

## **“Getting the Mail”– Revelation 1:1-3**

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com).]*

Take your Bible and meet with me in Revelation 1 (page \_\_\_ in the pew Bible).

Starting a new series is always exciting for a preacher and this one is no different. We just finished exploring some of the priorities that our church (and every church for that matter) should embrace according to the Bible. Now we will have the opportunity to see a series of letters that put on display seven churches and allow us to listen in on Jesus’ assessment of their conduct. That strikes me as pretty useful information to consider as we think about the kind of local church the Lord wants us to be. So this series is an attempt to explain these assessments and lay them over our lives and this church to ensure that we can hear what Jesus may be saying to us.

Lord willing, we will cover the first three chapters of Revelation, the final book of the Bible, though the letters are found only in chapters 2 and 3. Nevertheless, the opening chapter, it seems to me, is crucial not just for understanding the book as a whole but also these seven letters themselves. So for the first few weeks we will be diving into chapter 1, which is a pretty amazing chapter of God’s Word. Today we will look at the prologue, spanning just the first three verses.

I’ve been around the block a few times and I’ve preached and taught through most of Revelation in the past, so I’m fully aware that the thought of this study generates mixed emotions in the room. Some of you are very excited to study Revelation, but for the wrong reasons. You’re wanting to get your end-times charts and calendars in order so that you will be able to know the when and how of Christ’s return and the events that accompany it. If that’s you, you’re going to be disappointed. I don’t think that’s the point and message of this book (and certainly not the opening chapters), so that’s not where we’re heading.

Others of you within the sound of my voice come at this with some trepidation. The book frightens you because of all its foreign imagery and its unique style. Perhaps the book scares you because of how it’s been misused. It’s served as a “playground for the cults.”<sup>1</sup> It intimidates because of all the competing interpretations and timelines for the end of the world that, ironically, are in endless supply in our day. Maybe your background involves some teaching figure that explained the book with convincing precision, dates and all, based on their assessment and calculations of biblical numbers. But those dates are now history. Second and third attempts have proved every bit as misguided. You’ve long ago abandoned those figures, but they’re still telling a whole new crop of pupils how things are going to play out in the next few years. Look for them to get more and more vocal with a presidential election looming. So this has created cynicism in some of you. You avoid the book because of how it has been mishandled or because you have been given the impression that it’s too complex for someone like you. But that’s just not true.

These mixed emotions are as tragic as they are real. Yet despite these sentiments, we can’t seem to shake the book, can we? Almost instinctively we sense that Revelation contains something valuable that we need to unearth, even if we are too afraid to dig. It’s the grand finale of the biblical narrative. It’s what James Hamilton described as “the exclamation point at the end of the sentence that is the Bible.”<sup>2</sup> You wouldn’t invest a lifetime in reading any other book and then neglect to consider how it ends. So why would you with the Bible? The ending helps make sense out of everything to its left. And the prologue that begins the book helps us sort out what comes to its right.

Our time today will be, more or less, an introduction to the book of Revelation. It may be a little more dense than some of you would prefer, but others of you are already salivating at the mouth because this is right up your alley. It's useful for us all though.

So then, let's begin with the most important thing and listen to the Word of God, beginning in verse 1...

*“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. <sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.” (Revelation 1:1-3)*

There is a certain rhythm to Revelation. It was meant to be read aloud and its cadence is easier to detect when it is. You already start to sense some of its rhythm here. 1, 2, 3...1, 2, 3...1, 2, 3. God gave...The Son made known...John bore witness. 1, 2, 3. What did John bear witness to? The Word of God...the Testimony of Jesus...All that he saw. 1, 2, 3. Who is described as blessed here? Those who read...those who hear...those who keep.<sup>3</sup> 1, 2, 3...1, 2, 3...Do you hear the balance and flow of this rhythm?

With that meter as our backdrop, we can begin to understand what this book is about. It's not about cracking some secret code. It's meant to be a blessing, an encouragement. Does that surprise you? But to glean from its pages the right stuff, we have to ask the right questions. The kind of literature you are reading shapes how you read it. Therefore, the question that confronts us at the outset is “what kind of book is this?” That may not have been your first question, but its very important and how you answer it will greatly influence how you interpret the book.

Some have read the book of Revelation as one big allegory that provides an overview of church history, stretching from the first century of John's day to the end of the world.<sup>4</sup> In other words, it's “history written in advance.”<sup>5</sup> This is sometimes referred to as the “historicist” approach. While it is true that the book has something to say about church history, this view does have some major weaknesses. It's not a coincidence that every generation seems to assume that they are living in the final days before Jesus' return and so the timelines that have been offered are as vast as are the generations who had the means to write them. If you view the book as a map to church history, then the divisions you make in the modern church are going to look quite different than the way the medieval church divided up the book. This should give us some pause, unless we are to assume that our generation finally got it right (which, as it turns out, seems to be the assumption of every generation). A second problem with this view is that it almost always understands the book through the lenses of Western newspaper headlines, which tends to minimize the place of Christians in locations like Africa and Asia and, at this point in history, the majority Christian world. It's as though we have assumed we will be the center of history so the events that seem significant to us must mark out the end. In other words, we interpret the book only through the history we are familiar with, while neglecting the vast majority of history that is familiar to the rest of the world. But the biggest problem with this view is that it basically makes most of Revelation irrelevant to any generation except the final one. But you must realize that the original readers of this book found it very meaningful to their lives and situations.<sup>6</sup> Our interpretation shouldn't empty out the meaning for the original audience, but should be compatible with it and, indeed, shaped by it.

Another common approach in our day, usually referred to as a “futurist” approach, is to assume that the book is not so much predicting the unfolding of church history as a whole, but rather the final years before the end of the world. In other words, Revelation becomes a blueprint for the end. This was the approach popularized by Hal Lindsey in the 70s and more recently by a series of fictional(!) books you've probably never heard of called, *Left Behind*. Yet this approach suffers from the same problems of the last one. It

invariably singles out our generation as *the* generation and our history as *the* history that unlocks the text, while ignoring the countless Christians who have benefited from this book for the past two millennia. So they were wrong to interpret, for example, the image of a swarm of locusts we find in Revelation in light of Joel chapter 1, because *clearly* it's referring to the new helicopters the Russians have. Clearly. (not really). Of course, not all futurists would make claims like this. But you see the problem? It's not that Revelation doesn't address the future. It does! I'm simply saying that it does a lot more than that and has been doing a lot more than that for a couple thousand years and we are *not* the first generation to be able to benefit from and grasp the meaning of this book. Indeed, the verses we just read suggest that the book is describing what "*must soon take place*" because "*the time is near,*" from the perspective of the original first-century audience.

Then there are those who argue not that most of the book awaits some future fulfillment, but that most of the book has already been fulfilled in the history of the early church. Those who interpret Revelation like this are usually referred to as "Preterists," from the Latin word *praeter* ("past"). The strength of this view is that it appreciates the historical context of the first-century world, which is absolutely crucial for understanding many of the images and symbols of the book. The preterists' contention that the book must have made sense to the original audience is a good one. Still, I don't think the first century readers would have interpreted things like great white throne judgment of chapter 20 or the arrival of the holy city in chapters 21 and 22 as being fulfilled in their own day.

So while all of these approaches (and a couple others we don't have time to mention)<sup>7</sup> have some value and something to offer us, my own approach is more eclectic. Some elements of the book are clearly future referring. Some are past. Some probably typify characteristics of God's work and judgment in every age. There is room for charitable differences of opinion. But the overall message of the book is clear enough—The Lamb Wins!—and that has been a message that has spoken to every generation of Christians and needs to get in our bones as well.<sup>8</sup>

With that in mind, let me note a three things (1...2...3) regarding what Revelation *is* that we can pick up from the opening verses. First of all...

### **Revelation Is a Letter**

I say a (singular) letter because, even though chapter two and three contain seven letters to churches in Asia Minor, the whole book is meant to be one single letter. This is a little more obvious in the next verses, which communicate a very typical introduction for an ancient letter—"*John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace...*" That's the typical way a letter begins in antiquity. The writer identifies himself as the sender, his intended recipients, and some sort of blessing or prayer. The ending is also very typical for an ancient letter.

Since Revelation is a letter, it has a historical setting. The more about that historical setting the better—especially as it relates to the author, the audience, and the situation that is being addressed. The author is identified as "*John*" in verses 1 and 4. Not much is said about him in these verses, except that he was a "*servant*" of Christ (1:1). In verse 9, we learn that he was exiled on an Island called Patmos, "*on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*" While John is a common name, the assumption throughout most of church history has been that this is the Apostle John and I've seen nothing that would lead me to abandon that conclusion. He was the "beloved" disciple of Jesus and the son of Zebedee. At this point he is an old man and in all likelihood the only surviving Apostle of Jesus. We will say more about his circumstances in a later sermon.

Notice though the five links in the revelatory chain that is described in the first verse. This "*Revelation*" is said to have come from (1) God the Father, who passed it along to (2) Jesus, who sent (3) an angel to

make it known to (4) John, who in turn bore witness to (5) God's servants. So ultimately the real return address is God Himself and a lot of steps were involved so that you could hear its truth. Let that sink in.

But before it came to us it came originally to seven churches located in seven cities—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These cities are located in modern day Turkey. We will become more acquainted with these cities when we get to the next couple chapters, but the combination of them shows that the letter was a circular letter that made the rounds to these various churches (and probably several others in the region). The fact that he address the letter to *seven* churches when several other churches were present in the same region may also suggest, given the common symbolic use of numbers like seven in the book, that the contents are meant for the complete church of God, which these seven real churches are representative of.<sup>9</sup> The refrain we are going to hear again and again in the next couple chapters—“*He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)—may also suggest the significance of this letter for the universal Church.

For those of you studying 1 Peter in the women's group on Wednesdays, this same area is among those that Peter wrote his letter to as well. We know that they were experiencing persecution (as evidenced in both Revelation and 1 Peter), though we don't know to what degree. The fact that they were experiencing some pressure for their faith and that John is the author of this letter, suggests dating the letter to the time when Domitian was the Caesar in Rome (late first century). Persecution toward Christians predates Domitian (e.g., Nero), but it wasn't far reaching until his reign. Domitian was a bad dude. Though physically unimpressive, he became a tyrant. He left his brother to die, he killed his own niece after he married her, and was known for putting to death people who made fun of him.<sup>10</sup> There was a cult that demanded that he be worshiped and that the people confess him as “Lord and God.” Obviously that didn't sit well with Christians. No wonder John was exiled. Even the Romans hated him. He was eventually murdered by some of elite Romans in his own circle.

We will talk more about the kinds of pressures and persecutions that these churches were facing in a later sermon, but suffice it to say that the letter is addressing the situation that emerges when a guy like that is on the throne. It was meant to encourage these Christians and strengthen them for what they were facing or what they were about to face. And while we may not be facing the kinds of persecutions and pressures that these Christians were facing, there is a cost for following Jesus faithfully in our day as well. When that check comes due we too can discover this book to be just as relevant and encouraging as it was to the original audience. We too need to see how God has blessed us when by the world's standards and in their hands we appear to be anything but blessed.

Here is the second thing I want us to understand about this letter...

### **Revelation Is an Apocalypse**

Revelation is not just a letter. It's an apocalyptic letter. That's a big word, so let me explain. The very first word in the original language is *apocalupsis*, from which we derive English terms like “Apocalypse” or “apocalyptic.” When I hear politician throw around terms like this, as I did on the news just yesterday, it's no wonder why there is so much confusion about the meaning of the word.

What do you think of when you hear the word “apocalypse”? Some terrifying or destructive event? A Martin Sheen movie? The Greek word here means to “make known,” “unveil,” or “disclose,” hence the translation “Revelation” in verse 1, which serves as both the title and content of the book. The picture behind the word is one of uncovering, like you are pulling back the curtain and allowing someone to see things as they really are.<sup>11</sup> That's what happens in this book.

While the form of the book of Revelation seems strange to us, with all its weird symbols and images, it was actually a well known kind of literature in John's day among both Jews and Christians. So what were they used to seeing in apocalyptic literature? A couple former professors note that most of this literature involves some kind of "divine revelation, usually [given] through a heavenly intermediary [e.g., an angel<sup>12</sup>], to some well-known figure [e.g., John], in which God promises to intervene in human history and overthrow evil empires and establish his kingdom."<sup>13</sup> That's exactly what we find in the book of Revelation. To these features I would add that apocalyptic literature is known for being highly symbolic and prophetic.<sup>14</sup> Another former professor, Gregory Beale, describes it as "a heightened form of prophecy," which is confirmed when it's called a "prophecy" in verse 3 and again in the final chapter (22:7).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, apocalyptic literature has a reputation for not being very linear, in other words it jumps around and, in a cyclical fashion, it often tells us what it's already told us in a different way.<sup>16</sup> And finally, apocalyptic always has an ethical dimension. It's trying to influence our behavior and perspective. All of these features of apocalyptic literature may strike us as an odd (who would write like this?), but it would have been familiar to them.<sup>17</sup>

Some of you are wondering, why are we talking about this? Here's why—if you don't recognize the kind of literature you are reading, then you may not read it in the right way. When we realize that Revelation is part of this apocalyptic genre, then it cautions us to read it certain ways and not in others. Here are a handful of examples:

#### *We Should Resist the Urge to Read in an Overly Linear Way*

Don't be surprised if when reading Revelation you get the sense that it's repeating itself or describing something again from a different angle. That's typical of the apocalyptic. And that basically makes it impossible to read it as a linear timeline of events, from start to finish.

#### *We Should Resist the Urge to Read in an Overly Literal Way*

In other words, "Take Revelation seriously, but don't always take it literally."<sup>18</sup> Since apocalyptic literature is known for its symbolism, we should expect a good deal of symbols to come our way in Revelation. And we find no shortage of them. In fact, he highlights this in verse 1. In the ESV, it says "*He made it known...*" Do you see that? The verb that stands behind that is an interesting word that means to communicate in signs. In the New Testament there is another book called John, which has the same author as Revelation. If you recall in that book, John very often refers to certain miracles of Jesus as "signs." Why? Because the miracle was not just a supernatural event but also something that pointed to or represented another reality about Jesus or His Kingdom. Well, that same word for "sign" has a verbal form and that's the word that John uses in Revelation 1:1. The King James Version helps us see the connection a little more clearly with the translation "signify." How is the Revelation being disclosed? Through signs or symbols. It's "sign-i-fied." So he has told us in the very first verse to expect signs, expect symbols, pointers to other realities. As Paul Spilsbury has written: "[T]o read Revelation as a book that uses symbolic language is to read it precisely as it demands to be read. There is no better way to acknowledge and respect the book's authority than that."<sup>19</sup>

Yet for some odd reason, there are many who insist of taking so many of these signs literally. That betrays a failure to understand the nature of apocalyptic literature and leads to some strange interpretations. A general rule of thumb to follow when you are reading most literature in the Bible is to read it literally unless there is some strong indication in the context that suggests the author intends you to read it symbolically. Revelation is the exception. Basically the reverse applies. Generally speaking John intends us to read the contents of the vision symbolically unless there is some strong indication in the context that he intends you to take it literally.<sup>20</sup> Does that make sense?

And for what it's worth, that is especially true with numbers. Apocalyptic literature is notorious for using numbers in a very symbolic way. This is especially true if the number is 3, 4, 7, 10, 12, or some factor of any of those highly symbolic numbers.<sup>21</sup> We don't have time to get into all that yet, but basically that is almost every number we find in Revelation. True story. So just by virtue of the kind of literature this is when I see a number my default is to assume it's symbolic of something unless the context points in another direction.<sup>22</sup>

Now you may be wondering, why communicate in symbols and not just spell things out clearly? That's complex question. Part of the answer is, no doubt, that John is recording "*all that he saw*" (1:2) and probably just as he saw it. But there could be other reasons that communicating through symbols has distinct advantages. For example, symbols can be used to communicate truth to one audience while concealing it to another. So John, through these symbols, can communicate certain things to Christians who are familiar with certain images, while at the same time creating a puzzle or enigma to a Roman officer seeking to persecute God's people. Another benefit of symbols is that they can vividly communicate information in emotional and memorable ways. These are just a couple of examples.

### *We Should Resist the Urge to Read as Chronological Snobs*

I already touched on this, but here's what I mean. As with any biblical text, we need to start with the question "what did this mean to the original audience?" before we jump to "what does this mean to me?" The meaning doesn't change from one generation to the next, even if the particulars of the applications do. If you find that all of your interpretations have everything to do with you and would have been completely meaningless to John's original audience, then you are missing the meaning in what John wrote. You are basically assuming that the text would have been meaningless to Christians for hundreds of years until our time. That's has a flavor of arrogance to it (does it not?) and is sometimes called "chronological snobbery."

What did John mean when he wrote this? That's the kind of question we need to ask. So many people interpret this book in ways that only make sense if you live in this moment. "*All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness...*" (2 Timothy 3:16). That's not just true for our generation. That's been true through the ages. So if your interpretation draws out meaning that John himself wouldn't recognize in his day, then you probably need to have a second look. And when you do, you need to have your Old Testament open, because there are hundreds of Old Testament references echoed in Revelation. If you can detect these, that more than anything else, will help you make sense out of the strange symbols and happenings in the book. As Warren Wiersbe advises, "we must anchor our interpretation in what God has already revealed..."<sup>23</sup> If you are looking for a place to start, I'd recommend Exodus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Zechariah. A thorough knowledge of these books will tune your ear to the subtleties of John's writing.

### *We Should Resist a Revelation-Made-Easy Approach and Read Instead with Humility*

One of the most influential books God has used in my life is called *Grasping God's Word*, by Scott Duvall and Daniel Hays. In that book, they write,

"We should resist 'Revelation-made-easy' approaches. Revelation is not easy! people who must satisfy their curiosity or people who are unwilling to live with any uncertainty are those most likely to read into Revelation things that are not there. Beware of interpreters who appear to have all the answers to even the smallest of questions. 'Experts' who claim absolute knowledge about every minute detail of Revelation should be held in suspicion. Reading with a humble mind means that we are willing to admit that our interpretation could be wrong and to change our view when the biblical evidence points in a different direction."<sup>24</sup>

That's really good advice that I hope we can take to heart. I can tell you what has really impressed upon me the importance of reading Revelation with humility is the schooling God, in His grace, has given me access to. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to study under many of the academic heavyweights that have written some of the most sought after commentaries and writings on the end times in our day. I'm not going to name drop. The point I'm making is that it has been humbling to see how, while they agree on the core things, they land in different places when it comes to certain debates associated with the study of Revelation—like the nature of the Millennium, the timing of the rapture, the length of the tribulation, are we in it now, the identity of the 144,000, and on and on... They are all godly and faithful interpreters who come at the text with the same presuppositions and yet their interpretations have taken them, in some cases, in very different directions. Not on anything core. But on some of the debated matters of this book.

When I see that it doesn't prevent me from arriving at an interpretation and having a thought out opinion, but it does lead to me sketching out those opinions in pencil and not holding my views on the debated, non-core, matters too dogmatically. As I tell you often, I don't care if you agree with me on every debate, just that you are arriving at your conclusion because you believe that's where the texts leads (not where you want the text to lead or where some fiction book tells you the text leads). Godly men and women have had different interpretations of certain texts we find in this book. That should keep us humble and hungry. That should keep us in the Word.

*We Should Read with Our Imaginations and Not Just Our Intellects*

Now certainly we don't want our imaginations to run wild. But if you read Revelation in a way that is constantly parsing the language and looking for deeper meaning and analyzing the allusions and never just sitting back and imagining what John is describing, you're going to miss something significant. You're going to miss the powerful and emotive effect of Revelation. It's supposed to move you. It's supposed to make you say "wow" and "oh no" and "how long?" and "holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty" and fall on your face before God in worship! It should grip and affect you. So you have to put your commentaries, books, calculators, and charts aside at some point and just imagine the glory of the slaughtered Lamb seated on the throne and the dramatic victory that He brings to His people. You have marvel at His majesty. You have to worship with the angels in the book and fall down with those uncoordinated elders who fall on their faces before the beauty of God every time they're mentioned it seems. What a legacy! Seriously. Let's be known for that!

Sometimes you just need to sit back and read, imagine and not over-analyze. We need an "informed imagination."<sup>25</sup> Let the book take you to another world like a good movie does in a theater. When I went to see Star Wars lately, that's what happened for a moment. It's like I forgot that I wasn't actually "in a galaxy far, far away." That's the power of a good movie. It stirs up the senses. Revelation can have a similar impact on us, but there is a significant difference. Unlike the movies, when John is pulling back the curtain, he's not showing you a land of fantasy. You're actually beholding reality. The way things truly are. Jesus is exalted and victorious. The saints are sealed. He walks among the churches, even the messed up ones. He holds us in His hands. The Lamb wins! It may not look like that in the world, but the world is not the "real world." John is pulling back the curtain so we can see how things actually are.

As one writer describes,

"One big difference between Revelation's world and the world of movies is that Revelation wants us to take its world to be even more real than the one we commonly refer to as 'the real world.' In fact, Revelation is out to undermine our confidence in the evidence of our own eyes. It wants us to leave behind, once and for all, the idea that what we can see with our eyes and hear with our ears is

all there is. For Revelation, that is only a small part of a much bigger whole. And until we can grasp that larger whole and understand how it relates to our experience, we will not be able to understand the true nature and meaning of what we experience around us.”<sup>26</sup>

Let me close by just mentioning one final aspect of this book...

### **Revelation Is Meant to Be a Blessing**

Look again at verse 3—“*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.*”

Lord willing, when we gather next Sunday I want to begin showing you why this book that so many of you are intimidated by can be such a blessing and source of encouragement in your life. We will look at the significance of the fact that this is not just a “revelation” but a “revelation of *Christ*.” And we will consider what John is getting at when he refers to that which “*must soon take place*” (1:1) and claims that “*the time is near*” (1:3). I’m not dodging those matters. We will come to them in due course.

So come next week. Bring friends. Seriously, bring friends. You’re going to like this series.

Let’s pray...

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bewes, *The Lamb Wins!: A Guided Tour Through the Book of Revelation* (Glasgow: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 13.

<sup>2</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches* (Preaching the Word; Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 31

<sup>3</sup> Voddie Baucham, “Prologue: The Blessing of Revelation,” a sermon preached that can be found on monergism.com.

<sup>4</sup> This has been argued at least since the fourteenth-century writer Nicolas of Lyra. Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Bewes, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Spilsbury, *The Throne, the Lamb and the Dragon: A Reader’s Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 19-20.



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<sup>7</sup> For example, the “Idealist” approach, which Craig Keener describes like this: “The Idealist approach find timeless principles in Revelation. Everyone who preaches from the book will affirm this general conviction, but in the view’s most extreme form it simultaneously denies any specific historical or future meaning for the book. As Tenney observes, to its principles ‘almost any interpreter of Revelation could give assent regardless of the school to which he belongs. The idealist view does contain much that is true. Its flaw is not so much in what it affirms as in what it denies.’ Was Revelation teaching merely timeless general principles. With no concern for pressing issues at hand in seven churches?” Keener, 27. Richard Bewes characterizes the idealist sentiment as follows: “Look, we may not understand all the symbols and imagery of the Revelation; let it be enough that it is wonderfully symbolic of the victory that lies at the heart of Christianity. Be encouraged, but don’t worry too much about the details.” Bewes, 16.

<sup>8</sup> This is why I absolutely love the title of Bewes’ book.

<sup>9</sup> Spilsbury, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Hamilton, 29-30.

<sup>11</sup> “Apocalyptic writing takes you behind the scenes and reveals the unseen principles that affect history—and the future. It brings hope during times of crisis; it shows the end from the beginning.” Bewes, 14.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., 1 Enoch 1:2; 72:1; 74:2; 75:3; Jub. 1:27; 2:1; 32:21; 4 Ezra 4:1; 3 Bar. 1:8; 5:1; 6:1. Cf. James C. VanderKam, “The Putative Author of the Book of Jubilees,” *JSS* 26 (Autumn 1981): 209-17.

<sup>13</sup> J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 287.

<sup>14</sup> Not only “prophetic” in the sense of being predictive, but also in the sense of proclaiming God’s truth. In this sense the apocalyptic nature of Revelation flows naturally out of the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. As Beale explains, “Prophecy in the OT generally had two time references: it was a forth-telling of God’s word for His people in the present, and a foretelling of events to happen in the future. Revelation maintains these two features of prophecy.” Gregory K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 37.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>16</sup> Spilsbury, 35.

<sup>17</sup> For more on this see Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 5-12. Duvall and Hays note, “Most scholars believe that apocalyptic grew out of Hebrew prophecy and actually represents an intensified form of prophecy written during a time of crisis. We see other examples of apocalyptic literature in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, and in noncanonical Jewish writings such as *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*. Although apocalyptic was well known to people living from about 200 B.C. to A.D. 200, we are not as familiar with it in our day. We catch a glimpse of apocalyptic in certain movies and political cartoons, but even then the comparison leaves something to be desired.” Duvall and Hays, 287.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>19</sup> Spilsbury, 30.

<sup>20</sup> “Some people immediately become uncomfortable with talk about metaphors and images in Revelation, as if this somehow undermines the authority of the book. ‘Don’t you believe it is literal?’ they might ask. But none of us believes that the Lord Jesus is *literally* a lamb, least of all a lamb with seven eyes! Yet this is how Jesus is depicted in Revelation. God (who is Spirit) does not literally sit on a throne, as depicted in chapter 4, and God’s ‘seven spirits’ are a symbolic way of referring to the perfection of God’s one Spirit. This general point applies across the board to all the personalities, creatures, actions and events depicted in Revelation. Whether it is stars falling from heaven or armies of locusts invading the earth, we are dealing with symbols and metaphors.” *Ibid.*, 29-30. I generally agree with this sentiment, but I would not rule out fulfillments that can play out in surprisingly literal ways, as we see in some OT prophecies with shocking NT fulfillments. We cannot always know how something is to be fulfilled. But insisting on a literal interpretation of many of the images found in Revelation strikes me as incredibly unlikely given the genre.

<sup>21</sup> Eckhard Schnabel, *40 Questions about the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 61-64.

<sup>22</sup> I agree with Spilsbury here again, “Once we realize that Revelation uses numbers and images in this way, we cannot arbitrarily switch back and forth between symbolic and literal readings of the text. That would get us hopelessly confused, and confusion is what we are trying to avoid.” Spilsbury, 32.

<sup>23</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Victorious: In Christ You Are an Overcomer* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1885), 14.

<sup>24</sup> Duvall and Hays, 289.

<sup>25</sup> Spilsbury, 36.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.