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REVEALING

REVELATION

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HOW GOD'S PLANS FOR THE FUTURE
CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE NOW

AMIR TSARFATI

WITH DR. RICK YOHN

REVEALING REVELATION

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WITH DR. RICK YOHN



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I dedicate this book to God, whose perfect plan revealed in Scripture is what gives me peace in a tumultuous world.

I dedicate this book to my family, friends, and ministry partners. It is your love, prayers, and support that give me the strength and resources to carry out that to which God has called me.

I dedicate this book to the brave pastors who are out there still boldly teaching Revelation with the same excitement and enthusiasm they have for teaching the rest of the Bible.

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WELCOME TO THE TOUR

Revelation was written to be read.

That may seem like an obvious fact, but when it comes to the last book of the Bible, many people forget that truth. Sure, they know that it should be read by someone, maybe theologians or pastors or prophecy teachers. But they conclude that for the ordinary church person, it's just too complicated or weird or scary. "Best to leave it for the professionals," they say.

The problem is that so many of the "professionals" are not reading it themselves. For some, it's because their seminaries barely touched on this important book during a New Testament overview course. So they have no real idea what the apostle John wrote. Others prefer to dodge the book, incorrectly claiming that there are no personal applications in it. Really? What they are saying is that Revelation is essentially irrelevant. If that is true, then why is it in the biblical canon? I challenge you to show me one book of the Bible that is not applicable in some way—one part of Scripture about which you can say, "You know, I kinda think that God was just padding His word count with this passage." This kind of Revelation avoidance is very sad, because way too many people in the church are missing out on all the blessings that God Himself promises to those who read it.

It is because I want everyone to experience these guaranteed blessings that I've written this book. It's true that, at first, Revelation can be intimidating. However, once you start reading, you'll be shocked at how easy it is to understand. Again, God wrote it to be read—not just by the professionals, but by you.

For many years, I was a tour guide in Israel. When I took a group to a location like Caesarea Philippi or En Gedi or Gethsemane, my goal was to make sure that by the time our bus departed, everyone knew all that they needed to know about that particular site. That is my goal as we roll up to Revelation. I want to be your tour guide, and together we will discover all the wonderful knowledge, promises, and blessings found in this letter.

This is not a commentary. It is a tour. My hope is that everyone who gets to the last page will say, "Okay, now I get it. What an awesome plan God has." This book is written for the common person, the everyday student of God's Word. If you want to dig deeper, let me encourage you to check out the accompanying workbook that I have written with a man who has been teaching Bible prophecy for decades and whose name shares the cover of this book, my good friend Dr. Rick Yohn.

Now, my friends, step up into the bus and find a seat. We are now departing, and the sites you are about to see will amaze you.

A Long Letter

In our age of technology, we no longer make a habit of sending letters to one another. Instead, we use email, texts, and social media. For me, my use of social media allows me to reach hundreds of thousands of people in real time with updates about events that are taking place in the Middle East. This would be impossible if we were still in the old nondigital days. In John's time, he didn't have any of those fancy options. If you wanted to communicate something to someone and you couldn't be there yourself, your one choice was putting pen to paper.

We should be very thankful that social media did not exist in the first century. Why? Because posts are usually short, to the point, and often meaningless. Can you imagine Paul, rather than writing the letters to the church in Corinth, spending his time trolling the accounts of

Apollos and Peter or creating memes that take jabs at the “super apostles” of 2 Corinthians 11–12? What if, rather than penning the amazing visions he was given of the throne room of God, John had spent his time on Patmos posting pictures of beach life and the lunch he had made of the tiny crabs he caught in the tide pools?

The first-century Roman Empire was a letter-writing society, and twenty-two of the twenty-seven New Testament books take that form. All of Paul’s writings are letters, as are the writings by Peter, John (except for his Gospel), the anonymous writer of Hebrews, and James and Jude, the brothers of Jesus. In fact, once you finish the Gospels and Acts, everything from that point on might well have been stuffed into an envelope with a church’s address scrawled on the front.

Revelation is no different. In a glorious moment on a rocky island, John was commissioned by Jesus Christ to send a letter to seven of His churches. Some of the content was dictated by Jesus while John furiously scribbled; some of it the apostle would witness firsthand. But all of it was a direct message from God to His people.

How is it, then, that so many Christians and their pastors turn their backs on this precious part of God’s truth? There’s no doubt that the churches that first received this letter didn’t follow the same path by reading it over, shaking their heads, then tossing it aside and saying, “Yeah, that John was always a little bit off.”

Instead, we can picture the church at Ephesus gathered for service. A hush comes over the congregation as the seal is broken and the letter is unrolled. All are on the edge of their seats. These may have been the first words they had received from their former pastor—the man who had married and buried so many of the congregation, the one whose teaching they had sat under for years, the apostle who had been one of the inner circle of the disciples of the Savior, Jesus.

The current pastor scans the faces of the people. He has a serious look on his face, but a tear is visible in the corner of his eye. He begins:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ... (Revelation 1:1).

Just those five words. They say it all. How could you not want to read the rest? Jesus Christ, God Himself, is about to reveal something

to the world. What was unknown is about to be made known. What was unclear is about to be made clear. The Lord, in His infinite wisdom, determined that He had some things that He needed to lay out for His church, and here they were written out.

Yet there are believers who don't take time to read this letter.

And there are pastors who refuse to preach it.

That's amazing! How can anyone possibly think that is a wise decision?

The church at Ephesus would have soaked it in. Every word would have been like music to their ears and honey to their palate. This would have been true even of the bitter words, words that convicted them as a congregation, because they would have recognized that they were all part of "the Revelation of Jesus Christ." The message in this letter would have been the topic of conversations for weeks, months, years to come.

Without reading this letter, you cannot know the Lord as He is today and has always been. There will be a gaping hole in your knowledge of His character. You cannot know the future He has prepared for you. You will be ignorant of His plans for the rest of the world. The Lord is the Great Communicator, and He has made Himself known through the ages in dreams, visions, signs, wonders, and His Word. How can we demote any part of His Word to the level of null and void?

This sixty-sixth book of the Bible not only completes all that God wanted us to know about His plans, but also tells us the rest of the story about our Messiah. We know Jesus as our suffering Savior who took our place on the cross. We know Jesus as the risen Christ who has gone to prepare a place for us. But what then? Does His story end there? What is Jesus doing now? Is He pacing around in heaven, waiting until it's time to once again set foot on the Mount of Olives? Is He anxiously watching global events, looking for a chance to jump back in and become relevant again? And what about the church, the bride of Christ? Is there a future for us? Are we going to experience the days during which God pours out His wrath upon this world?

All these questions are answered in the book of the Revelation. God does not want you to live in ignorance of His plans. He doesn't want

you to live in a state of anxiety, wondering if you will experience the time of judgment. Revelation makes it perfectly clear that the answer to that worry is no. If you are part of the church, you will not be here when the hammer comes down.

Despite its daunting reputation, this lengthy letter is a message of hope, and it is a message of promise. By the time you finish, you will know that Jesus is risen as promised, Jesus will return to take us home as promised, Jesus will return to Jerusalem with us accompanying Him as promised, Jesus will reign over the world as promised, and Jesus will judge unbelievers just as He promised.

If you, as one of God's children, read Revelation all the way to the end, I can guarantee that you'll finish with a smile on your face. So, let's dive into this final book of the Bible, which contains the very last written words of our God and Creator. We'll begin with an overview of Revelation and then move on to the first chapter, where you will learn that, like the rest of life, it's all about Jesus.

A Choice of “-ists”

Whenever you begin reading a book, you do so with a set of presuppositions. If you pick up a work of history, you will turn to the first page expecting to read about events that actually happened. If you open a novel, you will anticipate enjoying a story that did not occur 100 percent as written. Otherwise, you would be reading history.

Presuppositions make all the difference when it comes to how we read. Down through the centuries, believers have approached the last book of the Bible with varying sets of presuppositions. It is those presumptions that determine whether one believes that what is written in Revelation will take place literally or if it is simply a picture representing some other time or various theological truths. There are four primary presuppositional approaches to John's letter.

The preterist, which comes from a word meaning “past,” views this book as history. It is a symbolic picture of the early centuries of the church. Most preterists believe the book of Revelation was written between AD 64–67 and the events were fulfilled in the horrific year AD 70 when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by Rome. But

to make that work, they are forced to “allegorize” or “symbolize” many of the chapters, like chapters 20–22, which talk about the new Jerusalem and the new heaven and new earth. My house is an easy drive from Jerusalem, and I am there quite often. You can find a lot of things covering the streets of the great city; gold is not one of them. The result of this approach is that Revelation becomes a book of exaggerated, unsubstantiated history rather than a book of prophecy.

The historian says that John’s letter refers to the events and conditions of the church up through the millennia until now. If Revelation ended after the first three chapters, I might agree with them. However, once chapter 4 comes along, you won’t find the church mentioned again until chapter 19. Everything from the time John reaches heaven (in Revelation 4:1) onward would have to be disconnected from reality. Revelation would simply be a complicated and confusing stage play of strange nonevents that somehow communicated to you deep truths about God and the church. What are those deep truths? Ask seven historians, and they’ll come up with seven different opinions. Once you say that the Bible’s words don’t mean what they normally mean, then understanding it becomes a matter of one’s own interpretation.

The idealist says that Revelation is a grandiose picture of the great clash between God and Satan. In a sense, it is John’s epic account of the eternal struggle between good and evil, similar to J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, only with fewer Hobbits. In the end, good wins, we all breathe a sigh of relief, and enjoy forever in the eternal kingdom. But the Bible is not a work of fiction. While there are short stories in the Bible, such as Jesus’ parables, they are always brief, plainly identified as stories, and have a clear point.

Finally, there is the futurist, who says that everything in chapters 4–22, except for a few “signs” that are clearly identified as such, talks about actual future events. Jesus said to John at their encounter on Patmos, “Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this” (Revelation 1:19). Only the futurist can say that they have held true to this admonition without allegorizing, rejecting, or conveniently ignoring any part of this biblical book. This is the “-ist” interpretation that I hold to.

It's All About Jesus

If you were to ask a group of churchgoers what the theme of Revelation is, you would likely hear a variety of responses. “It’s about the end times.” “It’s about the nasty stuff during the tribulation.” A well-studied member of the group might even say, “It describes God’s punishment on the nation of Israel and the people’s ultimate salvation.” All of them would be right.

But there is one central theme that carries through this wonderful letter of pain and hope, wrath and love, and judgment and grace, and it is not a *what* but a *who*. The book of Revelation is all about Jesus Christ. From beginning to end, He is there carrying out the will of the Father. It took John only four words to get to the name that is above all names. So, as you read, remember that the ultimate focus of this letter is not the rapture, nor the tribulation, nor Israel, nor the church, nor the new heaven or the new earth. It is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the powerful Lion of Judah, and the spotless sacrificial Lamb.

PART 1

**JESUS AND
HIS CHURCH**
(Revelation 1–3)

CHAPTER 1

A SERIES OF INTRODUCTIONS

REVELATION 1:1-8

John is about to send to the churches what he knows is a letter that is unique from all its predecessors. As he is writing, it is well past the time that Paul and Peter put pen to paper. In fact, they had been dead for decades. He knew their writings. He also would have read the letter to the Hebrews and the one that James, the brother of Jesus, had written. He was even familiar with the letter that another of the Lord's brothers had penned—Jude, whose short missive at times went a little to the unusual. But even Jude's occasional obscurity was nothing compared to what John was about to hit the church with.

Because of the nature of what Revelation would contain, when the Lord inspired John about what to write, He probably decided He had better ease the readers in. They needed a good series of introductions before He got to the visions—an introduction to the letter, to the writer, and to the Author. So, picking up his pen, John, led by the Spirit, began to write:

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.

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:1-8).

Revelation! The revealing of something that was previously unseen or unknown. Interestingly, the Greek word used here is *apokalypsis*, from which we get the word *apocalypse*. Think of those two words—*revelation* and *apocalypse*. They each give off very different emotions. *Revelation* is a happy, exciting word that envisions opening a gift or discovering if the confetti is pink or blue at the gender reveal party. But *apocalypse* is very different. It feels like it should have its own “dom-dom-dommmm” sound effect every time that it is mentioned. Sadly, this is likely a product of popular books and Hollywood. Apocalyptic literature is its own genre and Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* is about as far from that celebratory gender reveal party as you can get.

This understanding of apocalypse is a modern interpretation. Back when the pastor read the first line of John’s letter to his congregation,

the people didn't scream, "Apocalypse?" and dive under their seats. There would have been excitement because a mystery was about to be revealed. That which was hidden was preparing to be unveiled.

That's why it is sad that so many believers know so little of this Revelation. God has revealed something very special to His church, yet so very few church members know it or understand it. Yet they bear only part of the blame. As we saw in the preface, too few preachers preach this book from the pulpit and too few seminaries teach it in their classrooms. Paige Patterson, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote:

If there is something more regrettable than the treatment of the Revelation by enthusiastic friends, it is its abject neglect by most evangelical preachers. Partly as a reaction to the unbridled sensationalism of reckless interpreters and partly as a result of intellectual and exegetical laziness, the average evangelical pastor just never gets around to the Apocalypse.¹

I had never planned on writing a book on Revelation. But people need to get this information somehow. Wondrous events are revealed to the Lord's church in this letter. And at the center of all of them stands one man: Jesus Christ.

Jesus—the Author and Focus of the Letter

I was tempted to call this first chapter "The Jesus Letter." The reason is because, as I mentioned above, Jesus is the central figure in Revelation. Yes, John the apostle is the writer of the letter, but he wrote only what the Lord directed him to write. This letter is from Jesus, and from front to back it is about Him.

It is easy to forget that this is a letter. First, because we often call it the book of Revelation, and second, it is longer than any other New Testament letter. However, it also doesn't look like a letter—at least not in any modern form. Our letters today usually begin with "Dear Mr. Smith." We first address the person to whom we are writing, and end the letter with our name as the sender. However, in biblical days,

the reverse was true. Consider the following letters from the apostle Paul to the church at Corinth, and Peter, when he wrote to the Jewish dispersion:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth... (1 Corinthians 1:1-2).

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia... (1 Peter 1:1).

The opening of Revelation is even more confusing to today's letter readers because it includes the subject of the missive even before it gets to the greetings:

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 (Revelation 1:1-2).

John made it clear from the beginning that the ultimate author is Jesus Christ. A great early twentieth-century blues classic sings of "John the Revelator," but there is no John the Revelator. Jesus is the Revelator. John is just the guy with the pen.

Revelation—the Content of the Letter

The word "of" in the first phrase of the letter leads to a question. Is this a revelation about Jesus or from Jesus? Is He the Revealed or the Revealer? The answer is both. Again, He is the Revelator. He is the One who dictates to John chapters 2–3 of the letter, and He is the superintendent of the revelation of the events in the rest of the chapters. He launches with a command: "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches..." (Revelation 1:11). And He concludes with an affirmation of the message: "I, Jesus, have sent My

angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star” (Revelation 22:16).

Again, Jesus is the central figure in this book. Yes, it talks about the end times, but the first chapter begins with Jesus and the last chapter ends with Jesus. Chapter 1 sees Him making a surprise appearance, and chapter 22 calls out for Him to make a surprise reappearance.

The letter, though, isn’t just about Jesus showing up unexpectedly, although He does do that several times. It is also about Him bringing judgment upon the world. You might say, “Come on, Amir, Jesus is all about love. He’s not about judging and punishment.” You’re right, He is all about love. That is why His return is still yet to come. The desire of God is that all will come to Him. Paul wrote, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

Sadly, there are those who, despite the loving sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins, will choose to reject God. For them, there only awaits judgment. And who is the One designated to bring about that judgment? Jesus, the Righteous Judge. Speaking of Himself, Jesus said, “The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father” (John 5:22-23).

Blessing—the Benefit of the Letter

God made us, so He knows how we think and what it takes to motivate us. That is why when He asks us to do something, often He includes a carrot dangling at the end of a stick. “This is what you should do because it is in keeping with My holiness. And, for a little incentive, I’m going to include this reward for your obedience.” That is what we find in 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.

Why should we read the words of this prophecy? What should be

our motivation to hear these words and to keep the commands written in it? Because it's God's Word. That should be enough. But like a father who loves to give treats to his child when they are doing the right thing, He says, "By the way, when you do what you should be doing, I'm going to bless you to pieces."

This blessing comes in many forms. Among them is the fact that we can know what is coming for this world. God wants us to be aware of what is ahead. He wants us to prepare ourselves and our families for His return. In Israel, we have sirens that sound when our unhappy neighbors to the south and to the north decide to fire rockets into our country. When we hear their wail, we all scramble for the nearest shelter until the danger passes. Thus, we become doubly blessed—we have knowledge of the attack, and we have safety in the shelters.

God has given us 2,000+ years to prepare for the coming storm that will sweep the entire earth. When that happens, there will be no place to hide. Plagues, earthquakes, hail, fire, and starvation will run rampant throughout the globe. COVID will seem like a case of the sniffles in comparison to what people will be exposed to during the seven-year global catastrophe. "Blessed" almost feels like an understatement for those who will escape this time.

But safety doesn't come by standing there and listening to the sirens go off. Saying, "Uh-oh, rockets are coming" does absolutely nothing to protect us from bombs landing on our heads. We've got to get to shelter. That's where the last part of the verse comes in. It is not enough just to read and hear the words of this letter. We must "keep" them. The Greek word there is *tereo* and means "to guard, watch, protect, keep." The one who does this will take the central message of this letter and hold on to it with all they've got.

What is the central message of this book? It's Jesus. Remember, He is the Author and focus of this letter. Those who make Jesus their Savior and Lord by repenting of their sins and giving their lives to God will receive the wonderful blessing of shelter from the devastation. But this shelter will not be in an underground bunker. It will be in heaven with our Savior in the place that He promised to go and prepare for us (John 14:1-4).

Near—the Timing of the Letter

Near.

That may be the most difficult word to come to terms with in the whole passage. It has troubled readers and preachers and commentators for centuries. In fact, there are those who use this innocent little adverb to mock believers who are anxiously anticipating the return of Jesus and the rapture of the church. But that is nothing new. Even back in Peter's day, there were those who said, "Near, schmear." Peter, however, wasn't having any of it, and he pointedly corrected these doubters.

This they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:5-9).

That passage is a brilliant combination of smackdown and guilt trip. He starts with, "You don't understand 'near'? It's because you don't understand God." He finishes with, "While you're all in a rush, God is showing His amazing patience so that more and more people can flood into the kingdom." There is God's timetable and there is ours. From a human perspective, the word "near" passed its outer limits about 1,800 years ago. According to God's calendar, it's like we're only a couple of days into the wait. The time will come, though, when He will act. And when He does, He will do so very quickly.

A Fine "How Do You Do?"

Having given us that wonderful introduction, John now presents

what is both a salutation and a benediction. He put himself forth as the writer of the letter, the seven churches in Asia as the recipients, and the triune God as the Author. Then, once Jesus is mentioned, the apostle just can't help himself from heaping praise upon his Savior.

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Revelation 1:4-6).

John quickly gets past his part in one word. He states his name, then moves on to the recipients, whom he also quickly brushes by for now. They will be dealt with in much greater detail in the next two chapters. The writer and recipients may be important to an extent, but they are certainly secondary to the Ones who come next.

God in Three Persons—Blessed Trinity

Some have asked me, “Amir, did you know that the word *Trinity* is never used in Scripture?” That is true. But neither is the word *bacon*, yet I recognize its existence and am very thankful for it. How do I know that bacon exists? Because there is ample evidence for it, particularly at breakfast time. As one reads through Scripture, confirmations of the triune God are equally plentiful. Throughout Jesus' life, we can see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in His baptism, His transfiguration, His promise of the coming Counselor in the Upper Room Discourse, and the Great Commission. This Revelation salutation is not written to act as further proof of the Trinity. Instead, the fact is just accepted as truth.

Grace and peace are offered to the recipients of the letter first from the Eternal One—the Father who is, who was, and who is to come. Then, out of the normal order, the greetings are given from the Holy Spirit. Here He is described as the seven Spirits who are before the

throne of the Father. The implication is that the Holy Spirit is ready to be sent by the Father in the same way that He was sent to inhabit the believers of the church on the day of Pentecost.

Finally, we come to the Son, placed in the third position so that John can more easily elaborate on Him without having to do any fancy grammatical gymnastics. What is it that we learn about Jesus in this mini-hymn of praise?

Jesus is the Faithful Witness. He perfectly represented the Father before the world. The first of the great prophets, Moses, made this promise: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear” (Deuteronomy 18:15). Because He is the Word of God, Jesus not only acted upon the words of His Father, but also spoke the words of His Father. As He told the disciple Philip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Jesus is the Firstborn from among the dead. Paul wrote, “He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:18). He is preeminent in two ways. First, the fact that He is the firstborn indicates that there will be others to follow. Thus, through His resurrection, He has opened the door for our resurrection. He is also preeminent in that He is the perfect and only sacrifice that could be made for our sins. Not only is He the perfect High Priest, but He is the perfect offering. As the writer of Hebrews put it, “By one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). As the High Priest, He laid the offering on the altar. And, as the spotless Lamb that was slain, He allowed Himself to be that sacrifice.

Jesus is the Ruler of the kings of the earth. The Bible first revealed Jesus as a helpless baby, lying in a manger. But as is true of all people, infancy is not where He remained. He grew in wisdom and stature and power, far surpassing all others. Later in Revelation, John revealed who that little baby became when he wrote, “He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS”

(Revelation 19:15-16). He is the One before whom one day every knee will bow and every person will acknowledge that He is the rightful King to the throne.

Jesus is the Lover of our souls. How many of you love your children? Hopefully, all your hands went up. We all love our children and would willingly lay down our lives for them. But how willing are you to lay down your life for someone who is your enemy—a person who hates you or who arrogantly acts like you don't even exist? Not too many of us would volunteer for that assignment. Yet the Bible informs us, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Jesus sacrificed His life not just for His friends, but for His enemies too. That is the depth of Jesus' love.

Jesus is the Washer of our sins. This might be the characteristic of Christ that brings me the most peace. What once separated me from my God is now gone because of what was done on that cross. Not only has it disappeared from my life, but it is gone never to return. "He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). For those of you saying, "Well, Amir, couldn't God send an angel in some sort of spiritual submarine to bring them back up?," you're missing the metaphor. Because of the blood of Jesus Christ, we can come pure and holy into the presence of our righteous Creator, and that is a right and a privilege that will never be taken away.

Jesus is the enthroner of kings and the consecrator of priests. This same promise is reiterated in Revelation 5 by the twenty-four elders in heaven as they praise the Lamb, saying that He has "made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth" (verse 10). In the later passage we learn the purpose of our new roles. We will reign on the earth. Our experience after death is not one of luxurious lying around eating nonfattening bonbons. It is a life of learning, serving, and worshipping. Imagine what you will see, hear, and experience as the years pass and you fulfill your calling in the future kingdom of God. What exactly will it look like? We know that as kings, there is a political element to our leadership as we lead people. As priests, there is also a spiritual element as we act as connectors between God and humanity.

Because Jesus is the High Priest, He has full power and authority to place us in these positions.

The Seven Churches—the Recipients of the Letter

“John, to the seven churches which are in Asia...” (Revelation 1:4).

For those craving a little more specificity as to the location rather than “Asia,” Jesus mentions the cities a little further down:

What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea (verse 11).

These seven churches, which we will become much better acquainted with in chapters 2 and 3 of the letter, were all active congregations in John’s day. As we read this list, it becomes clear that the churches are mentioned in geographical order, beginning with Ephesus, which was closest in location to John when he wrote the letter. Today, while you can’t find the churches themselves, you can still visit the locations of the cities in Turkey. In fact, my wife and I spent our honeymoon in Pamukkale, known in the Bible as Hierapolis—a hot spring resort directly north of the city of Laodicea.

Today, the church that stands out from the others for those who have an archaeological bent is Ephesus. It is a gold mine for history lovers. You can spend an entire day walking through the reconstructed ruins. Particularly intriguing are the two theaters—one that seats about 1,500, while the other holds close to 25,000. For lovers of New Testament history, you can stand on the platform from which Paul wanted to quiet a riot or stroll through the *agora*—the market area—where some of Jesus’ disciples journeyed and purchased their necessities.

“I Will Return”—the Groom’s Promise to His Bride

It had been a while since Jesus promised, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and

receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3). By a while, I don’t mean weeks or months or even years. It had been decades. By this time, only John was left alive of those who had heard Jesus utter those words in the upper room the night before His crucifixion. It’s understandable if some in the church were saying, “Uh, John, are you sure you heard Him right?”

The Lord knew that reassurance was needed, so that was exactly what He gave:

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen (Revelation 1:7).

When Jesus returns, it will not be by limousine or airplane or spaceship. He is coming with the clouds. This is a visual that we see in other parts of Scripture as well:

I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him (Daniel 7:13).

The sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matthew 24:30).

Jesus said to him, “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64).

Notice the prepositions. He is coming *with* the clouds and *on* the clouds. He is not coming *in* the clouds. This is not a private return, nor is it momentary. Every eye will see Him, including those who “pierced” Him:

They will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn (Zechariah 12:10).

This reassurance from Jesus did not directly address the concern that many in the church had—“Lord, when are you returning to take us to be with you?” That event is the rapture of the church, when Jesus comes *in* the clouds and collects His bride.

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. 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 (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Again, notice the preposition “in.” The event promised in Revelation 1 is the second coming of Christ. That is when He returns to bring judgment upon the world and to set up His kingdom, which He will rule from His throne in Jerusalem. While that is certainly a time to anticipate, the blessed hope of the church is not the second coming. The rapture is our “go time.” At the second coming, we will be on the clouds with Jesus.

The Beginning and the End

This introduction ends with the following verse:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8).

My red-letter-edition of the New King James Version attributes this statement to the Lord Jesus Christ. But in verse 4, the phrase “from Him who is and who was and who is to come” is attributed to God the Father. So, is “the Lord” here referring to the Father or to Jesus, the Son? As always with interpreting Scripture, context is key.

The verse begins with the phrase “Alpha and Omega.” This title is used three times in the book of Revelation (1:8; 21:6; 22:13). The first two can be speaking of either the Father or the Son. The third is most definitely a statement coming from Jesus the Son:

Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last (Revelation 22:12-13).

Who is the coming One? As we have already seen, it is Jesus Christ. Thus, both the Father and the Son are Ones “who are and who were and who are to come.” “The Alpha and Omega” refers to God’s eternity or His eternal existence. He never had a beginning, so He always was. He will never have an ending, so He always will be.

“Uh, Amir, I know you’re Jewish and all, so you may not know about this thing called Christmas that celebrates when Jesus was born.” Actually, I have heard of the event, and *mazel tov* to Joseph and Mary. That day in Bethlehem when the virgin gave birth was the beginning of the humanity of Jesus. But John himself, long before he wrote this letter from the island of Patmos, opened his Gospel with these words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (John 1:1-3).

Jesus, the Word, was, is, and is to come. In this context, based on what we see in the rest of Revelation, it was Jesus who spoke the words of verse 8. If there was ever any doubt in anyone’s mind whether Jesus is God Himself, He uses the title “the Almighty” to refer to Himself. That Greek word used there appears eight other times in Revelation and once outside of this letter by Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:18 when he was quoting from the Old Testament. The word is used only in reference to God. When Jesus stood before John, the disciple was looking at the face of the Almighty Himself.