

Easter 2019

Text

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, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. 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.

Revelation 1:1-3

Topic

The apostle John begins the Revelation of Jesus Christ by announcing that “the time is near”

Title

“O Brothers, Near Art Thou”

I love Easter eggs.

- Not the bunny kind; those are for the kiddos. Unless they have money in them.
- Not the Cadbury kind; although those are the best.

I mean the big screen kind.

They are messages, or characters, or images, hidden in the background of movies. They are called Easter eggs because you have to hunt in order to find them.

They have become prolific in feature films. For example: The number, A113, appears somewhere in almost every Pixar film.

A113 is a classroom number at the California Institute of Arts. It was the classroom for first year graphic design and character animation, where many of the animators at Pixar and Disney, and several other studios, discovered and mastered their craft.

Other Pixar Easter eggs:

- In one scene during *Toy Story 3*, a Nemo sticker can be seen on the side of Andy's dresser.
- When Boo returns home at the end of *Monsters, Inc.*, she gives Sulley a doll of Jessie from *Toy Story 2*.
- Supervillain Bomb Voyage from *The Incredibles* appears in the background of *Ratatouille* as a mime.

- As a young boy waits in the dentist's office in *Finding Nemo*, he is reading a Mr. Incredible comic.

Pixar isn't the only studio hiding Easter eggs:

- *Raiders of the Lost Ark* has lots of Easter eggs and there are web pages dedicated to showing you where they are. At one point Indiana Jones is holding up a gold artifact, and the hieroglyphs on it show both C3PO and R2-D2.
- Sticking with *Star Wars* - In Episode 1 the action starts with a council meeting. The pods are discussing the state of the federation. If you pause the scene and scan around, in one of the pods you can see E.T. and his family.

I'm not sure I'd call them Easter eggs, but scattered throughout the Revelation of Jesus Christ are approximately 550 references to future events that are from the Old Testament.

If you are familiar with the Old Testament, as you are reading the Revelation, you'll recognize them.

I mentioned that to Geno the other day, and he commented that the Revelation is like a codebook. That got me thinking.

You've maybe heard, from a person or from a pulpit, that the Revelation is impossible to understand. They approach it as an enigma - as something strange and mysterious.

It **is** an enigma - *but not that kind*. In World War 2, the German military command used a machine to encode strategic messages. Films like *U-571* and *The Imitation Game* dramatized the capture and decoding of the machine. It was called 'the enigma.'

The Revelation of Jesus Christ - *that is the kind of enigma it is*. It is a decoder of these many familiar Old Testament references.

One of the scholars we trust, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, has this to say about the value of the Revelation:

The Old Testament prophecies are scattered throughout the Books of Moses and the various Prophets and Writings.

It would have been impossible to put these prophecies into any chronological sequence of events. The value of the Book of Revelation is not that it provides a lot of new information, but rather that it takes the scattered Old Testament prophecies and puts them in chronological order so that the sequence of events may be determined. This book provides a framework for the understanding of the order and the sequence of events found in the Old Testament prophecies.

The first phrase, from which we derive the book's title, tells you it is designed to *reveal*, not *conceal*:

Revelation 1:1 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,

"Revelation" is the Greek word *apokalupsis* from where we get our word *apocalypse*.

Pop culture has us thinking that the apocalypse is some horrifying, hopeless, dystopian future.

The popular ‘zombie apocalypse’ is representative of this use of the word. Think *The Walking Dead*, or *World War Z*.

Those dramas are just the tip of a very deep iceberg. Hollywood has been churning out apocalyptic films at an unprecedented rate.

Educational television has the apocalypse on its mind, too. *The Discovery Channel* has a post-apocalyptic reality show, *The Colony*, in which contestants must survive a dystopian scenario.

Nothing could be farther from the reality. While they get the word “apocalypse” from the Bible, they are ignorant of its true meaning, and of the future.

Apocalypse means *an uncovering* or *an unveiling*. It is the uncovering, the unveiling, of Jesus Christ as the coming King - coming to crush the devil and establish a kingdom on earth, then on into eternity.

The Revelation isn’t the story of the end of humanity. It is the forecast for the end of sin, Satan, and death.

Often the book is called Revelations, with an 's' at the end. While it shows many things, it is meant to be read as revealing **one** Person - Jesus. We're to see Him on every page.

What about when stars are falling from Heaven, and the sun is scorching humans? In those and all the other disasters we see the grace of God's wrath against sin, still giving lost sinners opportunity to be saved by Jesus.

By the way: It may seem obvious, but since this is Easter Sunday I'll go ahead and point it out. This book presents Jesus as risen from the dead, as very much alive and glorified. It announces that "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15).

God the Father "gave" Jesus this unveiling. Jesus Christ is God, and equal with God, but in terms of the plan of salvation, He remains subordinate to His Father's will.

Jesus then gave the unveiling of Himself to an unnamed angel, who then gave it to John, for him to write it down for us.

If that sounds like what we call “the telephone game,” where the message gets messed-up as it goes from person-to-person - **it didn't**. Twice in the book it declares, “these words are faithful and true” (21:5 & 22:6). The Bible - it was God-breathed, and it remains reliable, the Word of God.

This unveiling is to "show His servants." The Lord wants us to see Him, as He is now in Heaven, and as He will be at His Second Coming.

It's as if He is saying, "Look at Me!"

Where are you looking, in various areas of your life, for help? Or for hope? Or for satisfaction? Or for purpose? Or for acknowledgement?

Jesus says, "Turn away from anyone, or anything, else; *turn and look at Me.*"

"The things which must shortly take place" is often misunderstood to mean that all the prophecies of the book were to be fulfilled, and have been fulfilled, soon after they were given.

"Shortly" is *en tachei* meaning *quickly* or *suddenly*. Our word tachometer comes from it. When you floor your accelerator pedal the tachometer redlines. In the context of end times events it means that once these events begin it will be pedal-to-the-metal. It doesn't mean they were going to happen soon.

"Signified" means through signs or symbols. Stop and think about that for a moment. We use signs and symbols whenever we want to be clear. Whenever we don't want to be misunderstood. Signs and symbols are better than language because they are universal. It doesn't matter what language you speak when it comes to a symbol on a sign.

How are we to interpret the signage in the Revelation?

1. First, as we already noted, you will encounter signs and symbols that were already defined by their use in the Old Testament. For example: There is a strange scene in chapter twelve involving “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars” (verse one). You recognize it from the very first book of the Bible, Genesis, where, in chapter thirty-seven, it is identified as the twelve tribes of Israel (v9).
2. Second, quite often when you encounter a sign or symbol in the Revelation, if you’ll read a little further, **you are told what it means**. In this very chapter of the Revelation, John sees seven stars and seven gold lamp stands (v7 & 16). Almost immediately you're told, “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches” (v20).

Third: Do you remember learning how to outline something you had written? You did it to give the reader a road map to help him or her. Jesus gave us an outline to follow for reading the entire book:

Revelation 1:19 Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.

1. "Write the things which you have seen." In verse twelve of chapter one, John said "I turned," and he described what he saw. John saw the risen Lord. Chapter one is "the things which you have seen."
2. In chapters two and three Jesus dictates seven letters to seven churches. The seven churches are "the things which are." We say that they also refer to the entire church age because each of them ends by saying to all Christians, "he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." That's all churches, throughout this age.
3. Then from chapters four through the end of the book we read about "the things which will take place after this." You see - in proper chronological order - the church resurrected and raptured into Heaven; the seven years of the Great Tribulation; the Battle of Armageddon; the Second Coming of Jesus; the one-thousand year reign of Jesus on the earth (called the

Millennium); the final judgment of Satan, the fallen angels, and nonbelieving humanity; the destruction of this universe; the creation of a new universe; finally you get a glimpse at your life in eternity with God.

This book really does gather all of Bible prophecy together and make sense of it.

Many of the signs and visions of the Book of the Revelation came to John through the supervision of an "angel."

"John" is the apostle John, author of the Gospel bearing his name and three New Testament letters. He identifies himself four times (1:1,4, & 9; 22:8).

He is content to call himself a "servant." He used the word for a voluntary bond slave - someone who chose slavery out of love for his Master.

Revelation 1:2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

John received the Revelation as "the Word of God," given to him by the "testimony of Jesus Christ," and he saw it for himself. John will make the claim "I heard" twenty-eight times; and "I saw" or "I looked" or "I beheld" forty-nine times.

Revelation 1:3 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.

There are seven "blessings" scattered throughout this book - six more after this one. You can find the other six for yourself. They deal with yet future events.

When the Revelation was first delivered to the churches, the pastor read it, and the Christians heard it. It was a blessing to them.

If you have an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, this first blessing can be yours right now, by reading and by hearing this book.

Do you want to be blessed? Do you want to be blessed by God? Of course we all do.

We are suggesting that you read the Revelation more often.

Not reading the Revelation regularly would be like walking-out of a movie without seeing the last scene; or reading a book and ignoring the last chapter.

But even more than that - it would be to ignore blessing from God. It would be like having the winning PowerBall ticket, and knowing it, but never claiming your winnings.

I'd encourage you to read the Revelation - at least some of it - **everyday**. Read a chapter a day in addition to your regular reading.

“Blessed are... those who hear the words of this prophecy.” The word “hear” is used in a sense that is not uncommon, that of giving attention to; of taking heed to.

We might use the word study. Get into it; study it. If you want a great place to begin studying, get a copy of *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, by John Walvoord.

BTW - Be careful with commentaries. Not all commentators are futurists who approach the Revelation as literal. In fact, just when Bible prophecy is unfolding as never before; and when nonbelievers are more obviously interested than they've ever been, a lot of evangelicals are not only overlooking it, they are disdainful of it as unimportant.

"The time is near." It refers to a specific period of time, one that will be described in great detail in chapters six through eighteen. We know it as the seven-year Tribulation, whose final three-and-one-half years are the Great Tribulation.

How is it "near?" Once again, this does not mean it was about to happen. It is "near" in the sense that it is *next* on God's prophetic calendar.

We, the church, are expecting the resurrection and rapture at any moment. Being imminent, it's not on God's calendar - the one the prophet Daniel gave to the nation of Israel.

How is it reassuring that the Tribulation is near?

- It's reassuring because we know the Tribulation prepares the world for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.
- It's reassuring because I know that we win, in the end; and, therefore, all the suffering and sadness we must endure will be worked together for the good.

Avengers: Endgame is about to be one of the highest grossing movies of all time. Thanos snapped his fingers and half of all life in the universe dissolved into dust. The remaining heroes will undoubtedly find a way to reverse his snap, and put things right. Because that's what heroes do.

We're not expecting a snap. We're listening for the sound of a trumpet.

1Th 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

1Th 4:17 Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Here is what I *really* want to get to:

“... And keep those things which are written in it.”

Hmm. How do you “keep” *future* prophecy?

I think it's simply by choosing to live everyday in the light of what you know to be true of the future of this world, and of your personal world.

The apostle Peter alluded to the same kind of thing. After discussing future prophecy, he said, “what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming

of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (Second Peter 3:11-13).

Lots of times in syfy a character makes a fortune in the stock market, or by betting on some event, because he has come here from the future.

We already know the future of this planet. It is headed into an unprecedented time of global catastrophe - not from global warming, or some such thing, but on account of the wrath of God against sin.

As I said - in His wrath, God is gracious - reaching out to the lost, to save them for eternity.

If I was certain of the future, I would have bet on the Cubs to win it all in 2016. I should bet it all, as it were, on the apocalypse. My bet: **I want to be serving as I look up waiting for Jesus.**

Start thinking of yourself as back from the future.

God gave us a big Easter egg about 70 years ago. On May 14, 1948, Israel was born as a modern nation. It was the fulfillment of many prophecies in the Old Testament, and a definite sign that the Lord will perform what He has prophesied.

If you are not a believer in Christ... The events of the Revelation are set. Once the Tribulation begins, it will proceed as written.

These shows and films that give you hope that it can be stopped, or that you can survive it, are distractions from that truth. They give you a false hope when your hope should be in Jesus.

You can avoid it altogether by getting saved. Going through it... Well, just read the middle chapters of the Revelation and you'll understand why no amount of prepping can help you.

Get saved, and then rejoice in the glorious future God has planned for those who love Him.

It isn't just to avoid the Tribulation that you ought to get saved. It is to gain Heaven, and to avoid an eternity of conscious torment in the Lake of Fire.

If you are not in Christ, listen carefully to what the Lord is saying to you. These are His words, not mine; and they are the power of God unto your salvation.

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.