

## Chapter 1

**THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST**

Okay, I want to approach this semester by first talking about apocalyptic literature. The apocalyptic literature is a category of literature that you will see in all the commentaries and various theological studies that you may encounter. I will attempt to form some distance between the book of Revelation and apocalyptic literature. The book of Revelation is *THE APOCALYPSE*, not apocalyptic literature.

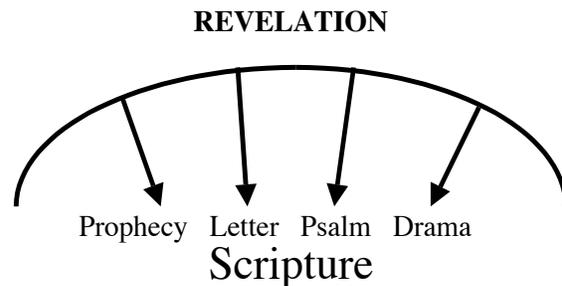
**APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE**

Apocalyptic literature is a name that has been given to non-canonical Jewish writings that have an expectation of some kind of a deliverer who will be political in nature. The Book of Revelation has nothing to do with that kind of approach. There has been a great deal of effort to shove these two concepts together so that the Apocalypse becomes just another piece of apocalyptic literature.

What is the Book of Revelation? It is *Apocalypsis*. The way this book starts off is with the Greek word, *Apocalypsis*. *Apocalypsis* means “an unveiling of something otherwise unknowable by man,” and it comes from above. The book of Revelation is just that—Revelation from God. There are non-canonical materials labeled as “apocalyptic,” but this is a misnomer because these materials do not have their origin in God.

Now we are going to theology here just for a minute. If you can see that Revelation is an umbrella word, then under this umbrella stands things given to man from God whether it is prophecy, or a letter, or a psalm, or a

drama. You see it does not matter what the form is. Revelation is something that comes from God to man, and it is a revelation of something that we could not know. We cannot climb up into heaven and see what God is revealing to us. We’re stuck down here, and so God has to send it to us. It is a downward moving thing, which means that it comes under the umbrella of the Doctrine of Revelation (See Chart 1.1).

**Chart 1.1**

So then, the entire Bible is Revelation. And if we begin to fall into that trap of considering the book of Revelation to be within the genre of apocalyptic literature, then we are taking one of the books out of the Bible and lumping it over with this non-canonical Jewish kind of stuff called apocalyptic literature that deals with political deliverance.

Apocalyptic literature grew out of the hopeful projections of Jews for a strong champion who would rise up to deliver them from their persecutors. This literature originated in times of terrible oppression in which hopes for freedom were sinking. To classify this book as another in this category, you see, is wrong, and it does not do justice then to this book that has its origin in God.

Moving the book of Revelation into the non-canonical category or blending our thought processes with that category will result in falling into some traps. One of those traps is that we could say that the writer of this book is somebody other than the Apostle John. That trap would result in wasteful dialogue over non-profitable things about this book, or even many books of the Bible.

There are, however, some peculiarities about this book. We are going to be looking at some of those peculiarities that cause it to look different from the Gospel of John. Even though John wrote both books, they are entirely different, and we will need to have some different Hermeneutical rules in order to interpret this special book of Revelation. We are going to get some clues from God as to how to interpret this book. But you need to put some distance between those two concepts of apocalypse versus apocalyptic literature. You should know then that one of the questions is, “Is the Book of Revelation, apocalyptic?” You had better believe it is a question that is being asked! Revelation is revelation. Revelation and apocalypsis mean the same thing. If apocalyptic is referring to this non-canonical category of literature, then, no, it’s not apocalyptic. But if it is apocalyptic as far as having its origin in God, then, yes, it is. It is part of the Bible and the entire Bible is revelation.

### *Apocalypsis*

The first word in this book is the inarticulate “Apocalypsis of Jesus Christ” which means revelation of Jesus Christ. Many translators will be tempted to say “a revelation of Jesus Christ” when the article “the” is omitted. However, something is lost when “a” is added.

Revelation is, of course, apocalyptic. It is

a letter, it is drama, it is prophecy, it is all of those things, and it has these various elements of form in it. Some of Revelation is letter form, some of it is drama form, some of it is vision, and some of it is prophecy (see Chart 1.1). The answer to the question, “Is the Book of Revelation, apocalyptic?” is yes, yes, yes, YES!

Now I am going to skip away from this idea of comparing and contrasting prophecy to apocalyptic, and move more into the concept of digesting the book as it stands and not worry about how it compares to other apocalyptic literature. We are going to study this book with a reverence because it is a book of the Bible. To do otherwise would be unprofitable.

### *Author*

Now who is the author? There is internal evidence that says that the Apostle John is the author. According to my doctrine anything that is revelation from God is inerrant even though it is through a human writer. And so this inerrant Book says John is the writer, but God is the author. You don’t need to dialogue over that. You don’t have to go read a bunch of commentaries to find out who wrote the Revelation, just read the Bible. It tells you. It’s very simple once you move away from lumping and dumping Revelation with all this other kind of non-canonical literature.

### *Historical Context*

The date of the letter has to do with the persecution surrounding the outbreak of emperor worship. The best date that I can come up with is A.D. 95, which is during the time of Domitian, the Roman Emperor at the time of the Apostle John’s banishment to the Isle of Patmos.

Who was Domitian? and how does he relate to Revelation? Here is the long answer. There are two parts, an A and a B, and both parts are fairly long, so let's gear up here.

### A. Problem:

Domitian was Emperor of Rome who claimed to be divine, and demanded to be worshipped. Nonconformance was punishable by death. This is the immediate problem being referenced by the book of Revelation. He is the emperor who banished John.

### B. Historical context:

1. Before emperor worship, there was the cult of Rome, in which the empire of Rome was deified as a Goddess ("*Dea Roma*."") The name of this ancient cult then is *Dea Roma*.
2. Julius Caesar implemented emperor worship (before Christ) by putting his statue in the temples. I do not have a date range, but you can get that from an encyclopedia.
3. Augustus Caesar implemented emperor worship in the provinces during Christ (31 B.C. to A.D. 14).
4. Caligula demanded worship and put his statue in the Jewish temple (A.D. 37 to 41).
5. Nero exploited emperor worship and blamed the fire in Rome on the Christians (A.D. 54 to 68).
6. Domitian demanded emperor worship and punished nonconformance (A.D. 81 to 96).

There is a bit of progression going on here, and the chronological events are getting worse and worse. This problem and historical context are the backdrop for the book of Revela-

tion. You begin with emperor worship and the demand for it. Then the progression goes to the point of being killed for not conforming to it. The book of Revelation comes against that backdrop.

This progression is important because it leads eventually to the Antichrist. The Antichrist will demand worship just like these emperors. This book foreshadows the rise of Antichrist in the end times. This is the first century kind of worship of some kind of a world ruler, you see, and it's going to be the same thing over again. We need to gear up. We need to understand what is coming down the pipes so that we do not fall into the trap of being deceived, and worshipping someone or something that will endanger the Christian faith.

## HISTORICAL APPROACHES

Now that we have the date and the occasion and Domitian's purpose, we need to look at the historical approaches to this book.

1. The Preterist approach is where the book applies to John's contemporaries only.
2. The Continuous-Historical approach means that the book is a historical laying out the history of the Christian church over a long period of time.
3. The Futurist approach means that this book applies entirely into the future.
4. The Philosophical approach is one in which there are principles that God uses to govern history, and this book is a collection of those principles.

Wanda: Would you repeat that, please?

Vinson (V): Okay, it is a collection of principles by which God governs history.

Now, you can choose which one of these

that you want to employ in your approach to the history in the Book of Revelation. It is my choice that we use all of these, because I think that to just pick one is to exclude a lot of things that God is trying to do. I think this book had a message for John's time, I think it has a message for our time, I think it has a message for our future time, and I think there is a continuous sweep of history depicted in this book. I also really believe that there is a collection of principles by which God is going to be showing us how He governs history.

It is God's history, and we are moving along in God's history. We are going to get to these end points that are described out in the future. It is up to us to see how we get there, but we are going to get there. In a sense it is almost deterministic. But in another sense you have free will and you are not so predestined that you are going to fall into every one of these little traps, you see. You are going to use your own intelligence to map out for yourself how you are going to step over some of these hurdles.

Some, of course, close their eyes and just run forward, smash and fall into every hole, trip over every barrier, and cannot understand why they are all skinned up. We have to bandage them up, get them on their feet, and tell them to not trip over that thing again!

## REVELATION 1

Okay, let's open up to Revelation 1.

Steve: That's in the back of the book, right?

V: Yeah. You go to the back of the book for the answers, right? Okay, it begins with:

Revelation

1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and

signified [it] by his angel unto his servant John:

### *Revelation For Slaves*

The Revelation is the *apocalypse*. Notice that God gave this revelation to show unto his servants (plural). There is much information in this one verse here. What you need to see here is that the purpose of this book is for His servants. Servant is slave, *doulos*. Some people reading this may not be slaves. If you are not a slave, you are not going to catch on to this book. To be a slave of the Lord means that He tells you what to do, and you do it. It is not what you do on your own, and you hope that it pleases Him. A slave has no way to do his own thing. The slave owner uses a slave. Jesus is the slave owner. You have been purchased as a slave.

Some of you are in rebellion and running away like a slave did a long time ago who met the Apostle Paul, got saved, and went back to his master and became obedient and faithful. So when God owns you, He can spend you the way He wants to. You do not spend yourself. You do not plan what you are going to do with your life. God has a plan for your life, and He is going to spend you the way He wants to.

I want to be a slave because that is the only way that I can have true freedom and the great adventure that God has for me. If you do your own thing, then you are in rebellion, and there is no wonderful adventure in that. There is nothing but heartache and pain, and there is going to be eternal loss in that rebellion. I want you to see that this book here is to be shown unto the Lord's slaves.

Homer: I've been told sometimes that we do not have exact plans to adhere to, and that we just need to look around and see where God is working and join Him.

V: Okay, that is correct. Following God is what you do as a slave. If you get in front of God, and ask Him to follow you, you are being a rebel. We have a lot of Christians who say, “Okay, what do I want to do? I think I will go over here and build a new church.” That Christian works and builds and works and then he says, “Oh, God, come over here and bless our church. We are building it for you.” That is backward to what this book is talking about.

The slavery that this book is talking about is when the Lord takes off walking, and He walks through the valley of the shadow of death, you are following right behind Him. You are scared when you look, and so you say, “Oh, I do not know about this!” But you just keep on going. That is slavery. We will couple this with the *kenosis* at another time.

You need to know that the present invitation is for you to become a slave. Some of you are already slaves, but some of you may have something in your heart that is stopping you from surrendering to Jesus. That something has got to come out. This book is going to bring pain and suffering to you, but it can bring rejoicing and blessing to you if you are yielded as a full slave to Jesus Christ. I want you to do that, so I am going to lead in a prayer right now for surrender. Will you surrender all to Jesus Christ, and yield your life in slavery to Him no matter what? No strings, no conditions, you just surrender to the Lord. Will you do it?

*Lord, Jesus, I surrender my life to you because I want to be your slave, just like John was your slave. This book was sent to be shown to your slaves, and I want to see, so God please show me your plan. I am your*

*slave no matter what your plan for my life is—I yield it all to you right now to the glory of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.*

Many Students: Amen!

## HIERARCHY OF REVELATION

### Pathway

Now I want you to see where this book came from. Here is a pattern: This is the pathway of this book, a hierarchy of revela-

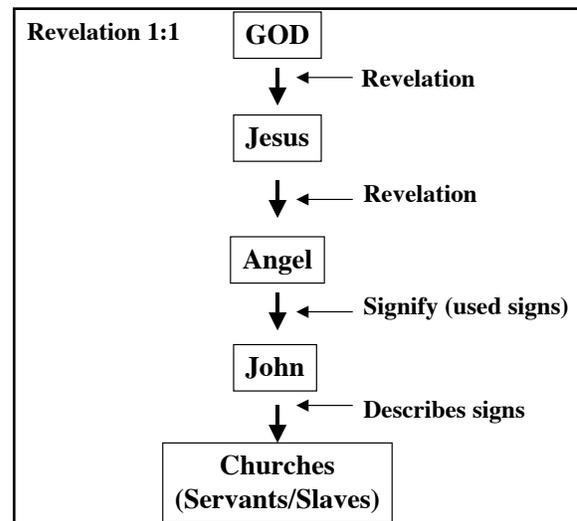


Chart 1.2

tion (see Chart 1.2). God knows the times and the seasons, the whole end-time schema because it is His plan. Even Jesus doesn’t know the times. The Father alone knows the times. He gives the revelation to Jesus. Let us see where it says that: “which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants” (v. 1).

All right, the destination for the information is the Lord’s servants/or slaves. And I must hold to the specific word “servants/or slaves.” For the most part today, however, these churches at the bottom of Chart 1.2 are not servants/or slaves. The reason why you do not know anything about the book of Revelation is because most churches are not

servants/or slaves. They can read this book of Scripture, they can hear it preached, they can hear it taught, and they still do not understand it. They come up with all manner of schemes of how to interpret it so that they have no tribulation in their lives. They end up with nothing but blessings for us because they think that we are the children of God, and we are supposed to be blessed. We are not to have any pain or even any suffering. None of that is for us because we are “children of the King.” We sing songs about that. But this book is really for the true servants/or slaves inside of these churches.

**Signs**

So the first arrow in the hierarchy in Chart 1.2 goes to Jesus. Jesus, then, gives it to an angel who is going to signify (or show by signs) the information to John. When you signify something, you are doing it by signs (see Chart 1.3). If you are driving down the

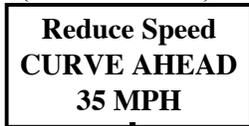


Chart 1.3

highway, and you see a sign up there that has words on it, and it says you ought to reduce your speed to 35 miles per hour because there is a curve. That gives you information. That is a word sign. But that is not what came to John. What came to John was a picture sign.

Say that you are driving down the road, and you see a picture sign (Chart 1.4). You should interpret that sign within the context of past interpretations. You look at that arrow on a diamond background of yellow, and you say, “My road is going to curve to the right, and this diamond means slow down.

Slow! be cautious! Turn! you are going to curve to the right.

An absurdity occurs when someone interprets the sign as follows: “Okay, that diamond means a jewel. According to the arrow,

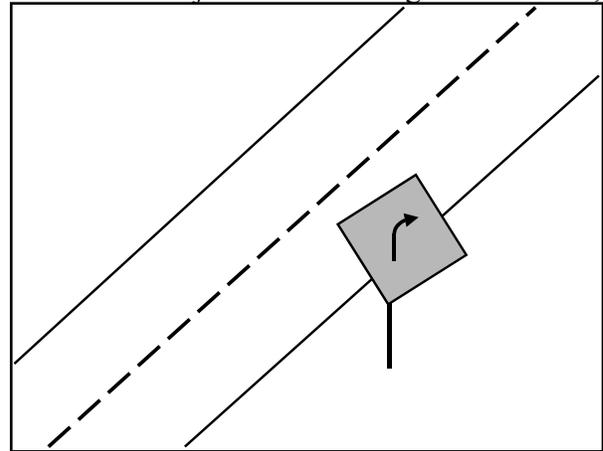


Chart 1.4

the jewel was shot straight up into the air and curved to the right before its descent. We will go out here on the right hand side of the road and look around and see if we can find that diamond. Surely it came back down and landed on the ground.”

You see how absurd that is if you use the wrong interpretation on a picture sign? We can see that the arrow goes up and over, but we interpret that sign through our signs hermeneutic to understand the meaning of that sign. In our minds we lay it down in a plane parallel to the ground and see the arrow as a road, not going straight up in the air, but going forward and curving to the right. That is what you do in hermeneutics, try to determine what the sign means. Now if you major on the picture in this sign, you may miss the significance of its underlying information and run off the road because you are going too fast. You didn’t take the true meaning of the sign to heart.

What we are going to look at is the meaning of the signs. Now John got these pictorial kinds of signs. But he is going to write a description of the picture to you that is going to be in words like the information sign. He would say, I saw a diamond piece of metal with two holes in it and two things that look like bolts or some kind of fasteners, and it was attached to a metal pole. The metal pole went down into the ground, and it had a big black line on the metal diamond. The black line went upwards and over to the right. That is what he saw, and that is what he writes. It is up to you to take what he writes and try to find out what it means.

So when the angel signified this information, he did it with picture signs to John. When the signs came to John, he was told to write down what he saw. So what do you get? John got the sign, but you get the written information “describing the sign,” not the information “from the sign.” You get the words, but John got the sign. But the words describe the sign. They are not interpreting the sign. If you begin to look at these words and forget that they are describing a sign, you can move off into some strange territory.

Jerry: The words describe the sign, but they do not interpret it?

V: They do not interpret the sign. They *describe* the sign. Do you know how you interpret the sign? by the help of the Holy Spirit who gives help to slaves, not to rebels. Slaves are the only ones who are going to understand the signs. The rebels will be looking at that diamond-shaped metal piece and say, “Why did God stick this thing right out here and what does it mean?” If you will do the Word of God, you will know the doctrine. It is up to you to get right with God, and let God begin to open up to you the understandings of those signs.

John was faithful to write a description of what he saw, and he saw the signification from the angel. Here (Chart 1.2) the information comes from God to Jesus. Jesus sends an angel who signifies it to John, *i.e.* the angel shows him signs. John writes the Word that describes the signs and sends it to the churches, and the churches have some slaves in them, and those slaves have their minds opened, and they begin to see what God is saying. It is important that you get this. All this is right here in verse 1. He will also show us how to do this interpretation in verse 20. But that is too far ahead of us right now. We need to do verses 2 and 3 next.

Revelation

1:2 Who bare record of the word of God, . . .

This is testifying here, you see, about John’s walking with the Lord during the incarnation.

### ***Blessing***

Revelation

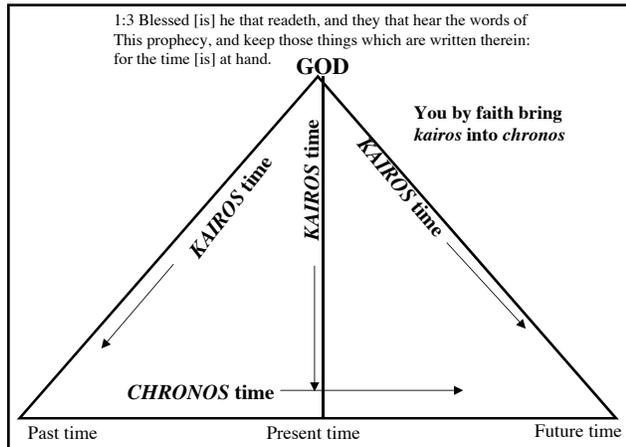
1:2 . . . and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

1:3 Blessed [is] he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time [is] at hand.

So here in verse 3 is where your blessing is described. If you read this book and keep it (believe and obey), or if you hear this and keep it, you will be blessed. There are many of you that are going to be blessed this semester. I mean you are going to get your socks knocked off. It is going to change your life, and you will thank God for eternity for this course.

The **time** (v.3) that we are dealing with here is *kairos* rather than *chronos*. The **time** is at hand. *Kairos* is at hand. If you take a

look at *chronos*, which is past, present, and future, and visualize how it all can be encapsulated into a point. That point is *kairos*, and *kairos* is where God intersects *chronos*. He is the I AM because He has within Him all of time, but He is the I AM because that means



**Chart 1.5**

that wherever you are in *chronos* time, God is. No matter who your forefathers were, God is. They were, but He is, back there in the past. You are, and He is, right here in the present. You will be, but He is, over there in the future. That is the I AM. We are here in *chronos*, but you, by faith, can bring the *kairos* into the *chronos*. That is how you get God’s power brought into the now. You can have by faith what is yet future. You can walk as victorious kings and priests because that is what you are going to be, and by faith, you can claim those future realities now, have the power of all of that now, and the joy of all that now. It is only by faith, though.

**Seven**

Revelation

1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace [be] unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;

Seven is a number that has more than just a numerical value. It has a universal value. When you have seven things, you are talking about the universal of the whole thing even though there is a quantified number seven that is being given to you. The way I see the number seven in this verse is to indicate the universal.

All through this semester I will be giving you my interpretations of what I think the signs are saying. You do not have to believe my interpretations, you can reject everything I am saying, and you can come up with your own weird thing (laughter). I want you to agree with me because I think I know what I am talking about, but if you do not, you will not have war with me. I give you the freedom that I wish I had had when I was a student.

Beth: What do you mean when you say seven has a universal designation?

V: The seven churches would be a statement that it is the universal church. Seven spirits is the universal spirit, the whole thing.

**The Three Offices Of Christ**

When we come down to verse 5 . . .

Revelation

1:5 And from Jesus Christ, [who is] the faithful witness, [and] the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

I want you to see the three offices of the Lord (prophet, priest, and king) right there in that verse. The first office is prophet when He is the faithful witness, His prophetic ministry and office. Prophet is the first office exemplified in His being the faithful witness. The second one is priest, “the first begotten of the dead.” When you are dealing with sacrifice you are dealing with the priestly

ministry of death, and Jesus paid with His own life as a sacrifice for my sins. That is the priestly office of the Lord. The third office is the royal office, which deals with ruling, and there it says that He is “the prince of the kings of the earth.”

Following after the three offices of Jesus in the same verse, the functions of the three offices are given. The first function is that He loved us, and that is the prophetic function. Do you know to whom you are going to witness? To those you love. If you choose to let someone go to hell, that is a strange act of love, is it not? If you love them, you will warn them. If you love them, you will go to them. Jesus loved us. He came to us, He told us, and He gave us an opportunity. That is the prophetic function of love, which is a horizontal kind of function.

The second function is “washed us.” Washed us is a power statement, right? Washing is the kingly or the royal function, and He does that through His power. He gives that washing, that cleansing, to you through the power that He achieved through His sacrificial work.

Paul: Mine says “freed us from our sins by his blood.” Is there a difference there?

V: “Freed” is a royal function. It is a redemption. A lot of you have not had Systematic Theology, but when you get there this will clear up. You are going to need to know this kind of stuff eventually when you are teaching.

The third function is the business about the blood that pertains to the priestly function. Washing us is a royal function, but shedding the blood is a priestly function. So you have the three offices and the three functions of those offices delineated all in the same verse.

## THE TWO ESCHATOLOGICAL OFFICES FOR SAINTS

Verse 6 is an interesting change.

Revelation

1:6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him [be] glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

He did not say priests, kings, and *prophets* for us. What is going on? I know we are presently supposed to have the prophetic function, and some of us have the prophetic office, so why did He not say it right here? He did not say prophets. He said priests and kings. He made us priests and kings forever.

Let me tell you what I think this means. I think that right now when you are encountering people in the world, you are serving as a prophet by telling them what the Lord said. For example, “the Lord says that you are to fear God. You are to be His witnesses, you are to do all the various things that He has assigned to you, and be not stiff necked and rebellious and all of that.” You have a responsibility to take that information out (His words). He commands you to herald in the streets and from the rooftops what is whispered in your ear.

### *Orientation of Priests and Kings*

However in the eschaton, you are going to be kings and priests. What is a king? A king exercises rule. What is a priest? He brings the petitions of the people to the ruler. You who are slaves now are going to be sharing in His rule. I think that in the eschaton He is going to tell you of His plan, and when He gathers His princes, His kings together, those will be you, and He is going to say, “I want you to go out and implement my plan.” You are not going to say to the people, “The Lord said for

me to tell you that He wants you to implement His plan.” You are going out as heirs of the Kingdom, and you are not going to be a *prophet* relaying the message. Your message will be your own for how to implement the Lord’s plan. You are going to say it from your own mouth in the eschatological kingdom because you are kings.

What is the orientation of a king? A king stands above, and says, “This is what I want you to do. Go, do this, this, and this.” That is the ruling orientation of a king.

When you go to the Lord as priests in the eschatological kingdom, you are going to bring back the messages and the petitions and the complaints and whatever it is of the people to the Lord in the same way that the priest does now. What does a priest do? You tell me what you need, and I go to God, and I say, “They need this!” That is intercessory prayer. That is the intercessory orientation of a priest.

A prophet is a person who stands in front of God facing the people and is the mouthpiece of God to the people. He tells me what to tell you, and I tell you. That is the messaging orientation of a prophet. You are a prophet, priest and king in this age. Your prophetic function is to carry the Word from God to the people. You are the mouthpiece of God, and you do just like Jeremiah does. You say, “God said . . .” Every time you preach a sermon it is not you saying it, it is “God said.” If it is not God said, then get out of the pulpit.

Many Students: Amen!

Tim: Whenever we get into heaven, we are the priests and the kings, so who are we going to be speaking to?

V: Okay, we are going to get to that in another chapter. That ought to bring you back, right?

Many Students: Nodding and smiling!

V: This is an interesting twist here that I want you to see and to begin to have these kinds of questions, just like what Tim thought and voiced here a minute ago. This is a serious business because all throughout the Bible you are prophet, priest, and king, but here the prophet is left out of your assignment. How interesting that is! I want you to ponder these kinds of things. You can read commentaries that say Jesus is the faithful prophet who is so good that my witnessing fades into nothingness in comparison to that. But if you use that one, I would say that our kingliness fades into nothing compared to His, and our priestliness fades into nothing compared to His as well.

Joe: It is all or nothing.

V: Yes.

Steve: You turned something around on me in this. Originally you said washing is a priestly function, and then you said . . . you have me confused.

V: Washing is royal. Blood is priestly.

Carl: The blood is the symbol for sacrifice.

Sybil: We will be both king and priest, correct?

V: Yes, and that is because it is given to us right here in the Scripture, “hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to him [be] glory and dominion for ever and ever.”<sup>1</sup> Right now you serve as king and priest and prophet, but your prophetic ser-

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 1:6.

vice and office is not forever because it will be swallowed up in your kingliness.

Wanda: The priest and king in the heavens, would that be conditional upon our being faithful servants here?

V: Yes, good point!

Betty: So, do nothing, you get nothing.

V: That is right. You see there are going to be a lot of peons in heaven. They are going to need some kings to tell them what to do. Your opportunity, then, is to get on board and get right because “to whom much is given, much is required” (Luke 12:48). If you are faithful in the little things, when you go to heaven, much will be given to you.

Wanda: We have a problem in that we have to do in order to receive.

V: That is a fact. It is not a problem.

Wanda: Faith is the key there, right?

V: You bet. Do it in faith.

Wanda: It puts you into an active . . . .

V: Yes, indeed. It is a lively faith.

Wanda: But we do not do what we are doing in order that we might have the promise. We have the promise once we are saved, but our doing is necessitated by our relationship to Christ through faith.

V: You have it.

Tom: How would one discern the will of God?

V: I am not ready to launch out into that since that is a course of study.

Carl: It is interesting that we are capable of being priests and kings simply because of that which preceded verse 5 in His action as prophet.

V: Amen!

Pete: It is notable that we are made priests and kings after the washing of the blood which is what, if it is not regeneration?

V: That is right!

We will pick up in the next lesson/chapter at verse 7, and do whatever else we are supposed to do next which is assigned for next week’s lesson/chapter.

### Chapter Questions

1. Describe the importance of the word slave.
2. What is the hierarchy of revelation for the book of Revelation?
3. What are signs, and how are they used in Revelation?
4. What does the number seven mean in Revelation?
5. Describe the orientation of priests and kings.