

JEFF KINLEY

**GOD'S
GRAND
FINALE**



HARVEST PROPHECY
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SEEING GOD IN THE STORY OF EARTH'S FINAL DAYS

Revelation tells the story of Earth's final days. It chronicles the culmination of human history. The climax of civilization. The end of all things as we know it. In the Bible's last book, we are carried to an apocalyptic intersection where crisis, chaos, and calamity all meet in a global head-on collision. It is a tale of depravity, devils, and destruction. It is the future foretold, and history written far ahead of its fulfillment.

But beyond all its prophecies and the unveiling of foretold events, Revelation is, more than anything, a book about *God*. He is the main character amid a cast that includes world leaders, miracle-working missionaries, martyrs, false prophets, apocalyptic horsemen, demonic armies and holy angels, the antichrist, the false prophet, and even the devil himself. From the pages of Scripture's closing words, it is Jesus Christ who emerges to take center stage. He is the book's central theme and its principal character. Its preeminent figure. And this is a

primary reason Revelation was revealed and written. The angel who delivered this vision was right when he declared, "The testimony of Jesus *is* the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10). If you study Revelation and miss this central theme, you will walk away knowing the future but failing to know the very God who fulfills the prophecies contained within.

Inherent in its very name, Revelation appropriately begins with the revealing of Jesus Christ himself, and continues doing the same through his evaluation of the churches (chapters 2–3), the heaven where he is worshipped (chapters 4–5), the judgments he will unleash upon the planet (chapters 6–18), the climactic return he will execute from heaven (chapter 19), the kingdom over which he will reign for 1,000 years (chapter 20), and the eternal city he himself has been preparing since he left Earth 2,000 years ago (chapters 21–22).

And without a doubt, when the dust of Revelation finally settles, what you will behold is the Lamb, standing in triumph, reigning in sovereignty, and dwelling in unspeakable glory.

A.W. Tozer wrote, "The most important thing about you is what comes to your mind when you think of God."¹

This book will cause you to think much about God. As we hike through Revelation together, you will naturally find yourself caught up in the universe of his divine attributes. The constellation of his character will surround you, challenging your thoughts while simultaneously drawing your heart into a deeper and more intimate relationship with him.

And if that is your goal, turn the page and dive in.

Jeff Kinley



CHAPTER 1

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The God Who Reveals

Revelation 1:1-11

Beyond anything else, the Bible is a book about God. It's his written way of revealing himself to mankind. From Genesis to Revelation, our amazing creator has both progressively and systematically unveiled who he is, how he relates to his creation, what he has done to restore fallen humanity to himself, and what he is going to do in the future.

However, being a gracious and creative God, he chose not to limit himself to just one or two ways of communication. Rather, he has used a multitude of methods to explain himself to us.

In the Beginning, There Was...*Revelation*

God began teaching us about himself with the very first recorded words in Scripture: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

Written to human beings who could easily observe both the vastness of the night sky as well as the wonders and grandeur of the newly made earth, those ten words unleash a wealth of knowledge concerning God and his character. From merely observing creation, we are able to understand and deduce the following:

- God is eternal, and thus logically predates his creation. It was he who brought everything into existence out of nothing (John 1:13; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:1; 11:3).
- He is supernaturally powerful, or “omnipotent” (Romans 1:20).
- He is divine and not human (Romans 1:20).
- He is creative, a master artist and architect (Psalms 8:1-4; 19).
- He is an awe-inspiring God (Job 36:32; 37:23; 38:1–39:14).
- He is a God of detail, order, and precision (see, for example, Jeremiah 33:25, where “fixed patterns” speaks of the laws of nature, physics, and physiology).

In 1820, English philosopher Herbert Spencer (himself an evolutionist) recognized five scientific principles by which he claimed we can understand the universe. They are

time
force
energy
space
matter

And yet, amazingly (and unbeknownst to Spencer), these are all specifically revealed in the very first verse of the Bible! Three thousand years before Spencer, Moses (the six-day creation guy) accurately catalogued these same complex scientific principles:

In the *beginning* [time]
God [force]

created [energy]
 the *heavens* [space] and
 the *earth* [matter] (Genesis 1:1).

#mindblown

So, on the very first page of the Bible, God explains in great detail and clarity what modern science still struggles to articulate. As it turns out, God is not only supreme over science, but he also invented its laws. A being possessing that level of intelligence would also lead us to conclude that he is a personal being, and not a *force*. Therefore, creation—the universe, earth, and humanity—cannot be attributed to some random chemical explosion that supposedly occurred some 14 billion years ago.

In other words, he is a big God, not a big BANG!

And all that from the first ten words of Scripture.

That's revelation.

The Evidence Speaks

We can further understand God's witness of himself to us by separating it into three categories: The first is what theologians call *general* revelation. Primarily, this refers to how the creator proclaims himself through what he has made—the universe, the earth, humankind. Creation declares both the essence of God as well as the exhibit of his handiwork (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-20). This is his *external* witness to us. After creating the heavens and the earth using no pre-existing materials, he then prominently displayed his divine nature and glory through them so that when we look up into the night sky, we are naturally compelled to give God the glory he deserves.

Along with this external evidence, he has given us an *internal* witness as well, in two ways: First, he created us, male and female, and in his own image (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7, 18-25). Being created in God's image means not only that we have intellect, emotion, and will, as he does, but also that we are inherently moral beings with a

capacity for relationship. He made us this way so that we could worship, obey, and enjoy him.

And second, he also communicated something of himself through gifting us with a conscience (Romans 2:14-15). This is why every known secular culture throughout history has recognized and valued a basic moral code—honesty, justice, prohibitions against theft, murder, etc. The reason for this is that embedded within the human heart (mind and conscience) is an instinctive sense of right and wrong. Simply put, we feel good when we do what is right and feel guilty when we do what is wrong. Like a computer and its basic operating system, we were designed with a preinstalled conscience that is programmed to morally guide us and to reflect the knowledge of our creator and his character.

Of course, like a computer system, we can also download harmful viruses that corrupt that conscience in our human hard drive. Unfortunately, this occurred early on when Adam disobeyed God and sin infected the human race (Genesis 3:1-8). But we can also further corrupt and damage our consciences by repeatedly hardening our hearts to God's truth and revelation of himself to us (Romans 1:21). This explains why some people have lost their sensitivity to sin and to the distinction between right and wrong. Their consciences have been damaged, some irreparably so (Romans 1:28-32; Ephesians 4:17-19; 1 Timothy 4:2).

The creator made us for something more than this earth and this life. We were made for eternity (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We were made for *him* (Colossians 1:16). Even so, general revelation alone cannot lead us all the way to salvation. For that, we need God to take it to the next level.

Enter the second category—*special* revelation. Here, God graciously gives us more specific details regarding who he is and what he wants us to know about truth and life. Here are among the ways he has previously done this:

- Direct, audible communication (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:9, 11; Deuteronomy 5:4; Matthew 3:17)
- Signs and wonders (Genesis 11:1, 5-9; Exodus 14:21-31; Deuteronomy 34:10-12; 1 Kings 17-19; Psalm 78:53; 111:2-4)
- Dreams and visions (Genesis 20:6; 31:24; Job 33:14-15; Isaiah 6:1-4; Daniel 9:20-21; Matthew 1:20; 2:12-13; Revelation 1:10-16)
- Angels (Daniel 9:21; 10:13; Luke 1:11-19; Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:2; Revelation 1:1)
- Prophets (Hebrews 1:1-3)
- Physical appearances of himself in human form in the Old Testament (Genesis 18:1-33; 32:25-28; Exodus 3:1-22; 33:18-23; Daniel 3:25), which are called *theophanies* or *Christophanies*
- Divine acts of providence (Acts 1:15-17; 17:24-28)

However, God's ultimate act of special revelation was when the second member of the Godhead became a man. This is sometimes referred to as the "incarnation of Christ" (John 1:14, 18; 12:45; 14:5; Colossians 1:15; 2:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; Titus 2:11; 3:4; Hebrews 1:1-4).

The writer of Hebrews puts it this way:

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days *has spoken to us in His Son*, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the *radiance of His glory* and the *exact representation of His nature*, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they (1:1-4).

The apostle John wrote,

The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth...No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him (John 1:14, 18).

Thankfully, the Lord also permanently documented his revelation to us in all 66 books of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The inspired revelation of Scripture is superior to general revelation because of its specific and eternal nature (Psalm 19:9; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 5:17-18; 24:35).

In doing this for us, God translated transcendent truth, putting it into a visual, verbal, experiential, discernable, and transferable language that virtually anyone could understand. Within Scripture's pages are realities concerning him that are easily grasped by children, coupled with concepts that even the most learned scholars struggle to comprehend.

A third way God has revealed himself is through *progressive* revelation. In other words, God (wisely) chose not to reveal all of his character, commands, or truth to any one person or all at one time. Obviously, that would have amounted to a massive information overload, and no human could have handled or processed such an experience. Instead, he gave his revelation to us in installments, or *bite-sized chunks*, if you will. Gradually, he unveiled himself and his truth over much time—through Adam, Enoch, Noah, Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. Each new revelation built on the previous one, and the resulting portrait was one painted with both broad brushstrokes of truth as well as intricate details uncovering the beauty and wonder of our God and his magnificent plan of salvation.

And he did all this because he wanted us to know him.

So when we come to the last book of the Bible, we would expect a dramatic and powerful conclusion to God's grand story and message to us. Think about this: God could have ended his written revelation to us any way he wanted to. As an author, I do the same.

I carefully consider how I conclude my books. What do I want the reader to know, think, feel, or do upon turning the last page? What do I want to impress upon him? What do I want him to remember? How do I wish him to respond? To be motivated? Inspired? Moved?

And God, being the master storyteller and consummate communicator, did the same with his book. He could have finished the Bible with a message on how to love one another, or how to be good Samaritans to our neighbors, or even by reviewing and summarizing some of the important truths he had previously communicated.

But he didn't.

Instead, he finished his *magnus opus* with a book that is 95 percent *prophecy*. As such, Revelation is almost exclusively a book about the future. But why? Why tell his first-century audience about prophecies that not only wouldn't end up happening in their lifetime, but wouldn't be fulfilled for at least 1,900 years?

I suppose the original hearers and readers of Genesis, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah could ask the same question, for they, too, were given prophecies that were eventually fulfilled many hundreds of years after they were first given. But this highlights the very nature of prophecy—that it is primarily a foretelling of future events and not necessarily things that are happening “in the now.” Some prophecies do have a near and far fulfillment to them, meaning they have significance both during the time of their revealing as well as for the time of their fulfillment (see Genesis 3:16 and John 12:31; Numbers 21:9 and John 3:14-15; Daniel 11:31 and Matthew 24:15-16; Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:17-21; Romans 16:20; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 6:12).

So why did God end his written Word with a book on future prophetic events? Because he has unfinished business to attend to. And because...

He has a bride to rescue (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

He has a people to redeem (3 Peter 3:9; Revelation 7:9-17)

He has a planet to punish (Revelation 6–19)

He has a nation to restore—Israel (Romans 11:25-26)

You see, the story isn't over. There is yet coming a climactic season-ending episode. A closing act.

A grand finale.

Fear, Fake News, and Faith

God wrote Revelation because he wants us to know about that finale, and to respond to it (Revelation 1:3). He wants us to be aware of coming world events and to spot the signs leading up to the end times. He wants us to enjoy a sneak preview of our future home in heaven. He also knew that in these last days, there would be a pandemic of confusion, ignorance, and uncertainty. Fear is currently outpacing faith among God's people. In the church, confusion is clouding clarity. Ignorance is spreading faster than knowledge. And uncertainty is overshadowing confidence.

And yet, not once in Scripture are we ever told to fear the future. Quite the opposite, as repeatedly, God instructed his people to move forward into tomorrow with faith and courage (Joshua 1:6-9; Matthew 24:3-4; 6:25-34; 1 Thessalonians 4:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:7). God intended for his Word to guard us against confusion, and to provide knowledge and clarity. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, they had become a church plagued by unsettling news from men posing as reliable teachers. Essentially, these teachers had convinced the Thessalonian believers that they had in their possession a letter from Paul indicating the day of the Lord had arrived. In other words, they claimed the rapture had already occurred and that the seven-year tribulation had begun. This information triggered at least two unpleasant concerns for the Thessalonian believers:

(1) God's judgments were about to fall on the earth (and on them), and (2) they had missed their blessed hope (the rapture).

These counterfeit messengers buttressed their argument by stating they had also received a vision as well, confirming their apocalyptic assertions. The apostle wrote,

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2).

Paul's grave concern was that this first-century fake news would shake the Thessalonians' composure and disturb their faith, which it did. So what did the apostle do? How did he respond to this troubling report? Under the Holy Spirit's divine direction, he wrote them a letter from an *actual* apostle, not a pretend one. In it, he imparted to them unquestionable and precise truth. "Let no one in any way deceive you, for it [the day of the Lord] will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed" (verse 3).

Paul wisely set the record straight. He didn't say, "Well, you know we all have our own views regarding the end times and the timing of the last-days events. But as long as we are united in the essentials of the faith, that's all that really matters. Now, all of you should just get along and love each other."

No. Unity was not Paul's chief objective here—truth was. The unity he desired for them (and for us) was to be centered on God's Word, not heretical hearsay nor rumor. He then said, "Do you not remember that while I was with you, I was telling you these things?" (verse 5). The verb tense here indicates he had told them about these prophecies concerning the last days more than a few times. This tells

us that part of Paul's core church-planting curriculum involved clear teaching about eschatology (the study of the end times). He wanted these believers to be informed on this important issue—one that today is often ignored, misunderstood, misrepresented, and miscommunicated to Christians.

Scripture always uses knowledge and understanding to combat ignorance concerning the last days—both of which are abundantly found in Bible prophecy. Often, when emphasizing the importance of studying and learning the Bible, someone will immediately counter with “We have to be careful not to learn too much, because as Paul warned, ‘knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies’” (1 Corinthians 8:1). These well-intentioned believers unknowingly undercut their own faith and spiritual growth with such statements, swinging the pendulum toward an anti-intellectual version of Christianity where our only virtue is “love.” What they miss is the fact that God's truth actually transforms us by “the renewing of [our] mind” (Romans 12:2). We don't show love to people by ignoring or minimizing the truth. We love them by *telling them* the truth. Obviously, Paul was not teaching that we shouldn't pursue knowledge of Scripture. There are far too many commands and examples of such a godly pursuit elsewhere (Deuteronomy 11:18-23; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119:11-12, 15, 23-24, 26, 33, 40, 52, 71, 93, 97-99, 100, 113, 124, 135, 152, 160, 171; Proverbs 3:1-2; 4:6-7; John 5:39; Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:15, 16-17; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:16; Revelation 1:3).

Instead, Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 8:1 is that knowledge alone, devoid from love, only inflates one's ego. But nowhere is ignorance of Scripture exalted as a virtue to be sought after. God gives us his truth that we might know it, believe it, be convinced of it, be transformed by it, meditate on it, live by it, see the world through it, and communicate it to others.

An old adage states, “In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.” Similarly, in an age where ignorance, deception, and lies

dominate the spiritual landscape, God's truth shines as a beacon of light in a dark night. Paul reminds us that it is the ignorance of truth, along with worldly thinking, that poses a real danger to our spirituality (1 Timothy 6:3-5). And the person who rejects the truth of God is "conceited and understands nothing" (verse 4). But not so for the biblically informed believer, as David declares:

I have more insight than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, because I have observed your precepts (Psalm 119:99-10).

So, the ultimate antidote to ignorance is truth—God's truth.

This revelatory knowledge given to us by God also drives out uncertainty and doubt, replacing it with genuine confidence. The prevailing spirit of our day seeks to suppress confident knowledge, especially as it relates to objective truth. Today, for a Christian to assert that God's Word is inerrant and infallible (2 Timothy 3:16-17), or that Jesus is the only way to heaven (John 14:6), is viewed as narrow and arrogant.

Narrow? Yes. But arrogant? No.

This is ironic, for we all expect this same kind of narrowmindedness in so many other areas of life. For example:

- We want our surgeon to be precise and not flippant or vague.
- We want our pharmacist to be accurate and not unsure.
- We want our pilot to be confident and not nervous.
- We want our electrician to be certain and exact, not ignorant, undecided, or sketchy.

This is even more critically important when it comes to theology, truth, morality, and reality. It is here where we need *precision*. And that's exactly what Scripture provides for us. The knowledge and

clarity found in God's revelation infuses us with the very confidence we need to face our world and to forge ahead by faith.

Yes, God wants us to *know*.

Consistent with that desire, the book of Revelation is a climactic book of knowledge, not confusion. It is not an enigmatic, apocalyptic code only to be broken by a select few experts, but rather, a book of enlightenment to be read, heard, understood, and obeyed by everyone who traverses its pages (Revelation 1:3).

Like Genesis, in its very first verse, we discover Revelation to also be a book about God. It is "the Revelation of [from, about] Jesus Christ." It comes *through* an angel, *to* John, and *for* his bond-servants (the church). And what will the book also cover? "The things which must soon take place" (1:1). Revelation is the only book in the Bible that comes with a certain kind of promised *blessing* for a certain group of believers—namely, those who "read, hear, and heed the words of the prophecy" (verse 3). And why is this so important? Verse 3 concludes, "For the time is near."