longer contradict each other. The truth is though, that once you arrive at the end of the tracks, those tracks will continue to be separate and *never* converge. Similarly, “truths” that are mutually exclusive never will come together, no matter how far you look into the horizon. So, if two passages contradict each other, the final truth remains yet to be determined, and we must keep looking. Eventually, a higher common truth will be found that harmonizes all the critical passages in question. Then you have the truth; not before. I believe, it is essential to understand that there are no antinomies in God's word.

Principle No.5: Prophetic Scripture can have both a near and far fulfillment. In other words, a prophecy can have two different times of fulfillment. On the one hand, there is an initial "near" prediction relating to a soon coming fulfillment. But afterwards, there is a future "far" prediction that will be come at a future time (e.g., at the time of the end). Misapplying this principle can cause misunderstanding of biblical events. KEY: For a near/far fulfillment to be applicable, it must be allowed in the context and be consistent with other prophetic passages.

One final introductory thought: careful study of different biblical writers reveals that different genres and terminology are used to describe the same event with equal truthfulness, but not with the same emotion or perspective or detail. E.g., Psalm 22 (wisdom literature) written by David, provides one perspective of the Christ’s crucifixion, whereas Isaiah 53 (prophetic literature) provides another view. And Daniel 9 (different prophetic author) simply states, "Messiah will be cut off and have nothing". In these instances, the similarity of context and events allow us to make the connection between the passages. And very importantly, these different perspectives from different but related passages bring fuller understanding and significance to the same event.

In summary, we will use these five principles of biblical interpretation in our study of Revelation. Although everyone enters bible study with some theological biases, to allow our biases to govern our hermeneutic and interpretation of scripture would be wrong. As much as possible, we need to utilize a consistent literal method of interpretation. We will give attention to the context and bring in other related passages of Scripture. We will compare scripture with scripture and accept no antinomies. We will accept legitimate near/far prophecies and attempt to examine relevant passages to determine the truth of a passage. And when clear biblical truth is found, we should never stand in judgment of that truth; that truth stands in judgment of us.

**SYSTEMS FOR INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION**

Revelation is the only New Testament book where several different *systems* of interpretation have been developed. There are usually four different systems utilized. The system adopted makes a great difference as to what the book is understood to teach.

System No.1, Preterist View: Preterist from "*praeter*" (Latin), means "past". Preterists apply most of the fulfillment of Revelation to the 1st century and attempt to understand it in its historical context like any other book of the New Testament. Interpreted this way, Revelation expresses the hope of the early Christians of Asia that they would be delivered from their persecution at the hands of Rome. It holds that the book symbolizes the conflict between the Church and Rome during the author's own day. Imperial Rome was the beast of Chapter 13, and priests promoting the worship of Rome represented the false prophet. The church was threatened with practical extinction in the face of worsening persecution and John wrote to confirm the faith of believers that even though terrible persecution was at the door, God would intervene. Christ would return, Rome would be destroyed and the Kingdom of God would be set up on earth. Of course, Christ did not return, Rome was not overthrown, and the kingdom of God on earth was not established. But prophetic fulfillment was not essential. The book fulfilled its purpose in strengthening the 1st century church. However, for those who accept the claim of Revelation to be a prophecy, this view is quite inadequate.

Problems with the preterist viewpoint include: 1. Taken to the extreme, Revelation could be meaningless for future believers beyond the period of the early church except for its principles. However, preterists would accept the future fulfillment of the great white throne judgment (20:11-15) and the future arrival of the new Jerusalem (21:1-22:5). 2. It denies the prophetic nature of the book. 3. Christ's eschatologic return is the central theme of book, not the events of the 1st century.

To some extent, the preterist view is held by most scholars today especially in relation to chapters 2 and 3. Other preterists say Revelation is similar to a style of Jewish and Christian writing known as “apocalyptic”. These were stories and writings for difficult times; or, “tracts for hard times”. They were a rewriting of history under the guise of a famous person (to promote their acceptance) utilizing symbols and wild imagery. They flourished in the period between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. and include books such as *Enoch*, *The Assumption of Moses, The Apocalypses of Ezra,* and *Baruch*. It is believed that apocalyptic writers were discouraged because of the evils of their times and the persecution of God’s people at the hands of godless nations. While they despaired because of their situation, they continued to hope in God and looked forward to his salvation. They believed God would soon come and shatter the rule of the wicked nations, destroying their evil and establishing his kingdom on earth. The apocalyptists looked upon their own days as the last, since the end of the age was immediately to follow. To some extent, Revelation is looked upon as apocalyptic encouraging its readers as they faced the persecution of the Roman authorities.

System No. 2: Idealist View: Also known as "the spiritual view". It finds timeless principles in the book (Keener 27). This approach avoids the problem of trying to find historical fulfillment of the symbols and imagery of Revelation and sees only a symbolic portrayal of the ever present and continual conflict between the kingdom of God and the powers of satanic evil. It denies any historical or future meaning to the book. The beast represents satanic evil anywhere it breaks out to oppress the church. It is not the purpose of the book to predict the future, but to lay out spiritual principles to govern the church through its earthly pilgrimage. The book’s symbolism should not be identified with any past or future events, but is meant to portray the continuing struggle between good and evil, between the church and the world, and assures final victory for the kingdom of God. There are multiple problems with this view: 1. It severs the book from its historical background; 2. It strips the book of its prophetic character; 3. It is inconsistent with the historical, grammatical, and literal method of interpretation; and, 4. It is a novel view (recent).

System No. 3: Historical View or "continuous historical view" has few adherents today. It says Revelation is an inspired forecast of the history of the church (primarily the western church) from the apostles to the 2nd coming of Christ. The numerous symbols and descriptions of the book supposedly designate various historical movements and events in the western world and the church. Obviously, such an interpretation leads to confusion, for there are no fixed guidelines as to what historical events are meant. Each adherent to this school of interpretation works things out so that the end falls in his *own* time. One of the most common interpretations of this view is that the beast is the Roman papacy and the false prophet is the Roman Catholic Church. This view was so widely held that for a long time it was called the “Protestant View”.

A variant of this view is described in the Scofield Reference Bible as follows (Scofield 1332):

*It can be seen that Ephesus (2:1-7), though a local church in the apostle’s day, is typical of the 1st century church as a whole; Smyrna (2:8-11), characterized the church under persecution, e.g., from A.D. c. 100-316; Pergamum (2:12-17), “where Satan’s throne is” is suggestive of the church mixing with the world, e.g., in the Middle Ages; Thyatira (2:18-29), reveals how evil progresses in the church and idolatry is practiced; Sardis (3:1-6), is representative of the church as dead, yet still having a minority of godly men and women, as during the Reformation; Philadelphia (3:7-13), shows revival and a state of spiritual advance; and Laodicea (3:14-19), is illustrative of the final state of apostasy which the visible church will experience”.*

The problems with this point of view are great: 1. It utilizes the allegorical method of interpretation; 2. Revelation has little to say to the churches of Asia to which it was addressed; 3. It ignores the Eastern church movement; and, 4. A knowledge of church history is the “key” to understanding the book, cutting off common people from understanding Scripture.

System No. 4: Futurist View: It is the dominant approach today. Events beginning with chapter 4 (and the far prophecy of the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3), will be fulfilled in the period immediately before and after the return of Christ. Chapters 4 - 5 begin by referring to a future time in heaven sometime after chapter 3 that leads up to the beginning of Daniel’s 70th week (Dan 9:4-27). Chapter 6-19 relate to the entire period of the 70th week of Daniel. Considerable diversity exists among futurists as to the probable order of events, especially the relation of the rapture of the church to the great tribulation. It is true that most of Revelation is future to today but we are to live expectantly. Futurists interpret Scripture literally in its most natural, normal sense. However, critics of this view say that the futurist view robs the church of all significance of the book for the early Christians and, indeed, for all subsequent generations except for the last one. For all intermediate generations, Revelation becomes merely a forecast of what will happen in the last days just before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Until those days come to pass, it means little, except that God does have an ultimate plan and purpose he will fulfill.

The best system for interpreting the book of Revelation is System No. 5: The Combined Preterist, Idealist, and Futuristic View”. This is an eclectic approach. Revelation was written to encourage the early church against spiritual persecution and compromise and like all other books, to provide timeless principles for Christian living and to describe events prior to the Day of the Lord and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the consummation of God’s redemptive plan for the ages. This properly emphasizes the occasion of the book (below).

**OCCASION**

There are two related occasions for the book:

1. The historical situation for the churches in chapters 2 and 3 had become ominous. The churches were consistently subject to persecution on a local level from their traditional Jewish enemies, pagans or magistrates. But now the danger had become more acute because of the unprecedented demand by Emperor Domitian asking for divine worship. Domitian's demand and the zeal of the leaders of the imperial cult in Asia brought the churches to a terrible crisis. The prospect had terrifying possibilities for believers, who were well aware of the exterminating power of Rome. Therefore, a message from God was needed which would strengthen and encourage believers to maintain their faith and be overcomers and persevere under the impending ordeal and give them assurance that their faith, one day, would be fully vindicated with the return of Christ and the Day of the Lord and His certain victory over the forces of evil.

2. Corresponding to this external pressure was a movement within the churches which advocated compromise and accommodation to ease the situation. In five of the churches (Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea), the Nicolaitans and others were promoting false teaching, participation in pagan feasts, quasi-religious practices involving immorality and idolatry, and worldliness. This was supposedly to make life easier for Christians amid a hostile pagan environment. John recognized this attitude and called for vigorous opposition. It is soundly condemned in the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3.

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of the book of Revelation is threefold: 1. To strengthen and encourage the church to be overcomers and persevere against worsening persecution and give them assurance that their faith would be fully rewarded and vindicated on the Day of the Lord and the return of Christ and His certain victory over the forces of evil. 2. To oppose false teaching, immorality, idolatry, and worldliness within the church. 3. To reveal details of the upcoming final divine judgment of the Day of the Lord (trumpet and bowl judgments) against those who practice unrighteousness and refuse to repent.

**STRUCTURE**

The book of Revelation is filled with symbolism and references to various topics including different churches, seals, trumpets, bowls, beatitudes, and other topics and organizing them and structuring them can help provide understanding to the book. Tenney (32-35) suggests different ways to organize and structure the book based upon repeat phrases and ideas throughout the book.

One of these phrases is the phrase “in the Spirit” that occurs four times suggesting 4 major subdivisions to the book:

1. 1:10: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”; emphasizes Christ’s role in the churches, 1:9-3:22
2. 4:2: “Immediately I was in the Spirit”; emphasizes Christ’s judgment of the world (Day of the Lord) from the viewpoint of heaven, 4:1-16:21. This very long section is subdivided further into three sequential series of 7 judgments (seals, trumpets, bowls)
3. 17:3: “He carried me away in the Spirit”; emphasizes the end of evil Babylon, the end result of man’s fallenness, 17:1-21:8
4. 21:10: “He carried me away in the Spirit”; emphasizes the new Jerusalem, realizing the purpose of God for dwelling with man, 21:9-22:5

Another repeating similar phrase is “peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.” Although not identical in each occurrence, it is similar at 8:5, 11:19, and 16:18. Each one supposedly marks the conclusion of the seal judgments, trumpet judgments, and bowl judgments, respectively, and they subdivide the book into three sections, i.e., the seal judgments (6:1-17); the trumpet judgments (8:1-11:19); and the bowl judgments (15:5-16:20).

The major question concerning this structure of the book is, are the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments consecutive (i.e., chronological, sequential) spanning the entire 7-year sequence of events in Revelation (a total of 21 judgments); or, are they simultaneous (i.e., recapitulationism). If simultaneous, each sequential seal, trumpet, and bowl judgment would combine together to form a single judgment for a total of 7 judgments over the 7-year period (i.e., seal #1, trumpet #1, bowl #1 constitute the first judgment; seal #2, trumpet #2, bowl #2 constitute the second judgment, etc.). Many scholars support the recapitulation view (Keener 33; Blount 21; Metzger, 24; Ladd, 121). Their arguments contain the following ideas: (Fanning 60-61):

1. Thematic parallels exist among the seals, trumpets, and bowls (e.g., similar effects on the seas and fresh water, heavenly bodies, scorching heat, refusal to repent)
2. If chronological, there would be inconsistencies between the sequences of judgments (e.g., 6th seal [heavens affected] vs. 4th trumpet [heavens unaffected]; 1st trumpet [grass burned up] vs 5th trumpet [locusts told not to harm grass])
3. 7th trumpet and 7th bowl appear to end at the same place
4. Similar storm theophany occurs at the end of each series (e.g., lightning, earthquake, thunder, hail)
5. Changes in heavenly bodies at 6th seal indicate catastrophic changes and Christ’s immediate return

However, strong arguments exist in support of the chronological view. These include (Fanning 60-61):

1. All three series of judgments have explicit chronological ordering of events (e.g., each series contains “first”, “second”, “third” judgments, etc.)
2. Intensification of judgments within each series and between series is easier to explain if they occur chronologically rather than simultaneously.
3. Bowl judgments are called “the last plagues” which “complete” God’s judgments
4. The 7th seal constitutes the 7 trumpet judgments (and are clearly sequential and different) and the 7th trumpet constitutes the 7 bowl judgments

These two views will be discussed in further detail in the commentary. I will argue for the chronological, sequential view of the seals, trumpets, and bowl judgments.

**DATE**

The majority of scholars advocate a late date of ~ 95 AD for the composition of the book under the reign of Emperor Domitian. An earlier date of ~ 65 AD is advocated by scholars who understand that the persecution described in the book comes from Emperor Nero. This earlier date is also advocated by those who see the persecution of Rome under Nero as a buildup to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. No one argument is persuasive either way (Beale 4). The earlier date would support a preterist interpretation for the book. The earliest (and best) external evidence strongly supports the later date. Irenaeus wrote concerning the identification of the antichrist and said, “We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing as to the name of the antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by *him who beheld the Apocalypse. For it was seen not very long ago but almost in our day, toward the end of Domitian’s reign”* (italics added) (cited in Beale 19). This has been interpreted by most patristic writers and commentators to mean that the Apocalypse “was seen” and witnessed by Domitian.

Either date for the writing is acceptable without affecting the overall interpretation of the book. Under either dating position, the book remains a polemic against Roman persecution and against spiritual compromise and accommodation to worldly pagan, immoral, and idolatrous worship. The earlier date could be used to support an anti-Israel emphasis and destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple in 70 AD. However, this is an allegorical interpretation and not required.

**AUTHOR**

Numerous scholars have addressed the question of authorship of the book of Revelation. External evidence (Justin Martyr 150 AD, Irenaeus 180 AD, Tertullian 200 AD; cited by DeSilva 19) strongly supports the apostle John as the author; whereas, internal evidence (vocabulary and grammatical style) is used to argue for another John, “John the Elder” (Blount 8), both of whom are said to have lived in Ephesus and have ancient monuments dedicated to them. A good review of all the data is written by Robert Mounce (8-15) who favors the weight of the external data over the internal and favors the apostle John as the author. The following is a summary of his work.

The author of Revelation identifies himself as “John” in 1:1, 1:4, 1:9, and 22:8. In 1:1 he is a slave who testifies “to all that he saw.” In 1:4 he greets the 7 churches. In 1:9 he identifies himself as a “brother and fellow partaker in the kingdom.” In 22:8 he testifies that he “heard and saw these things.”

Throughout the book, there are no other identifiers for this John. With no other identifying information, we can assume that there could be no possibility for mistaken identity by the letter’s recipients. His “matter of fact” approach and extensive knowledge of the conditions in each of the churches indicates he wrote with great knowledge and authority to the churches under his jurisdiction. He surely was well known and respected by the churches he addressed.

A surprising number of modern writers accept the ancient conjecture of Eusebius that the author of Revelation was a man known as “John the Elder”, who was possibly identified and distinguished from John the Apostle by the earlier writer Papias, although it is not even clear that Papias tried to distinguish them. Mounce counters this idea by arguing that even if Papias wrote of two Johns and if there were two ancient monuments in Ephesus with the name of John, it does not require that the Elder John is the author of Revelation. He says it is difficult to accept how a single mention of a name in an obscure text can be used to justify John the Elder as the author of Revelation and nullify all the early unanimous external evidence naming John the Apostle as the author.

Mounce addresses a few other objections to the Apostle John’s authorship.

1. The author calls himself John but nowhere claims to be the Apostle John: however, it only needs to be noted that the authority with which he writes is an implicit assumption of apostolicity and that his authority would not be enhanced by adding the title of “apostle”. That he does not feel that he needs to add the title of apostle strengthens the authority with which he writes and strengthens the argument that John the apostle wrote the book.
2. There is nothing in the book that indicates the author knew the historical Jesus (Or, there is no indication in Revelation that the author was present at the events depicted in the gospels that involved the Apostle John). This is a classic and easily refuted argument from silence that fails to consider the purpose of Revelation. The gospels deal with the ministry of the historic Jesus where John was involved but Revelation looks toward the consummation of history that John simply records for us.
3. There is a tradition that the Apostle John suffered an early martyrdom which precludes him writing any of the Johannine material: Charles (1. xlv-1; conclusion on 1.1) supports this theory. However, this is a very weak tradition and with the compelling evidence against it, most modern writers avoid using it as evidence for arguing for the authorship of the Elder John.
4. Due to a perceived excess emphasis on millennialism, Dionysius in the 3rd century tried to eliminate the apostle John’s authority in Revelation (and truthfulness of the millennial kingdom) by comparing it to the gospel and the epistles of John and concluding it could not be written by the same author: Charles (1. Xl) also supports this view. He wrote that the gospel and epistles have strong linguistic and vocabulary similarities, but that Revelation does not contain “a syllable in common with them.” However, although there are many differences in vocabulary and grammar between the gospel and Revelation, there are many important similarities that must be considered. Quoting the scholar Swete (cxxx), he concludes that the overall evidence “creates a strong presumption of affinity between the fourth gospel and the Apocalypse.”

Taking everything into account, internal evidence has convinced the majority of modern writers that John the Apostle did not write the book of Revelation. However, “the unusually strong and early external evidence supporting apostolic authorship should cause us to hesitate before accepting a conclusion based on subjective appraisal of internal considerations” (Mounce 15). Supporting this, the scholar Smalley stated “the case for apostolic authorship, as such, appears to be entirely plausible” (Smalley 40 cited in Mounce 15).

Conclusion: “Since internal evidence is not entirely unfavorable to apostolic authorship and external evidence is unanimous in its support, the wisest course of action is to accept as a reasonable hypothesis that the Apocalypse was written by John the apostle, son of Zebedee and disciple of Jesus” (Mounce 15).

**COMMENTARY**

**Chapter 1**

**Prologue (Opening Statement) 1:1-3:** **1. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His Servants--things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to his servant John,* 2. *who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.* 3. *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.***

1:1 *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, the title of the book. *Revelation* (*apokalupsis*) means an unveiling, revealing, or uncovering of something hidden (Luke 12:2); it is the making known of something we could not know on our own. It is the supernatural revelation of divine truths unknown to men and incapable of being discovered by them (Rom 16:25; Gal 1:12). It is not a book of human wisdom or of human origin. *Of Jesus Christ* can be interpreted one of two different ways: objective or subjective. As objective, Jesus is the object or content of the revelation. It is a revelation about him, the unveiling of him and the Day of the Lord events surrounding His coming in judgment and glory to establish His kingdom on earth (I Cor 1:7; II Thes 1:6-10; I Pet 1:6-7). As subjective, Jesus is the source of the revelation, the one who unveils all the end time events surrounding His coming to earth.

Both of these views are right, but the subjective view is best since it is the revelation that *God gave him to show his servants.* God the Father is the source and fountainhead of all revelation; God the Son is the agent through whom this revelation is made known to men. (The revelation which Christ showed to John is identical to the “things” in v.1, the “it” of v.1, the “word of God” in v.2, the “testimony of Jesus Christ” in v.2, and the “all things that he saw” in v.2.) *Bondservants* (*doulos*) is better translated as “slaves” and refers appropriately to our true position before the Lord. We are slaves in the truest sense of the word. It refers either to Christians in general or to the believers who were the messengers to the 7 churches in chapters 2 and 3.

*Things which must shortly take place* (*a dei genesthai ev taxei*); or, *events which must quickly come to pass*; *shortly* (*taxei* and related words*);* used 39 times in Scripture and translated as *quickly* (16x), *swift* (2x), *hastily* (1x), *shortly* (11x), *soon* (3x), *suddenly* (1x), *outrun* (1x), *with all speed* (1x), *speedily* (1x), *lightly* (1x), *the sooner* (1x). Suggestions for the meaning of this phrase in context include:

1. Fulfillment of the events are expected to begin in the very near future, i.e., shortly or soon (best). It would refer first to the vision of Jesus Christ in the 1st chapter, then to warnings and exhortations in the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3; and, finally, expectantly, to the events surrounding the Day of the Lord in chapters 4-19; cf., 6:12-17 (combined Preterist/Futurist viewpoint).

2. Certainty of the events in question; refers to the Lord unfailingly bringing them to pass in His time not ours.

3. Suddenly, without delay when the time comes. Includes the idea of swiftly; once they begin, they come quickly

4. Blending of near/far prophecy into one event; the distant future is seen in terms of the immediate future.

5. Imminent, i.e., chronology is not important; events of chapters 1 to 3 could occur at any moment.

NOTE: the best understanding of *taxei* is soon or shortly to occur (no. 1 above). The other suggestions actually change the meaning of the word. E.g., “soon” or “shortly to occur” vs. “certainty”, “suddenly”, “imminent” (especially). Controversial.

*And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John*; “He” could be either the Father or the Son. Probably, it is Jesus since the revelation was first communicated to Him by the Father; he then, in turn, communicated it to His angel who gave it to John. Thus, the revelation was not made directly by God to John. The revelation came in 4 steps: 1. God to Jesus; 2. Jesus to his angel (Gabriel? cf. Dan 8:16; 10:10; Matt 1:19; Lu 1:19, 26); 3. The angel to John; 4. John to his readers. *Signified* (*samaino*) means to make known or indicate; but, the Greek word implies difficulty in understanding Revelation since it is given in signs and strange imagery (“sign-ni-fied”).

1:2 *Who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.* John, referring to the entire book of Revelation (i.e., *all things that he saw*) affirms that what he wrote is his testimony to the authenticity of the word of God which was the testimony given him by Jesus Christ. It affirms that his testimony is true to everything he was told by Christ and to everything he saw (very strong statement to the authenticity and accuracy of the book of Revelation)

1:3 *Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keeps those things which are written in it, for the time is near.* This is the 1st of seven beatitudes scattered throughout the book (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14). A blessing or beatitude (*makarios*) is pronounced on the person who reads the words of this prophecy publicly to the church and upon those believers in the church who hear it and obey it. The context strongly suggests that “read” means to read aloud and in view of the context (7 letters sent to 7 churches), there is little doubt that reading it publicly to the churches is meant. Reading the Scriptures publicly was necessary in John’s day since the vast majority of people could not read. At first, the reader was chosen from the congregation. But, later the office of reader became an official position in the church. This beatitude essentially reproduces the words of Jesus in Luke 11:28: “*Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it”.* John expected the congregation to keep the words of Revelation’s prophecy. He considered what he wrote as authoritative Scripture on par with the prophetic books of the Old Testament. It was prophecy, but it possesses a moral authority that requires the obedient response of all believers. It requires that the book was meant to be understood and obeyed. Allegorists, idealists, and other interpreters ignore this truth.

*For the time is near,* adds incentive for immediate obedience. Although the beatitude is true in a general sense because it already is a promise of Scripture, here it is given added significance in view of the fact that “*the time is near”.* John is saying we should really take the prophecy to heart and consider its implications for our lives because its fulfillment is *“near*” or soon. We should live expectantly. This does not mean imminent. This should be understood in the same sense as the phrase in 1.1, i.e., *“things which must shortly come to pass”*. See the notes above.