

1. **Introduction:** On earth today, there is an ongoing spiritual war that began in heaven ages ago when Lucifer, a powerful and beautiful angel, led a rebellion against God. Pride in himself was the cause of Lucifer's rebellion. After his fall, his name was changed to Satan. He was cast out of heaven and continues his war on earth.
  - God sovereignly rules the universe which He created and will win the spiritual war. In Christ He will bring history to its consummation as and when He chooses.
  - Satan in his fallen nature is a liar, and the truth is not in him. Lies are a counterfeit of truth - untruth presented as truth.
  - God's goal is to have for Himself a holy people who can and will live with Him in eternity. Heb 12:14 tells us that to live in God's presence, they must be holy like God.
  - Satan's goal is to have a sovereign control like God by becoming the god of as many people as possible. Though Satan constantly opposes God he cannot win or be like God, but he can counterfeit at least some of God's actions, and that he does.
  - Those who follow Satan become increasingly like him. Those who follow Christ are increasingly conformed to His image (2Cor 3:18).
2. **About Revelation:** Like Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, Revelation contains visions with many symbolic elements. It uses visual images and verbal warnings and promises to weave a poetic picture of themes from the rest of Scripture.
  - Revelation's 404 verses contain over five hundred allusions to OT texts. Familiarity with OT symbolic and metaphorical language is essential to understanding Revelation.
  - Revelation consists of a letter (1:4-22:21) plus a short prologue (1:1-3).
  - The whole document was sent to 7 churches in Asia Minor to be read aloud to each congregation.
3. **Revelation 1:1-3:** *The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testifies to everything he saw - that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> 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.*
  - John experienced visions given to Christ by God and delivered to John through an angel. The purpose of the visions is to show God's servants what must soon take place.
  - *"What must soon take place."* When God says something must take place, it will.

- What does ***“soon take place”*** mean? It seems that, to people receiving a letter saying something will soon happen, should certainly think that “thing” will happen within, at most, a few years.
  - John experienced visions were revealed to him through an angel sent by Christ. As he was instructed, he wrote down what he saw and heard using symbolic language where appropriate.
  - Biblical “symbolic language” was familiar to those who first received Revelation.
  - Such language is not familiar to most of us, but it can be understood. Symbolic languages are widely used for coding computers and in mathematics and science.
  - Revelation is the only book in the Bible promising blessing to those who read it or hear it read aloud, and keep what is written. That is important because “the time is near.”
  - It is difficult to avoid thinking “time is near” means “soon.” At least some key elements of Revelation must have been imminent for those who first received it.
  - It has now been almost 2000 years since those first recipients received the letter.
  - Revelation is not frivolous or casual. It is not intended to satisfy desires to unravel secret things of God. It contains information that believers are intended to keep, be transformed by, and to use to become more faithful in obedience to Christ. As Deuteronomy 29:29 reminds us, the secret things belong to God.
  - Even today, there is a blessing for those who read Revelation and follow its precepts.
4. ***Revelation 1:4-6: John to the seven churches that 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, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood <sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.***
- Revelation is addressed to ***“the seven churches that are in Asia,”*** which is the Roman province of Asia located in the western part of Asia Minor.
  - The seven form an irregular circle beginning with Ephesus, then north to Smyrna and Pergamum, and then southeast to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.
  - Though there were other active churches in the area, these seven are used to represent the entire church throughout the age from the resurrection to the second coming of Christ. Seven is the number of completeness.
  - The salutation is beautiful. ***“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come.”*** Grace is God’s favor given to those who do not deserve it. He pardons sins and bestows the gift of eternal life.

- The phrase *“him who is and who was and who is to come”* has the same implications as God’s identification given to Moses as *“I am who I am.”* He is the unchanging God of the Covenant, the beginning and the end.
  - The grace of God’s gift of peace flows from God to the redeemed believer who has been reconciled to God by the salvation work of Jesus Christ
  - Grace and peace are from the Father, earned for us by Jesus, and applied by the Holy Spirit who is identified as *“the seven spirits who are before God’s throne”* (representing the completeness of the Spirit).
5. **Revelation 1:7:** *Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.*
- *“Coming with clouds”* This phrase in reference to Christ's return, signifies both divine majesty and ultimate judgment
6. **Biblical Symbolism of Clouds:** In the Bible, clouds are far more than mere atmospheric phenomena. They represent God’s presence, divine glory, power, and authority.
- God led the Israelites through the wilderness with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, symbolizing His constant presence, guidance, and protection (Ex 13:21).
  - God used a cloud to show the people when He was speaking to Moses (Ex 19:9; 24:15). When the tabernacle was completed, God enveloped it with a cloud (Num 9:15).
  - A thick cloud surrounding Mount Sinai when God gave the Law to Moses signified God’s holiness and the importance of the covenant (Ex 19 – 24)
  - A glory cloud filled the Tabernacle to indicate God's dwelling among His people, His acceptance of their worship, and His presence with them.
  - When Solomon finished the temple and the priests brought the ark of the covenant into the Holy of Holies, God filled the temple with a cloud (1 Kings 8:10).
  - As God's veil, clouds allow God to directly interact with His people without exposing them to the brilliance of His glory (Ex 33:20). For Jesus to say He will be coming "with the clouds" means He is coming with the glory of God. It means, He is God.
  - At Jesus’ transfiguration, a bright cloud overshadowed Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, and a voice from the cloud affirmed Jesus' divine sonship and authority (Mk 9:7).
  - God's voice often came from within a cloud, as seen at Mount Sinai, and His Transfiguration. Clouds at times serve as a medium of divine communication.
  - Clouds are associated with the Day of the Lord, a time of both divine judgment and consummation of redemption.

- In numerous Biblical passages, Jesus' return at the end of the church age is prophesied to occur with clouds, indicating both his glory and his role as judge.
7. **Next:** Begin with **Revelation 1:8:** ***“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”***