

BE

VICTORIOUS

BE VICTORIOUS

IN CHRIST YOU ARE AN OVERCOMER

NT COMMENTARY

REVELATION

Warren W. Wiersbe

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*Dedicated to
our pastor and his wife,
Curt and Claudine Lehman,
whose ministry has helped many
to be overcomers*

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THE BIG IDEA

An Introduction to *Be Victorious*
by Ken Baugh

From 1994–2004 I lived in the Washington, D.C., area with my family, and not long ago I was talking with my wife, Susan, about all the terrible things our two girls witnessed between September 11, 2001 and November 2002. First, our girls witnessed the greatest attack on our country since Pearl Harbor, as terrorists crashed their hijacked airplanes into the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon. I remember seeing the smoke from the Pentagon through my office window at church. Then on October 26, 2001, we experienced the anthrax scare when a letter containing the toxic substance was opened by an aide of Senator Tom Daschle. On November 16 of the same year, another package of anthrax was discovered in the Sterling, Virginia, post office right down the street from our house. Then in October 2002 we witnessed the Beltway sniper shootings, which caused my oldest daughter's high school to cancel both the homecoming football game and dance out of fear of further attacks. I remember my wife and I going to the Tyson's Corner Mall one night during the three weeks of these attacks and people would actually run from the parking lot into the stores out of fear of being the sniper's next target. Needless to say, I don't have to explain the existence of evil to my girls. They are fully aware of its horror.

Do you ever wonder at the presence of such reckless hate in our world?

Where does all of this evil come from? I often ask myself. The Bible tells us that we live in the midst of two dimensions: a physical dimension and a spiritual dimension. The physical dimension is what we see all around us—it's the world we can taste, touch, and test in a laboratory. The spiritual dimension is something quite different. This is where we encounter powerful spiritual forces, both for good and for evil. The Bible tells us of two kinds of angels who live here: those who wish to protect and care for the children of God, and those whose sole purpose is to steal, kill, and destroy.

The Bible also tells us of one angel whom we should fear the most. He has been called by many different names throughout history and Scripture, each of which reveals another aspect of his evil nature. He is called: the Accuser of our brothers; the Angel of the abyss; Beelzebub; Belial; the Dragon; the Enemy; the Evil One; the Father of Lies; the God of this Age; a Guardian Cherub; a Liar; the Morning Star; a Murderer; the Prince of Demons; the Prince of this World; a Roaring Lion; the Ruler of the Kingdom of the Air; Satan; a Serpent; the Son of the Dawn; the Spirit who works in those who are disobedient; a Strong Man; and the Tempter. Most people refer to him as “the Devil,” and if you are a follower of Christ his goal is to destroy you.

The Bible tells us in 1 Peter 5:8, “Keep a cool head. Stay alert. The Devil is poised to pounce, and would like nothing better than to catch you napping. Keep your guard up” (MSG). Today, many people reduce the Devil to a scare tactic—a way of scaring people into being good—while others limit him to a logo on the side of a tuna fish can or an evil presence in a movie. But the Bible affirms both his presence and goal: to destroy people. Read the words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:12–13:

This is no afternoon athletic contest that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for

keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels. *Be prepared.* (MSG)

Peter warns us to *keep our guard up*, Paul tells us to *be prepared*. Both terms refer to military action, because we are in the midst of a spiritual war with the Devil and his angels. But this still doesn't tell us *why* the Devil and his angels cause such hate to exist in the world around us. Let me explain.

First, it is easy to see why the Devil hates us, because we are the only ones in all of God's creation who were created in His image and likeness (see Gen. 1:27). And since the Devil hates God, he hates human beings who were made in the image of God. Furthermore, back in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve rebelled against God, part of the consequence was that they relinquished their right to rule over the earth to the Devil. As such, today the Devil is the ruler of this world. In 1 John 5:19 (NIV) we read, "The whole world is under the control of the evil one." So the one who hates us most is also in charge of our world.

Therefore, all the evil that we see and experience in this world—terrorist attacks, the sniper shootings, murder, rape, war, hate, racism, and so on—are all due to the Devil and his angels. But do not despair, the Devil is on a leash and can only wreak so much havoc. A day is coming when Jesus will put a stop to his reign of terror. In fact, Jesus has already defeated the Devil at the cross (Col. 2:13–15), and now He is just waiting for the right time to come back and finish the job. The apostle Paul even affirms this in Romans 16:20 (NIV): "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."

Jesus came to earth over 2,000 years ago as the Lamb of God, but He is coming back again as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Jesus Christ is coming back! He is the rider on the white horse, the One who is faithful and true. When He comes, the armies of heaven will be following Him, and He

will destroy all those who oppose Him. In the end, Jesus will not only defeat the nations of the world whom the Devil has deceived, but will finally cast him into the lake of fire where he will remain for eternity. Here is the big idea of the book of Revelation: Jesus Christ is the Victor, Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and we as His followers will reign with Him forever in the New Heaven and the New Earth. I say, Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus, come—and come soon! Come and take your bride, the church, to be with you forever!

As a follower of Christ, you will read and study the book of Revelation, and you will want to shout in victory and fall at Jesus' feet in humble worship, for truly He alone is worthy to be praised!

Dr. Wiersbe's commentaries have been a source of guidance and strength to me over the many years that I have been a pastor. His unique style is not overly academic, yet theologically sound. He presents the deep truths of Scripture in a way that everyone can understand and apply. Whether you're a Bible scholar or a brand-new believer in Christ, you will benefit, as I have, from Warren's insights. With your Bible in one hand and Dr. Wiersbe's commentary in the other, you will be able to accurately unpack the deep truths of God's Word and learn how to apply them to your life.

Drink deeply, my friend, of the truths of God's Word, for in them you will find Jesus Christ, and there is freedom, peace, assurance, and joy.

—Ken Baugh
Pastor of Coast Hills Community Church
Aliso Viejo, California

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ has challenged and fascinated Bible students for centuries. In my own library, I have dozens of commentaries on this book, and no two authors completely agree on everything.

But this is not important. What is important is that we not miss the major message of Revelation: *the glorious victory of Jesus Christ over all His enemies*. It would be unfortunate for the Bible student to get so lost in the details of this stirring prophecy that he miss its tremendous and overarching truth: *In Jesus Christ, we are overcomers!*

John wrote this book to encourage first-century Christians who were experiencing great suffering. In every age of the church, Revelation has brought comfort and hope. Why? Because its symbols are timeless and may be understood by believers in any period of history; because its promises are eternal and may be trusted by all saints.

I believe that John prophesied about specific events and a specific sequence of events, but I do not want my personal interpretation of prophecy to detour you from the main message of the book: Jesus Christ is the Conqueror, and all believers share in His great victory.

Those students who wish to pursue a more detailed study of Revelation are encouraged to read the commentaries by Lehman Strauss (Loizeaux

Brothers), John F. Walvoord (Moody Press), W. A. Criswell (Zondervan), William R. Newell (Moody Press), and Leon Morris (Wm. B. Eerdmans).

—Warren W. Wiersbe

A SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Theme: Jesus Christ is Victor

Key verses: Revelation 1:19; 17:14

- I. The Things Which Thou Hast Seen (Revelation 1)
John's vision of the exalted Christ
- II. The Things Which Are (Revelation 2—3)
The messages to the seven churches
- III. The Things Which Shall Be Hereafter (Revelation 4—22)
 - A. The throne in heaven (Revelation 4—5)
 - B. The tribulation on earth (Revelation 6—19)
 1. The first half (Revelation 6—9)
 2. The middle (Revelation 10—14)
 3. The last half (Revelation 15—19)
 - C. The kingdom of Christ (Revelation 20)
 - D. The new heavens and earth (Revelation 21—22)

A VERY SPECIAL BOOK

(Revelation 1)

Don't ever prophesy," said American humorist Josh Billings, "for if you prophesy wrong, nobody will forget it; and if you prophesy right, nobody will remember it."

Over the centuries, prophecies have come and gone, and yet the book that the apostle John wrote near the close of the first century is with us still. I can recall reading it as a child and wondering what it was all about. Even today, with many years of concentrated study behind me, I am still fascinated by its message and mysteries.

In Revelation 1, John introduces his book and gives us the data essential for appreciating and understanding this prophecy.

THE TITLE (1:1A)

The word translated "revelation" simply means "unveiling." It gives us our English word *apocalypse* which, unfortunately, is today a synonym for chaos and catastrophe. The verb simply means "to uncover, to reveal, to make manifest." In this book, the Holy Spirit pulls back the curtain and gives us the privilege of seeing the glorified Christ in heaven and the fulfillment of His sovereign purposes in the world.

In other words, Revelation is an *open* book in which God reveals His plans

and purposes to His church. When Daniel finished writing his prophecy, he was instructed to “shut up the words, and seal the book” (Dan. 12:4), but John was given opposite instructions: “Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:10). Why? Since Calvary, the resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, God has ushered in the “last days” (Heb. 1:1–2) and is fulfilling His hidden purposes in this world. “The time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3; 22:10).

John’s prophecy is primarily the revelation of Jesus Christ, not the revelation of future events. You must not divorce the Person from the prophecy, for without the Person there could be no fulfillment of the prophecy. “He is not incidental to its action,” wrote Dr. Merrill Tenney. “He is its chief Subject.” In Revelation 1—3, Christ is seen as the exalted Priest-King ministering to the churches. In Revelation 4—5, He is seen in heaven as the glorified Lamb of God, reigning on the throne. In Revelation 6—18, Christ is the Judge of all the earth, and in Revelation 19, He returns to earth as the conquering King of Kings. The book closes with the heavenly Bridegroom ushering His bride, the church, into the glorious heavenly city.

Whatever you do as you study this book, get to know your Savior better.

THE AUTHOR (1:1B–2, 4, 9; 22:8)

The Holy Spirit used the apostle John to give us three kinds of inspired literature: the gospel of John, the three epistles, and the book of Revelation. His purposes may be outlined as follows:

<i>Gospel of John</i>	<i>Epistles</i>	<i>Revelation</i>
Believe, 20:31	Be sure, 1 John 5:13	Be ready, 22:20
Life received	Life revealed	Life rewarded
Salvation	Sanctification	Sovereignty
The Prophet	The Priest	The King

John wrote Revelation about AD 95, during the reign of the Roman

emperor Titus Flavius Domitian. The emperor had demanded that he be worshipped as “Lord and God,” and the refusal of the Christians to obey his edict led to severe persecution. Tradition says that it was Domitian who sent John to the Isle of Patmos, a Roman penal colony off the coast of Asia Minor. This being the location of John’s exile, perhaps it is not surprising that the word *sea* is found twenty-six times in his book.

During Christ’s earthly ministry, John and his brother James asked Jesus for special places of honor by His throne. The Lord told them that they would have to merit their thrones by sharing in His suffering. James was the first apostle martyred (Acts 12:1–2); John was the last of the apostles to die, but he suffered on Patmos before his death.

How did the Lord convey the contents of this book to His servant? According to Revelation 1:1–2, the Father gave the revelation to the Son, and the Son shared it with the apostle, using “His angel” as intermediary. Sometimes Christ Himself conveyed information to John (Rev. 1:10ff.); sometimes it was an elder (Rev. 7:13); and often it was an angel (Rev. 17:1; 19:9–10). Sometimes a “voice from heaven” told John what to say and do (Rev. 10:4). The book came from God to John, no matter what the various means of communication were, and it was all inspired by the Spirit.

The word *signified* (Rev. 1:1) is important; it means “to show by a sign.” In Revelation, the noun is translated as “sign” (Rev. 15:1), “wonder” (Rev. 12:1, 3), and “miracle” (Rev. 19:20). This is the same word used in the gospel of John for the miracles of Jesus Christ, for His miracles were events that carried a deeper spiritual message than simply the display of power. As you study Revelation, expect to encounter a great deal of symbolism, much of it related to the Old Testament.

Why did John use symbolism? For one thing, this kind of “spiritual code” is understood only by those who know Christ personally. If any Roman officers had tried to use Revelation as evidence against Christians,

the book would have been a puzzle and an enigma to them. But an even greater reason is that symbolism is not weakened by time. John was able to draw on the great “images” in God’s revelation and assemble them into an exciting drama that has encouraged persecuted and suffering saints for centuries. However, you must not conclude that John’s use of symbolism indicates that the events described are not real. They are real!

There is a third reason why John used symbolism: symbols not only convey information, but also impart values and arouse emotions. John could have written, “A dictator will rule the world,” but instead he described *a beast*. The symbol says much more than the mere title of “dictator.” Instead of explaining a world system, John simply introduced “Babylon the Great” and contrasted the “harlot” with the “bride.” The very name “Babylon” would convey deep spiritual truth to readers who knew the Old Testament.

In understanding John’s symbolism, however, we must be careful not to allow our imaginations to run wild. Biblical symbols are consistent with the whole of biblical revelation. Some symbols are explained (Rev. 1:20; 4:5; 5:8); others are understood from Old Testament symbolism (Rev. 2:7, 17; 4:7); and some symbols are not explained at all (the “white stone” in Rev. 2:17). Nearly 300 references to the Old Testament are found in Revelation! This means that we must anchor our interpretations to what God has already revealed, lest we misinterpret this important prophetic book.

THE READERS (1:3–4)

While the book was originally sent to seven actual local churches in Asia Minor, John makes it clear that *any* believer may read and profit from it (Rev. 1:3). In fact, God promised a special blessing to the one who would read the book and obey its message. (The verb *read* means “to read out loud.” Revelation was first read aloud in local church meetings.) The apostle Paul had sent letters to seven churches—Rome, Corinth, Galatia,

Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica—and now John sent one book to seven different churches. Early in the book, he had a special message from Christ to each church.

John did not send this book of prophecy to the assemblies in order to satisfy their curiosity about the future. God’s people were going through intense persecution, and they needed encouragement. As they heard this book, its message would give them strength and hope. But even more, its message would help them examine their own lives (and each local assembly) to determine those areas needing correction. They were not only to *hear* the Word, but they were also to keep it—that is, guard it as a treasure and practice what it said. The blessing would come, not just by *hearing*, but even more so by *doing* (see James 1:22–25).

It is worth noting that there are seven “beatitudes” in Revelation: 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14. The number seven is important in this book because it signifies fullness and completeness. In Revelation, God tells us how He is going to complete His great work and usher in His eternal kingdom. In Revelation, you will find seven seals (Rev. 5:1), seven trumpets (Rev. 8:6), seven vials (Rev. 16:1), seven stars (Rev. 1:16), and seven lampstands (Rev. 1:12, 20 NIV). Other “sevens” in this book will be discussed as we study.

The special messages to each of the seven churches are given in Revelation 2—3. Some students see in these seven churches a “panorama of church history,” from apostolic times (Ephesus) to the apostate days of the twentieth century (Laodicea). While these churches may *illustrate* various stages in the history of the church, that was probably not the main reason why these particular assemblies were selected. Instead, these letters remind us that the exalted Head of the church knows what is going on in each assembly, and that our relationship to Him and His Word determines the life and ministry of the local body.

Keep in mind that the churches in Asia Minor were facing persecution

and it was important that they be rightly related to the Lord and to each other. They are pictured as seven separate lampstands, each giving light in a dark world (Phil. 2:15; Matt. 5:14–16). The darker the day, the greater the light must shine; unfortunately, situations existed in at least five of these assemblies that required correction if their lights were to shine brightly. As you read Revelation 2–3, note that the Lord always reminded them of who He is, and encouraged them to be “overcomers.”

What’s more, the promise of Jesus Christ’s coming should be to all Christians at all times a motivation for obedience and consecration (Rev. 1:3, 7; 2:5, 25; 3:3, 11; 22:7, 12, 20; see also 1 John 1:1–33). No believer should study prophecy merely to satisfy his curiosity. When Daniel and John received God’s revelations of the future, both fell down as dead men (Dan. 10:7–10; Rev. 1:17). They were overwhelmed! We need to approach this book as wonderers and worshippers, not as academic students.

THE DEDICATION (1:4–6)

“If you don’t stop writing books,” a friend said to me, “you will run out of people to dedicate them to!” I appreciated the compliment, but I did not agree with the sentiment. John had no problem knowing to whom his book should be dedicated! But before he wrote the dedication, he reminded his readers that it was the Triune God who had saved them and would keep them as they faced the fiery trials of suffering.

God the Father is described as the Eternal One (see Rev. 1:8; 4:8). All history is part of His eternal plan, including the world’s persecution of the church. Next, the Holy Spirit is seen in His fullness, for there are not seven spirits, but one. The reference here is probably to Isaiah 11:2.

Finally, Jesus Christ is seen in His threefold office as Prophet (faithful Witness), Priest (First-begotten from the dead), and King (Prince of the kings of the earth). *First-begotten* does not mean “the first one raised from

the dead,” but “the highest of those raised from the dead.” *Firstborn* is a title of honor (see Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18).

But of the three Persons of the Trinity, it is to Jesus Christ alone that this book is dedicated. The reason? Because of what He has done for His people. To begin with, *He loves us* (present tense in most manuscripts). This parallels the emphasis in John’s gospel. He also *washed us from our sins*, or, as some texts read, *freed us* from our sins. This parallels the message of John’s epistles (see 1 John 1:5ff.). As a grand climax, Christ has *made us a kingdom of priests*, and this is the emphasis of Revelation. Today, Jesus Christ is a Priest-King like Melchizedek (Heb. 7 NIV), and we are seated with Him on His throne (Eph. 2:1–10).

In His love, God called Israel to be a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:1–6), but the Jews failed God and their kingdom was taken from them (Matt. 21:43). Today, God’s people (the church) are His kings and priests (1 Peter 2:1–10), exercising spiritual authority and serving God in this world.

THE THEME (1:7–8)

The overriding theme of the book of Revelation is the return of Jesus Christ to defeat all evil and to establish His reign. It is definitely a book of victory and His people are seen as “overcomers” (see Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7). In his first epistle, John also called God’s people “overcomers” (1 John 2:13–14; 4:4; 5:4–5). Through eyes of unbelief, Jesus Christ and His church are defeated in this world, but through eyes of faith, He and His people are the true victors. As Peter Marshall once said, “It is better to fail in a cause that will ultimately succeed than to succeed in a cause that will ultimately fail.”

The statement in Revelation 1:7, “Behold, he cometh with clouds,” describes our Lord’s return to *the earth*, and is amplified in Revelation 19:11ff. This is not the same as His return *in the air* to catch away His people

(1 Thess. 4:13–18; 1 Cor. 15:51ff.). When He comes to catch away (rapture) His church, He will come “as a thief” (Rev. 3:3; 16:15) and only those who are born again will see Him (1 John 3:1–3). The event described in Revelation 1:7 will be witnessed by the whole world, and especially by a repentant nation of Israel (see Dan. 7:13; Zech. 12:10–12). It will be public, not secret (Matt. 24:30–31), and will climax the tribulation period described in Revelation 6—19.

Godly Bible students have not always agreed as to the order of events leading up to the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom (Rev. 21—22). I personally believe that the next event on God’s calendar is the rapture, when Christ shall return in the air and take His church to glory. Christ’s promise to the church in Revelation 3:10–11 indicates that the church will not go through the tribulation, and this is further supported by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9–10. It is significant to me that there is no mention of the word *church* between Revelation 3:22 and 22:16.

After the church is raptured, the events depicted in Revelation 6—19 will occur: the tribulation, the rise of the “man of sin,” the great tribulation (the wrath of God) and the destruction of man-made world government, and then Christ’s return to the earth to set up His kingdom. Daniel indicates that this period of worldwide trouble will last seven years (Dan. 9:25–27). Throughout the book of Revelation, you will find measurements of time that coincide with this seven-year time span (Rev. 11:2–3; 12:6, 14; 13:5).

The titles given to God in Revelation 1:8 make it clear that He is certainly able to work out His divine purposes in human history. *Alpha* and *Omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; so, God is at the beginning of all things and also at their end. He is the eternal God (see Rev. 1:4), unlimited by time. He is also the Almighty, able to do anything. *Almighty* is a key name for God in Revelation (Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22).

God the Father is called “Alpha and Omega” in Revelation 1:8 and 21:6, but the name also is applied to His Son (Rev. 1:11; 22:13). This is a strong argument for the deity of Christ. Likewise, the title “the first and the last” goes back to Isaiah (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12–13) and is another proof that Jesus is God.

THE OCCASION (1:9–18)

This book was born out of John’s profound spiritual experience while exiled on Patmos.

What John heard (vv. 9–11). On the Lord’s Day, John heard a trumpet-like voice behind him. It was Jesus Christ speaking! As far as we know, the apostle had not heard his Lord’s voice since Christ had returned to heaven more than sixty years before. The Lord commissioned John to write this book and to send it to the seven churches He had selected. Later John would hear another trumpet-like voice, summoning him to heaven (Rev. 4:1). (Some students relate this to 1 Thess. 4:13–18 and see John’s “rapture” as a picture of the rapture of the church.)

What John saw (vv. 12–16). He saw a vision of the glorified Christ. Revelation 1:20 makes it clear that we must not interpret this vision literally, for it is made up of symbols. The seven lampstands represent the seven churches that would receive the book. Each local church is the bearer of God’s light in this dark world. Compare this vision with Daniel’s (Dan. 7:9–14).

Christ’s garments are those of a Judge-King, One with honor and authority. The white hair symbolizes His eternity as “the Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7:9, 13, 22). His eyes see all (Rev. 19:12; Heb. 4:12), enabling Him to judge righteously. His feet of burning brass also suggest judgment, since the brazen altar was the place where the fire consumed the sin offering. The Lord had come to judge the churches, and He would also judge the evil world system.

The “sound of many waters” (Rev. 1:15) makes me think of Niagara Falls! Perhaps two ideas are suggested here: (1) Christ gathers together all the “streams of revelation” and is the Father’s “last Word” to man (Heb. 1:1–3); (2) He speaks with power and authority and must be heard. The sword from His mouth certainly represents the living Word of God (Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17). He fights His enemies by using His Word (Rev. 2:16; 19:19–21).

Revelation 1:20 informs us that the seven stars in His hand represent the angels (*messengers*, see Luke 7:24 where the Greek word is so translated), or perhaps pastors, of the seven churches. God holds His servants and places them where He wants them to “shine” for Him. In Daniel 12:3, wise soul winners are compared to shining stars.

The Lord’s shining countenance reminds us of His transfiguration (Matt. 17:2) and also the prophecy of Malachi 4:2 (“the Sun of righteousness [shall] arise”). The sun is a familiar image of God in the Old Testament (Ps. 84:11), reminding us not only of blessing, but also of judgment. The sun can burn as well as bless!

This vision of Christ was totally different in appearance from the Savior that John knew “in the flesh” when He was ministering on earth. He was not the “gentle Jewish carpenter” that sentimentalists like to sing about. He is the risen, glorified, exalted Son of God, the Priest-King who has the authority to judge all men, beginning with His own people (1 Peter 4:17).

What John did (vv. 17–18) was predictable. He fell at the Lord’s feet as though he were dead! And this is the apostle who leaned on Jesus’ breast (John 13:23)! A vision of the exalted Christ can only produce awe and fear (Dan. 10:7–9). We need this attitude of respect today when so many believers speak and act with undue familiarity toward God. John’s response illustrates what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:16: “Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.” John no

longer “nestled” next to the Lord’s heart, relating to Him as he had done before.

The Lord reassured John by touching him and speaking to him (note Dan. 8:18; 9:21; 10:10, 16, 18). “Fear not!” is a great encouragement for any child of God. We need not fear life, because He is “The Living One.” We need not fear death, because He died and is alive, having conquered death. And we need not fear eternity because He holds the keys of hades (the world of the dead) and of death. The One with the keys is the One who has authority.

At the very beginning of this book, Jesus presented Himself to His people in majestic glory. What the church needs today is a new awareness of Christ and His glory. We need to see Him “high and lifted up” (Isa. 6:1). There is a dangerous absence of awe and worship in our assemblies today. We are boasting about standing on our own feet, instead of breaking and falling at His feet. For years, Evan Roberts prayed, “Bend me! Bend me!” and when God answered, the great Welsh Revival resulted.

THE OUTLINE (1:19)

To the best of my knowledge, the book of Revelation is the only book in the Bible that contains an inspired outline of the contents. “The things which thou hast seen” refers to the vision in Revelation 1. “The things which are” refers to Revelation 2—3, the special messages to the seven churches. “The things which shall be hereafter” covers the events described in Revelation 4—22. What John heard in Revelation 4:1 substantiates this interpretation.

In review, we can summarize the basic characteristics of this remarkable book as follows:

It is a Christ-centered book. To be sure, *all* Scripture speaks of the Savior, but the book of Revelation especially magnifies the greatness and

glory of Jesus Christ. The book is, after all, the revelation of Jesus Christ and not simply the revelation of future events.

It is an “open” book. John was told not to seal the book (Rev. 22:10) because God’s people need the message it contains. Revelation *can* be understood, despite the fact that it contains mysteries that may never be comprehended until we meet at the throne of God. John sent the book to the seven churches of Asia Minor with the expectation that, when it was read aloud by the messengers, the listening saints would understand enough of its truths so as to be greatly encouraged in their own difficult situations.

It is a book filled with symbols. Biblical symbols are timeless in their message and limitless in their content. For instance, the symbol of “Babylon” originates in Genesis 10—11, and its meaning grows as you trace it through Scripture, climaxing with Revelation 17—18. The same is true of the symbols of “the Lamb” and “the bride.” It is exciting to seek to penetrate deeper into the rich meanings that are conveyed by these symbols.

It is a book of prophecy. This is definitely stated in Revelation 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18–19; note also 10:11. The letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor dealt with immediate needs in those assemblies, needs that are still with us in churches today, but the rest of the book is devoted almost entirely to prophetic revelations. It was by seeing the victorious Christ presented that the persecuted Christians found encouragement for their difficult task of witnessing. When you have assurance for the future, you have stability in the present. John himself was suffering under the hand of Rome (Rev. 1:9), so the book was born out of affliction.

It is a book with a blessing. We have already noted the promise in Revelation 1:3, as well as the six other “beatitudes” scattered throughout the book. It is not enough simply to hear (or read) the book; we must respond to its message from the heart. We must take the message personally and say

a believing “Amen!” to what it says. (Note the many “Amens” in the book: Rev. 1:6–7, 18; 3:14; 5:14; 7:12; 19:4; 22:20–21.)

It is a relevant book. What John wrote about would “shortly come to pass” (Rev. 1:1) because “the time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3). (Note also Rev. 22:7, 10, 12, 20.) The word *shortly* does not mean “soon” or “immediately,” but “quickly, swiftly.” God does not measure time as we do (2 Peter 3:1–10). No one knows when our Lord shall return, but when He begins to open the seals of the scroll (Rev. 6:1ff.), events will occur with speed and without interruption.

It is a majestic book. Revelation is the book of “the throne,” for the word *throne* is found forty-six times throughout. This book magnifies the sovereignty of God. Christ is presented in His glory and dominion!

It is a universal book. John saw nations and peoples (Rev. 10:11; 11:9; 17:15) as part of God’s program. He also saw the throne room of heaven and heard voices from the ends of the universe!

It is a climactic book. Revelation is the climax of the Bible. All that began in Genesis will be completed and fulfilled in keeping with God’s sovereign will. He is “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending” (Rev. 1:8). What God starts, He finishes!

But before visiting the throne room of heaven, we must pause to listen to “the Man among the lampstands” as He reveals the personal needs in our churches and in our own hearts. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29)!

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What images come to your mind when you think of the book of Revelation or of the “apocalypse”?
2. Wiersbe writes: “We need to approach this book as wonderers and worshippers, not as academic students.” How can we best do that?
3. As you look at the church in the modern world, what evidence do you see that we function with Christ’s second coming in mind?
4. Revelation tells us, as Isaiah did, that Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. What does that mean in your everyday life?
5. The first church, addressed in Revelation 2, was accused of losing its first love. What kinds of evidence do you see in the church today that we face a similar scenario?

6. As you read the symbolic description of Christ in the first chapter of Revelation, what is the most striking attribute you see represented?

7. In what ways do you think God wants us to respond to Revelation?

8. What are some of your hopes and hesitations about Christ's "Second Coming"?

