

# Revelation 1:1-3

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Armageddon, the four horsemen of the apocalypse, the number of the beast, grapes of wrath, the scarlet woman, what am I on about?
- Is this a list of nominations for best film at a very dark Oscars ceremony? Or maybe the title of the next five or six Dan Brown novels?
- Or maybe what I've done is simply draw on language from sensationalist headlines in the Daily Mail, or any other paper of your choosing. Where do we find the language that I have just spoken?
- Where can we witness the original images that are portrayed or revealed in these words? Well, we find them, of course, in the book of Revelation.
- And so the reality is that in our society, really everybody who lives in our country is familiar with many of the words and the images that we find in Revelation, though they may not be able to identify where they even come from.
- [ 1 : 2 6 ]     All of these words, all of these images are found in this book, the book of Revelation, The Revelation of or from Jesus Christ. I wonder, what do you make of Revelation as we will launch into Revelation?
- And it's in some ways a little bit daunting, though also quite exciting. What do you make of Revelation? What are your first thoughts? Even this morning when, you know, you heard that we were going to be starting this series on Revelation, what was your first kind of almost instinctive reaction or thought in your mind when you heard that?
- What do you make of Revelation? I wonder if you, like me, if I'm being honest, have seldom ventured much beyond the first three chapters, which are more or less manageable.
- Because, you see, what follows is, well, what is it? Confusing? Disturbing? Incomprehensible? Scary? Or maybe just plain weird?
- What do you think? What do you make of the book of Revelation, the book of the Apocalypse? Well, let me suggest another adjective that I think describes the book of Revelation.
- [ 2 : 4 7 ]     I've already used it. I'll use it again. I think it's an exciting book. I think Revelation is exciting, and I'm excited to be beginning a journey through the book with you over the next few weeks or months.
- We'll see how long it takes. Now, this morning, as I've already indicated, we're going to start with the prologue. Verses 1 to 3 that we'll also just dip into verse 4 as well to complete something that we need to say about the prologue.
- Now, the prologue, as you'll see, is just three short verses, but it covers in those short three verses a bunch of stuff. Now, a bunch of stuff is not a very technical term, but it's accurate nonetheless.
- There's a bunch of stuff in these first three verses, the prologue of the book of Revelation. But I think we can narrow down what we discover in the prologue to four key matters that I want to just introduce to you this morning.

Now, some of these we will then develop in many, many ways as we make our way through the book, but we want to just introduce them this morning. The four key matters addressed in the prologue, I think, are the following.

[ 3 : 59 ] First of all, the author, who wrote the book? Also, we have clearly stated for us who the audience of the book is intended to be. There also is an indication as to the content of the book that we are going to be looking at and reading through over the next wee while.

And then, finally, there's also a very clear indication as to the purpose of the book, and specifically the purpose to be served by reading and hearing and taking to heart the content of this book.

So, these are the four matters that we discover or that we encounter in these first verses at the very beginning of the book of Revelation. Let's think about them one by one.

First of all, the author. Who is the author of the book of Revelation? Revelation. Now, if that was a quiz question on TV, well, first of all, most people wouldn't know the answer, as is usually the case with any question about the Bible on a quiz question or a quiz on TV.

But those who did know the answer would probably respond, John. They'd say, well, John's the author of Revelation. And that's true. But I think a more precise answer, but that is also more complex, but at the same time more helpful and revealing, is found in the prologue, where the answer, John, doesn't really do justice to what we find identified in the prologue as who the author is.

[ 5 : 28 ] I think what we can actually do is multiply, or sorry, identify multiple authors. And also what we can do is draw out a crucial implication of who the authors are.

So, first of all, let's see what we find as to what we're calling multiple authors. You see, in the first couple of verses, you can identify really quite easily, it's not a complex thing, what we might call a chain of transmission involving multiple parties, or let's call them authors using that term somewhat broadly.

But we can identify this chain of transmission. Let's just read through the first couple of verses, and you'll see it for yourselves. It's very clear there. We read there, the revelation from or of Jesus Christ, which God gave him.

Okay, so given that there's a reference here to Jesus Christ and God, we can understand the reference to God as being a reference to God the Father. So, God the Father is at the head of the chain, if you wish, or the beginning of the chain.

So, God the Father is involved. He can be identified as the author, but we're told that he gave this revelation to Jesus Christ. So, then we have a second link in the chain, the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ.

[ 6 : 44 ] The Father gives this revelation to his Son. But then the chain continues. We simply need to read what it says. The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place, He made it known, and implicit there is the He is Jesus.

Jesus made it known by sending his angel. And so, there's an angel involved in the transmission of this vision. The angel isn't, of course, strictly speaking, the author, but he's involved in transmitting the material.

So, you have God the Father. He passes it. He gives it to the Son. And the Son sends his angel. And then you have the fourth link. By sending his angel to his servant, John, who, you know, we said a moment ago is the author.

Again, John, strictly speaking, isn't the author. He's simply the last link in this line of transmission. He receives this vision. The Father gives it to the Son. The Son sends his angel.

The angel presents this vision to John. And so, you have this quite complex, not particularly complex, but you have these multiple parties involved that relate to this question of authorship.

[ 7 : 58 ] And notice that all of them really revolve around the person of Jesus. It's the Father of Jesus who gives this revelation to Jesus.

And then it's the angel of Jesus, his angel, who passes it on to his servant, to Jesus' servant, John. So, right from the kickoff, we're seeing that Jesus is very central to the book.

We can maybe add, perhaps, one other link to the chain of transmission. And that would be you and me. You know, we are the ones who are urged to read.

And indeed, even to read aloud, which also carries the sense of continuing the process of transmission that others would hear. We are to read.

We are to hear. We are to take to heart. Now, having identified the author as, in the first instance, God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, who then transmit the message through the angel and through John, that has a very important implication.

[ 9 : 09 ] We can maybe say two implications of the fact that God is the ultimate author. First of all, it's a reminder that we can only know God's will and purposes by revelation, by God's own disclosure of himself and of his will.

You know, we don't discover the truth by searching. But God reveals the truth by revelation. And we receive. That's the way it works.

Now, that may threaten our sense of self-worth and our pride. But that's the way it is. God reveals truth. And we receive the truth that he reveals.

So, it's a reminder of that. But, of course, to be reminded or for it to be made clear that the author of this book is God himself is, of course, an assurance that everything we read in the book is true and dependable and helpful.

This is the word of God. Useful, helpful for God's people. We need to make a further point regarding the one human author in the chain, namely John.

[ 10 : 16 ] So, who is John? Now, whoever he is, he chooses not to give us much in the way of description. There in verse 4, we read, John to the seven churches in the province of Asia.

Very bold. John. Not John the Apostle or John the brother of somebody. No, simply John. John. And John was a common name in first century Palestine.

And so, conceivably, this could be a different John to John the Apostle and the author of John's gospel. But I think the settled consensus among biblical scholars is that John the Apostle is indeed the author of Revelation or the one who received this revelation and transmits it faithfully to us.

And it's perhaps because John was so well known among the early Christians that he writes to that he saw no need to further identify himself. Everybody or the original readers would have known immediately who this John was.

But in addition to that, I guess, piece of incidental evidence, we also have, interestingly, the very early testimony of one of the church fathers, Irenaeus.

[ 11 : 32 ] Irenaeus was the bishop of Lyon. His life was roughly between 130 to the year 200 AD. And Irenaeus' testimony is significant, and we'll read what his testimony is in a moment, but it's significant because he was converted.

Irenaeus was converted under the preaching of a man called Polycarp in Asia Minor. And Polycarp, as a young man, had known the Apostle John. So, you see, there's a very close link between the Apostle John, who it is being argued as the author, and Irenaeus.

The Apostle John knew Polycarp. Polycarp was the mentor of Irenaeus. So, you see, the historical connection is a very close one, is really all I'm saying.

And Irenaeus wrote concerning the origin and authorship of the book of Revelation, and this is what he says. It was written no long time ago, but almost in our own day, towards the end of Domitian's reign.

It was the emperor in Rome. And then he says, by John, the disciple of our Lord. Now, Irenaeus' testimony also suggests a date for the writing of Revelation, which would be towards the end of the first century.

[ 12 : 45 ] Domitian was the emperor in Rome from 81 to 96 AD. And that would tie in with the age that John the Apostle would have been, an older man, but still able to receive and to write down this Revelation.

So, that's what we can say about author, but let's move on to audience. And in the matter of audience, we have both a broad and a more narrow or specific reference to audience in the prologue.

Now, the broad reference is in verse 1, the revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. So, who are the audience?

Well, they're identified. His servants, the servants of Jesus. All servants of Jesus. So, very clearly at the very beginning, John is saying that this is not for a very limited audience.

This is for all servants of Jesus Christ. But then, of course, there is just a couple of verses on a more specific, we might say, more narrow reference as to the audience.

[ 13 : 47 ] In verse 4, John to the seven churches in the province of Asia. Now, these were, and we meet them in chapters 2 and 3, these were real churches populated by real people, many of whom were personally known to John.

And John is writing to these real people living in a real, specific, historical context. Namely, and most significantly, in a world dominated by the Roman Empire.

And that context is very important to be aware of as we make our way through the book. But even this more specific, we also called it this more narrow reference to the seven churches, is one where already John is employing the number seven in a symbolic sense.

The number seven in the Bible, as I'm sure you're aware, symbolizes perfection or completeness. And that finds its origin, really, to the seven days of creation.

And so, when John indicates that he's writing to seven churches, even though they are real churches, they're not just made-up story churches, they're real churches. But the very fact that he identifies seven is clearly significant.

[ 14 : 59 ] These churches, real churches, are intended to represent all churches in existence, both in John's day, as he writes, but also in every subsequent generation, including our own.

And so, when we consider this matter of audience, let me pose a couple of questions. First of all, are you a servant of Jesus Christ? And if the answer is yes, then this revelation is for you.

You are intended to be the audience. Are we a congregation of disciples of Jesus? And if the answer is yes, and the answer is yes, then this letter is directed to us.

And that, in itself, is exciting. We're not curious or intrigued observers, but the actual recipients. We are the audience God intended when he gave this revelation to John.

Which takes us on to the third matter, where we'll have to just dwell a little bit longer, and that is the matter of content. Now, in discussing the content of the book, I want to first touch on the question of genre, which really is what kind of book is it?

[ 16 : 10 ] What kind of literature is it? Before looking more precisely at the actual content, what it's about. So, there's really two questions there. What is the book?

What kind of book is it? And what is the book about? First of all, what kind of book is it? And it's important to have a clear sense of what kind of book it is, because that influences the manner in which we read and understand the book.

And we want to do that well. And so, it is important. The very first word in Greek, translated in English, revelation, is the word apocalypse. And from that word is derived the expression apocalyptic literature, that is often the label attached to revelation, as also to other parts of the Bible, in particular the book of Daniel in the Old Testament.

Now, this expression, apocalyptic literature, can sound a little bit forbidding or even spooky. But what does it mean? Well, the word apocalypse, revelation, simply means the uncovering of something hidden.

Or the making known of something we could not know or discover for ourselves. This really is an echo of what we've already said about the importance of God revealing in order for us to have reliable knowledge concerning Him and His purposes.

[ 17 : 30 ] Revelation uncovers a perspective, God's perspective, on reality and on the march of history. That's what revelation does. That's what the apocalyptic literature does for us.

But we also need to know another word that John uses in verse 3 of the prologue. There in verse 3 we read, Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. So, we've already identified this book as apocalyptic in character.

But then we find that we can also describe it as prophetic. It's a prophetic book. It includes and is prophecy. Now, prophecy, as I'm sure you are aware, is not in the first instance about prediction, though people get very excited about the possibility that revelation includes all manner of predictions.

Prophecy principally is about proclamation. It's God proclaiming or making known His will to His people and calling on His people to respond in trusting obedience.

So, what is Revelation? Well, it's an apocalyptic or a prophetic book. It is both where the apocalyptic material, the images and the visions, is simply a form of prophecy or divine communication.

[ 18 : 48 ] But then we have to note one final detail about genre, what kind of book it is. Namely, that the book is a letter. In verse 4, it is so clear that the manner in which John presents what he's about to say is in the form of a letter to John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia.

And, you know, we've read very similar introductions to Paul's letters. You know, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ to the church at Colossae or to the church in Thessalonica. So, very clearly, Revelation, it's apocalyptic literature, it's a prophetic book, but it is also a letter.

The whole book is a letter. You know, it's sometimes said that the Revelation contains letters, especially the letters or the material that we find in chapters 2 and 3. But the rest of the book falls into a different literary category.

But actually, the whole book is a letter to the seven churches and to the servants of Jesus Christ. And the letter, which is the whole book, contains words for each congregation mentioned in chapters 2 and 3.

So, Revelation is prophecy, God speaking. The form of prophecy is largely apocalyptic, the use of visions and symbols. And this apocalyptic literature is contained in a letter.

[ 20 : 09 ] The next letter, which leads us on to the next matter, which is the content. So, not just what kind of book it is, but what is the book about?

Which I guess is what we're most concerned with or interested in. Well, let me answer that question with one simple sentence. And you might say, well, is it possible to answer that question about what's Revelation about with one single sentence?

But it really is. And that sentence, in answer to the question, what's it all about, is simply this. It's all about Jesus. And that isn't being reductionist.

That isn't being overly simplistic. That is the heart of the matter. What is Revelation about? It's all about Jesus. We notice how the book begins.

There at the very beginning, verse 1, the revelation from Jesus Christ, as it is in these new editions of the NIV that we now have as the church Bible. In the older one, it simply said the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[ 21 : 13 ] And that is actually quite significant, how we understand the word that is translated either of or from. It's a wee word. Well, of is a wee word. From is also a wee word.

And the word that is used by John can be understood in two ways. It can be understood in the sense of from, as in this is the revelation that Jesus provides.

But it can also be understood in the sense of the revelation concerning Jesus. The revelation of Jesus Christ. About Jesus Christ. And it may well be that John intends us to understand both of these things to be true.

Both of these things are true about Revelation. It is from Jesus Christ. And it is about Jesus Christ. John goes on to emphasize that or highlight that reality in what he says in verse 2.

Where he says, who testifies, that is John, who testifies to everything he saw. That is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. What does John mean by this?

[ 22 : 20 ] Well, he says that John saw the communication. How do you see a communication? Well, you see it because it was visual. Vision after vision were presented to him. And he saw what God was saying.

And what did he see? Well, he saw God's word. God's word. God's truth. About Jesus. The testimony of Jesus. And what in particular did he see about Jesus?

Well, what he saw in particular about Jesus is that Jesus is king over his kingdom. And that his kingdom reigns supreme over all.

So, what is Revelation about? It's about King Jesus and about his present and permanent and absolute rule over all. But to say that Revelation is about Jesus, though true, doesn't exhaust what John tells us in his prologue concerning the content of Revelation.

Notice what John says in verse 1 that is what generates some excitement, certainly for some folk. Verse 1, it says, The revelation from Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

[ 23 : 30 ] So, there John is saying, you want to know what you're going to be reading about and what follows? Well, this is what you're going to be reading about. You're going to be reading about what must soon take place. And of course, this expression has proved to be quite a battleground over the centuries among those looking to explain what Revelation is all about.

There are a number of schools of thought or manners of understanding what John means by that. And each of them are not neatly distinct or mutually exclusive.

But let me just broadly identify the different ways this expression of John has been understood. What must soon take place? Some understand Revelation to be about what was going on at the time of writing in the Roman Empire.

And there certainly are many clear allusions to the Roman Empire. So, that's what it's about. And no more. Others understand Revelation to be about everything that was to take place from the time of writing, but also into the subsequent centuries and indeed millennia.

So, yes, it begins with the situation as it was at the time of the Roman Empire, but it also reveals or speaks about what is to happen subsequent to that particular empire.

[ 24 : 45 ] Others, and the more perhaps spectacular ways of understanding Revelation, but not necessarily more helpful, is to understand Revelation as speaking about what some would describe or speak about as the last times, particularly those times that would precede the coming of Jesus and still in the future, in the understanding of those who hold to this view.

And then others would say that Revelation is not about or describing any actual events, but is a vision that allows us to draw lessons about living as the people of God in any and every age.

Now, how are we to choose between this array of possibilities? Do we have to slavishly adopt one approach? Now, I think there's a clue in the language of the prologue that can help us understand what John means when he speaks of what must soon take place.

One thing we need to be very clear on when we go through Revelation is that Revelation is full of allusions, sometimes direct references, to the Old Testament. And we'll discover that in order to properly understand Revelation, we do need to have a knowledge of the Old Testament that it is alluding to and referring to time and time again.

And I think in the prologue, John already begins to allude to the Old Testament, even in these first words of introduction, and particularly the language of what must soon take place.

[ 26 : 17 ] I think here John is echoing language that we find in Daniel. Now, this isn't just some random sort of suggestion. In what follows in chapter 1, John explicitly refers to and references Daniel.

But I think here in the prologue, he is already alluding to Daniel, a book, of course, that is also characterized by apocalyptic literature. Let's just very quickly notice what John may well be alluding to in the language that he uses there in his prologue.

So, if we turn to Daniel chapter 2, and we'll just read a couple of verses there in Daniel chapter 2 to identify that connection that I'm suggesting exists that can serve as a clue.

So, Daniel chapter 2, let's read at verse 27, and then we'll read another two verses a little bit later on in that same chapter. The king asked Daniel, also called, oh, sorry, that's 26, verse 27.

Daniel replied, No wise man, enchanter, magician, or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about. But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.

[ 27 : 27 ] He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that pass through your mind as you were lying in bed are these. And then Daniel continues.

Then jumping to verse 45 of that same chapter. So, Daniel 2, verse 45. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands, a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold to pieces.

The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true, and its interpretation is trustworthy. So, notice in both of these occasions in Daniel 2, God is identified as revealing what is going to happen, what will soon take place.

And then crucially, in verse 44, we're told what it is that is going to happen. In verse 44, which precedes that second reading we had, in the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

So, this is what's going to happen. And Daniel is saved to Nebuchadnezzar. These visions are about what is going to happen, and this is what's going to happen. God is going to set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. And John picks up on this language of Daniel as he introduces his book, or his transmission of the Revelation.

[ 28 : 50 ] To what time does this refer, that God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed? Well, let's think about Jesus, how Jesus began his ministry. What was Jesus' opening gambit when he began to preach, when he began his public ministry?

What were the very first words that he pronounced, or that he is recorded as pronouncing? The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. So, I think we can begin to get the picture.

John is saying that with the coming of Jesus, the prophecies of Daniel about what is going to happen are being fulfilled. John, Jesus has and is inaugurating his kingdom, a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

And everything in this book is about the kingdom of Jesus. His book, John's book, is about King Jesus, the kingdom of Jesus, the citizens of the kingdom of Jesus.

The book is about how this kingdom of Jesus stands in radical opposition to an authority over the kingdoms of this world. Now, for John, of course, the kingdoms of this world were personified, were incarnate in the Roman Empire.

[ 29 : 56 ] But then, of course, the kingdoms of this world can take different shapes and forms with the passage of time and history. So, Revelation is about, and even in a measure, deals with and describes real historical events, especially relating to the Roman Empire.

And it does so in a manner that tells us where the kingdom of Jesus fits into the picture. In effect, Revelation describes the world we live in from God's perspective.

And God always sees the big picture. Let me just maybe try and illustrate that for you. Think of a wee boy at a football match, but in the old days, before all-seater stadiums.

And the wee boy is in the stand, and he's surrounded by the thronging masses. And the wee boy can hardly see anything of the match. He's too small.

He's hidden by all the crowds surrounding him. And so the whole experience is a very confusing and disturbing one for him because he can't actually see what is going on. He has a very limited perspective from where he's standing.

[ 31 : 02 ] But then the wee boy is lifted up by his father onto the father's shoulder. And what happens when that happens? Well, the wee boy's view is transformed.

The match is the same. Nothing is happening that wasn't happening before, but his perspective is a completely different one. He sees things from a different perspective. And Revelation is a bit like that.

In Revelation, God takes us onto his shoulders and helps us see the world from his heavenly perspective. It doesn't mean that we understand everything we see, a bit like the wee boy probably still doesn't understand the complexities of the offside rule.

But nonetheless, even though we don't understand everything, our vision is transformed by this new perspective that God is giving to us as he lifts us up and says, hey, I want you to see things the way I see them.

And that's what he's doing in Revelation. But how is it that what John writes, rooted in the world of the Roman Empire, how is that relevant and helpful to us?

[ 32 : 08 ] Are we simply being given an insight into what was happening back then so we can understand what was happening back then of some historical interest perhaps? John's perspective is relevant because there is nothing new under the sun.

The kingdoms of this world rise and fall, and they all share in different degrees the same enmity to God and typathy to God's people and delusions of grandeur. But in the face of these kingdoms and parallel to them and over them stands in every age the kingdom of Jesus and King Jesus seated on the throne.

And this is what Revelation is about, Jesus and his kingdom and how the citizens of Jesus' kingdom are to live and trust and persevere whatever passing kingdom, however grand and powerful and brutal, holds passing and partial sway in the world.



So I think that, I hope, gives us a taste of what I think is the heart of the content of Revelation. Finally, and more briefly, just note the purpose of Revelation as John identifies it here in the prologue.

Prologue. What does God intend to be the outcome for his people of receiving this revelation? Well, John tells us in verse 3, and we were speaking to the children about this. 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.

[ 33 : 39 ] This is the purpose, that we, that you, would be blessed. That's its purpose. Not that your curiosity would be aroused, not that you would be very clever in being able to explain to people what the four horsemen of the apocalypse represent.

No, that's not the principal purpose. The purpose is that you would be blessed. Blessed are those who read it. Blessed are those who heed it. Blessed are those who take it to heart.

And as we think about this purpose, let's just think about this blessing. First of all, let's think about the content of the blessing. In what sense will we be blessed? Well, the blessing is enjoyed or experienced as we receive and understand and respond to God's purposes in the book, which we can maybe reduce to three principal purposes.

First of all, the purpose is that we would gain greater and deeper and richer knowledge about Jesus. The book we are presented with is a wonderful vision of the exalted and reigning Jesus, and it's surely relevant to John immediately in chapter 1.

And God, of course, in giving the vision, immediately begins by a vision of the risen Jesus. As if to make it abundantly clear, if there were any doubt, this is what the book is about.

[ 34 : 52 ] So let's just meet the main character right at the beginning. And so from verse 9 and onwards, we have John's vision of Christ. So we will be blessed in the measure that we know Jesus more.

We discover more about Jesus. But we'll be blessed also as we are encouraged by Jesus, as we're encouraged to trust in Jesus, especially in the face of persecution, as was the experience of many of the original readers, in the face of opposition, in the space of hostility of one kind or another, that the kingdoms of this world, whatever they might be, exhibit to God's people.

We are encouraged to trust in Jesus. One way in which, in my own mind, as I was trying to kind of verbalize what Revelation was about, this way of expressing things came to my mind, that Revelation is not principally about what the future holds, though it may have some clues and hints in that regard.

It's not principally about what the future holds, but about who holds the future. Who holds the future? Who holds the present? Who is in charge? That's what Revelation is about.

And that is to be an encouragement to God's people, in the face of opposition and hostility and challenge of one kind or another. But I think also we are blessed, not only as we know Jesus better, or encouraged by Jesus, but as we receive a warning from Jesus.

[ 36 : 20 ] You know, it's often thought that the principal danger facing John's original audience was persecution. It's often said, you know, this is a book that was written to a persecuted church, and of course there is some truth in that.

But that wasn't the only danger, and we might even be so bold as to say it wasn't the principal danger. The kingdoms of this world, and this is certainly true of the Roman Empire, employ two methods to seek to destroy the people of God, persecution and seduction.

These are the two armaments in there that they can employ. And Revelation is also about warning God's people not to be seduced by the world.

When we come to reading the letters to the churches, we'll find that it's very clear that many of these churches were not suffering intense persecution. Some were, some weren't. For some of them, the biggest danger wasn't being killed by the Romans, but being seduced by the Romans, and being drawn into a Roman way of seeing the world, being banged into the lies of Rome as to who's in charge and what's important and what life is about.

Being seduced by Rome was much more dangerous than being killed by Rome. And there's this warning from Jesus to God's people that we not be seduced by the kingdoms of this world, that our testimony not be weakened by divided loyalties.

[ 37 : 43 ] And we are blessed when our knowledge of Jesus grows, our trust in Jesus deepens, and our loyalty to Jesus hardens. And there's a condition of this blessing.

And I won't repeat what I said to the children. Blessed is the one who reads, who hears, and who takes to heart. And this is the language of obedience.

We will be blessed in the measure that we read and hear and take to heart. Of course, the other side of that coin of blessing, and the rather solemn one, is the alternative to blessing.

What are we if we're not blessed? Well, we're cursed. To not read, to not hear, to not take to heart is a serious matter. In the very words of the prologue, there is this note of urgency at the end of verse 3.

When having encouraged us, having urged us to read and to hear and to take to heart, John says, because the time, the kairos, is near. And that, however we may wish to understand that expression, certainly introduces this element of immediacy and urgency.

[ 38 : 52 ] It is an urgent matter to read this book. It is an urgent matter to hear God's words. It is an urgent matter to take to heart what He has to say to us.

And so we see something of the purpose in these opening words of the book. And so the adventure begins. And may our journey through this book be indeed of great blessing to all of us.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You that You're the God who has made Himself known, that You are the God who reveals to us who You are and what You are like.

We thank You for Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. We thank You that He who died on the cross rose again triumphant from the grave, ascended on high, is seated at Your right hand, and is ruling and governing over the universe throughout history against every pretender and foe, every empire of this world that rises and falls, constant throughout history.

There is this reality of the government and the sovereign rule and the gracious rule of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

[ 40 : 06 ] And for this, we give You thanks. Help us as we study Your Word today and into the preceding or following weeks.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.