

4 February 2007

## **“Look Who’s in Charge”**

Reading: Revelation 1:1-8

### **Introduction to the Series**

One morning, about thirty years ago, I received an unexpected phone call. It was from a man called Andrew Lamb, one of the part-time students at a small Bible College at which I taught. What was about to unfold was probably the most dramatic conversion I have ever witnessed.

Andy worked at a French polishing business in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. His boss, who was the son of the owner, had grown up with an obsession about strength and power. He became aware of Andy’s Christian witness and taunted him about his faith. On this particular day, he said mockingly, “Your God is not all-powerful. If he were, he could strike me down here and now and pin me to the ground.” Andy was about to explain to him that God is not obliged to respond to challenges like that one when he felt prompted to say, “Sir, my God could do that if he wished.” With that his boss *was* struck down and pinned to the ground, unable to move a muscle. After a while Andy prayed for him and said, “Sir, the Lord will allow you to stand up now.” With that, his boss slowly got to his feet, his eyes as wide as saucers.

That’s when Andy phoned me. He felt it important that his boss speak to a white man. He himself was “coloured”, his boss was white and those were the dark days of apartheid. When I arrived his boss, Denzil Langeveldt, was still in a state of shock. I explained the way of salvation to him. He took very little persuasion. Within minutes he had committed his life to the Lord. The very next Sunday, he was in church. He couldn’t wait to get there.

It was exciting to see him grow in the faith. He had a voracious spiritual appetite. He spent every spare moment reading his Bible. He had little formal education but his understanding was nothing short of amazing. And he was so excited about it all. He would arrive early for church and enthusiastically tell us what he had discovered in Romans or Ephesians. Then, one day, I noticed a disturbed look on his face. “What’s wrong?” I asked. “Pastor,” he said, in a state of agitation, “it’s a trick. ‘Revelations’ (the Book of Revelation) is a trick. It makes no sense. I don’t think God put it in the Bible.” It took some time to convince him that it was meant to be there.

Yes, he was a little eccentric, but he was extremely sincere. And his problem was understandable. As he attempted to read the book, he found himself in a strange world – a world of beasts, seals, horses, trumpets and bowls. Even the picture of Jesus was different from the way he had imagined him. This bizarre book seemed so unlike the rest of the New Testament (he had read through the other twenty-six books by this time). None of it made sense and, in his frustration, he concluded that the book had somehow

slipped into the Bible by mistake. And he certainly wasn't the first or the last person to have been puzzled by this extraordinary book. But that's not how it is meant to be.

### **Given to Enlighten – Not to Confuse**

The very first word of the book is *apokalupsis*. It means “to uncover” or to “remove the curtain” – to reveal what is normally hidden from view. Darrell Johnson, of Regent College, preached an inspiring and a very balanced series on the book. He entitled the series, “*Things are not as they seem.*” His point was that appearances are often deceptive. There are realities that help furnish the key to the interpretation of the meaning of history and the circumstances of Christians in the present. The book seeks to set the present in the light of the *unseen* realities of the *future*; it also seeks to set the present in the light of the *invisible* realities of the *present*.<sup>1</sup>

The situation of the people who first received the book was, in many respects, very different from ours and, in other respects, very similar to ours. I shall argue that the similarities are more significant than the differences. The book has a message for us today.

This Series will have failed miserably:

- If it leaves you more confused at the end than you are at the beginning. (If it does, that will be my fault).
- If you find it fascinating but unhelpful. (If it satisfies your curiosity but is of little or no practical value to you).
- If you end up examining time charts and are intrigued by the number 666 and the battle strategy of Armageddon.
- If you find tanks and helicopters, under-skin microchips and mysterious codes, nuclear warfare, popes and political leaders, Russia and the European Common Market. If so, you will have misunderstood the book. If you pull out your calculators and start setting dates, you will not only have missed the point but you will also be disregarding the clear words of Jesus,

“No one knows the day or hour, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (Mt 24:36)

I guess I have already disappointed a few people. No, I certainly don't claim to have all the answers, but I usually know nonsense when I see it. And it's part of my job to lead my hearers away from speculative nonsense towards sound truth.

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell W. Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge: An Expository Journey through the Book of Revelation* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 26.

The series will have achieved its main objectives:

- If, as a result of it, you are drawn closer to the Lord.
- If your overall understanding of God's self-revelation increases.
- If you become more conscious than ever of the Lord's magnificence and his majesty.
- If you are given a perspective on reality that shapes or sharpens your understanding of the most important matters in life.
- If you are enabled to live a winsome and a courageous Christian life. (In fact, if a study of this nature doesn't help us spiritually and deepen our lives, we really are wasting our time).

So let's commence our examination of the book.

## **I. COME WITH ME TO PATMOS, A BEAUTIFUL, CRESCENT-SHAPED ISLAND IN THE AEGEAN SEA.**

### **A. The Alcatraz of the Aegean**

It's a small island, about fifteen kilometres long and eight wide. As you can see from this slide, it looks like a resort – today, that is. In those days it was a barren, craggy piece of rock jutting out of the Sea and it served as a prison with very secure, watery walls. It lay some fifty-five kilometres off the coast of Asia Minor and it was a long swim to the mainland. If the authorities wanted to remove from society a person deemed undesirable, then Patmos was the place to send him. If, however, the person were regarded as a criminal, he was sentenced to hard labour in the rock quarries and for some it was a slow death sentence. Patmos was the Alcatraz of the Aegean Sea. John was there as a prisoner, not just an exile. William Ramsay describes the conditions. Banished to the island in these circumstances would be “preceded by scourging, marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground, a dark prison, work under the lash of a military overseer.”<sup>2</sup> John doesn't give us the details, but he was certainly not on vacation.

### **B. The Imperial Cult**

That's where John was, and we have a pretty good idea why he was there. He tells us that it was “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” (1:9) This is what was going on. The Emperor Domitian (81-96) was extremely insecure, as tyrants often are. He travelled with a retinue of body guards. Whenever he entered a city, the citizens had to shout, “Worthy!” As he entered

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<sup>2</sup> Sir William Ramsay cited by William Barclay, *Revelation of John, Vol. 1* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1960), 52

the great hall in Rome, the senators would shout, “Worthy!” One of the titles he claimed for himself was, “*Dominus et Deus*” – “Lord and God.”

In an attempt to secure his reign, he insisted that citizens burn a pinch of incense on the altar and declare, “*Caesar Kurios*” - “Caesar is Lord.” The cities of the western part of the Roman province of Asia were a hotbed of emperor worship. In Ephesus the ruins of the Temple of Domitian can still be seen. This did not pose a problem to almost all of the inhabitants of the empire. In a polytheistic society, they could happily perform this duty and then they were free to go out and worship any god they chose. (Jews were given a special exemption). But Christians simply could not say, “Caesar is Lord.” They knew what was implied. They could honour Caesar as emperor and render to him the things that belonged to him. But they could not render to Caesar the things that belong to God. For them, only Jesus was Lord. In consequence, many Christians had lost their lives and there was more to come. They were a small minority, without much influence, liable to persecution and even death at any time. It was easy for them to feel overawed and intimidated. They could say, “Jesus is Lord,” but it certainly didn’t seem like that.

Today, in Canada, we do not face hostility of this nature, but do you sometimes feel a little overawed? Does it look as though Christianity is winning the battle against contradictory truth claims and ideologies? Is the world becoming progressively more humane? Is God’s kingdom being established on earth? Is the world in better shape, after 2000 years of Christianity, than it was when Jesus came? Visit the large cities of our world and take in some of the impressive sights. Humanity, for the most part, lives in self-reliance and idolatry. There is freedom of religion, but there is also a rising intolerance toward those who make truth claims that they regard as universally applicable.

We, who claim to be Christians – are we better off or worse off? Does it sometimes seem that we are on the losing side? Do you sometimes doubt the faith or, at least, wonder why there isn’t more evidence of God’s activity in your circumstances? Most of the people in your street or your apartment complex, or in your class at school don’t claim to follow Jesus, but they seem as well off as you are. Our circumstances do not always corroborate our beliefs. Both at the macro level of world events and at the micro level of our own circumstances, we face anomalies and contradictions.

### **C. Apocalyptic**

The book aims to set the record straight. As Darrell Johnson says, “*Things are not as they seem!*” The reason the man to whom I referred earlier thought the book was a trick is that he was unfamiliar with the genre (kind of literature) in which it was written. From about 200 BC to about AD 200 apocalyptic literature was well known. Besides the canonical Book of Revelation, there were other apocalypses. These works were intended for communities undergoing a crisis of faith. They focus upon the cosmic battle between good and evil and describe this

in terms of vivid imagery. They show how God will intervene and punish evil and establish his reign. Apocalyptic is not intended to be “a chronological account of the future but a literary shock treatment of bold and graphic images ... to give us hope that God will win a resounding victory over all evil.”<sup>3</sup> (I shall provide notes containing guidelines on the interpretation of apocalyptic literature)

Brent Sandy and Martin Abegg explain the value of apocalyptic literature:

The genius of apocalyptic literature is the message of hope. In the face of perverse evil, God’s people are being exhorted to persevere to the end. For although the game may seem lost – or for the more optimistic, tied up – we are assured that God is preparing to intervene and judge evil by supernatural means. Biblical apocalyptic is a wake-up call to a most refreshing eternal perspective: God will bring a permanent solution to sin’s evil effects, and we will be there to enjoy it.<sup>4</sup>

Here we have a book of encouragement. It commences with a vision of the risen and exalted Christ and concludes with his return to earth in power and glory and the establishment of his universal reign in the New Jerusalem. Between these awe-inspiring scenes at the beginning and end of the book, we witness a huge cosmic conflict. At times evil seems to have the upper hand and God’s children are exhorted to remain faithful in the face of the onslaught of evil. But the outcome of the battle is certain from the very beginning.

You may have heard of a group of seminary students who were playing basketball in a high school gym near their seminary. While they were playing, the janitor, who allowed the seminarians to use the gym after hours, would borrow one of their Bibles and read it. One day, one of the students asked the janitor what he had been reading. “Revelation,” he replied. The student chuckled, “Yeah, right.” “No, really, said the janitor. Convinced that the janitor couldn’t possibly understand the book, the seminarian asked condescendingly, “Do you understand what you have been reading?” “Oh yes,” replied the now smiling janitor. Chuckling again, the seminarian asked, “Well then, tell me what it means.” The janitor looked around coyly, leaned across and whispered in the seminarian’s ear, “*It means that Jesus is gonna win.*”<sup>5</sup>

One more important comment will suffice before we have a look at the prologue of the book. In his inspiring work on Revelation, *Reversed Thunder*, Eugene Peterson makes an important observation:

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<sup>3</sup> D. Brent Sandy and Martin G. Abegg, Jr., “Apocalyptic”, in *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, eds. D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese, Jr., (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 188.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge*, 20

Everything in the Revelation can be found in the previous sixty-five books of the Bible. The Revelation adds nothing of substance to what we already know . . . St. John uses words as poets do, recombining them in fresh ways so that old truth is freshly perceived. He takes truth that has been eroded to platitude by endless usage and sets it in motion before us in an “animated impassioned dance of ideas.”<sup>6</sup>

## II. LET’S ALLOW THE LORD TO PULL BACK THE CURTAIN.

The verses we have read today are just the introduction to the book. But even here we encounter some important truths. I want to draw your attention to four of these this morning:

### A. You Need a Realistic View of God

#### 1. *“Him who is and who was and who is to come.”*

John greets his readers in the customary New Testament way: “Grace and peace to you . . .” But he adds, “From *him who is and who was and who is to come.*” This is a paraphrase of the divine name (YHWH). You will remember that Moses asked God what he should say if the Israelites wanted to know the name of the One who had appeared to him. God answered, “I AM WHO I AM.” He was expressing his eternal existence (and more than that). Here the same truth is expressed in different words. (Ex 3:14-15)

One commentator says this is “the most tortured piece of Greek in the (entire) book.” It contains a grammatical error and it is stylistically clumsy. But it is quite possible that John does this deliberately because he would prefer to use incorrect grammar than to use terminology that might imply change in God or diminish his majesty.<sup>7</sup>

In comparison with “the One who is and who was and who is to come,” Domitian doesn’t look nearly as menacing. He looms large on the stage of world events but his reign had a beginning and it will come to an end. That’s what happened to Nero, to Alexander the Great and to Nebuchadnezzar. And that’s what we need to remember today.

Louis XIV of France stipulated that at his funeral his casket would be placed at the centre of the chancel with only one large candle beside it. His reign had been proud and glorious and the Notre Dame Cathedral was filled to overflowing with the “who’s who” of French society. Bishop Jean Massillon mounted the pulpit and announced his text. It was Ecclesiastes 1:16: “I spoke in my heart, saying, ‘Behold, I have become great, and have advanced in wisdom beyond all who were

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<sup>6</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: the Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), xi-xii.

<sup>7</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation: Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 46.

before me in Jerusalem.” He paused, to allow the truth of the text to sink in, and then he said: “God only is great, my brethren; and above all in those last moments when He presides at the death of the kings of the earth, the more their glory and their power have shown forth, the more vanishes: then do they render homage to his greatness; God then appears all that He is, and man is no more at all that which he believed himself to be.”

After finishing his sermon, Massilon left the pulpit and walked to the casket and the solitary candle. He paused for a moment, snuffed out the candle and repeated: “God only is great!”<sup>8</sup>

2. “*I am the Alpha and the Omega* says the Lord God.”

These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This is another way of saying, “Everything is bounded by God. He was there at the beginning and he will be there at the end.”

3. “. . . *The Almighty*.”

The word used here (*Pantokratōr*) is John’s favourite word for God. It is used only ten times in the New Testament; nine of these occurrences are in Revelation. (2 Cor 6:18; 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22) It describes God as the one who has complete power over everything.

When the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) was translated into Greek, this was the word that was used to translate Yahweh Ts<sup>e</sup>v’ôt, one of the compound names of God.<sup>9</sup> That fact is, I think, highly significant. In the KJV this compound name is rendered “the LORD of Hosts” and in the NIV it is “the LORD Almighty.” It portrays God as in absolute control of everything, the elements of nature and the armies of heaven, people and powers, events and circumstances. Think of young David’s response to an incensed Goliath, who threatened to feed him to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. “David said to the Philistine, ‘You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of Yahweh Ts<sup>e</sup>v’ôt, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.’” (1 Samuel 17:45)

Think of the emphasis on this name when God reassures his people that although they are facing huge odds, he is able to fulfill his promises and provide their needs:

“This is what the LORD Almighty (Yahweh Ts<sup>e</sup>v’ôt) says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘The silver is

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<sup>8</sup> Lloyd John Ogilvie, “Introducing the Sermon” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 181-2.

<sup>9</sup> Except in passages where it is transliterated *Kurios Sabaoth*.

mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. 'The glory of the present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty.'" (Haggai 2:6-9)

He is the *Pantokratōr*, the Almighty, and absolutely everything is under his control. William Barclay draws our attention to the circumstances under which John is writing:

The embattled might of Rome has risen up to crush the Christian Church. No empire had ever been able to withstand Rome; Rome was the all-conquering and the all-powerful. What possible chance had the Christian Church, small, mainly composed of slaves, without influence and power, against Rome? What chance against Rome had "the panting, huddled flock whose crime was Christ"? Humanly speaking, the Christian Church had no chance. All it could look for was annihilation. But if men thought that, they had left the most important factor out of the reckoning – they had left out God, the *Pantokratōr*, the Almighty, the one in the grip of whose hand are all things.<sup>10</sup>

## **B. You Need an Accurate Picture of Jesus**

*"From Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth."*

### 1. *"The faithful witness"*

Not only is Jesus our Lord, but he is also the ultimate "faithful witness". Through his message and by his very life he has declared to us what God is like. (John 1:18; 18:37) More than that, the Greek word for witness (*martus*) has come into the English language as "martyr." In the context of the Revelation, faithful witness often meant death. (2:13; 11:3; 17:6) The one addressing Christians, who were about to enter a time of persecution, was himself the faithful witness – to the point of death.

### 2. *"The firstborn from the dead"*

He is also the "firstborn from the dead". This term can and does sometimes refer to *priority*. Jesus was *the first* to be raised from the dead. (1 Cor 15:20, 23) But there is much more to the title "firstborn". It refers to *pre-eminence*. The firstborn is one who has power and honour and occupies the first place. So it is as "the firstborn over all creation" and as "the beginning and firstborn from among the dead" that he has "the supremacy in everything". (Col 1:15-20)

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<sup>10</sup> Barclay, *Revelation*, Vol. 1, 48.

3. *“The ruler of the kings of the earth”*  
You can imagine the impact of these descriptions on the first readers? He is the “ruler of the kings of the earth”. But can you also feel the force that they have for us today? The allusion here is to Psalm 89:27, “I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.” Jewish scholars believed that this was a reference to the Messiah, so its citation here is significant. We need to remember that, right now, despite appearances to the contrary as he allows history to run its course, he is supreme – the “ruler of the kings of the earth”.

One can hardly avoid thinking of the offer Satan made to Jesus in the desert. In an instant he gave a physically weak and hungry Jesus a glimpse of the kingdoms of the world and promised: “I will give you all their authority and splendour, for it has been given to me and I can give it to anyone I want to.” (Luke 4:5-7) What the devil promised Jesus and could never have given him, Jesus won for himself by the suffering of the cross and the power of the resurrection. (Acts 2:36; 1 Cor. 15:24-26; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb 2:5-9; Rev 11:15-18; 19:11-16)

### C. **You Need an Appropriate View of Yourself**

*“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father . . .”*

1. *“Loves us”*  
John moves on into a doxology in which he reminds us of the Lord’s present love for us.
2. *“Freed us from our sins”*  
That ongoing love was manifested at a particular point –the moment when he delivered us from our sins by his own blood. The aorist tense (the past, ‘snapshot’ tense) is used here. By one great act on the cross he set us free from the bondage of sin. Barclay puts it well: “What happened on the Cross in a moment of time is a window into the eternal, unchanging, unceasing love of God.”<sup>11</sup>
3. *“A kingdom and priests”*  
But that’s not all. There truth enunciated in the last part of this verse echoes the stupendous revelation of our present position in the economy of God. We are co-heirs with Christ. (Rom 8:17) “If we endure, we will also reign with him.” (2 Tim. 2:12) “Jesus is not ashamed to call (us) brothers.” (Heb 2:11) Just think of some of the promises made those who overcome in the letters to the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3): “To him who overcomes I will give authority over the nations . . . just as I received authority from my Father.” (2:26-27) “To him

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 43.

who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.” (3:21)

The full implications of Jesus’ kingship will only be manifested in the future. Similarly, the full implications of our privileged position as co-heirs will only be seen in the future. We live now in the tension between the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom. But, right now, we are “a kingdom and priests.” Those beleaguered Christians in the western part of Asia Minor may have been tempted to wonder about their influence. But we (and they) are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that (we) might declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Pet. 2:9) We ought never to arrogate anything to ourselves, nor strut around with the triumphalism of “king’s kids”. This should amaze us and humble us. But we do need an appropriate view of ourselves. He loves us. He “has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever!”

#### **D. You Need a Correct Perspective on Time**

*“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants **what must soon take place.**” “The **time is near.**” Look **he is coming ...**”*

##### 1. *“Soon”*

In the first verse we are told that the things recorded must “soon” take place. Again, in verse 3, John announces that “the time is near.” Towards the end of the chapter, the Lord instructs John to write what he has seen, “what is now, and what will take place later.” (1:19). He assures the church at Philadelphia, “I am coming soon.” Three times in the last chapter, the Lord says, “I am coming soon.” (22:7, 12, 20) It is over nineteen hundred years since the book was written and we still await his coming. Was he mistaken? If not, how are we to understand this repeated assurance of his soon return?

##### 2. *“The last days”*

This is not the place to attempt a thorough discussion but we do need to note a few matters. The “problem” is occasioned when we lose sight of the overall perspective of Scripture. In the first place we need to be aware of the fact that from a biblical point of view, we live in “the last days.” But so did John, Peter and the other disciples. Remember that Peter quoted Joel’s prophecy on the Day of Pentecost to explain what was happening fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus: “In *the last days*,” God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.” (Acts 2:17) The Writer to the Hebrews concurs: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but *in these last days* he has spoken to us in his Son.” (Heb. 1:1-2) In his first letter, John reminds his readers that “this is *the last hour.*” (1 John 2:18) Paul had already told the Roman Christians about “the present time” . . . assuring them that “the night is nearly over, the day is almost here.” (Rom 13:11-12)

From the perspective of the history of redemption, *the coming of Jesus heralded the dawn of the last days*. No one knew how long the age would last. Since nothing else is necessary before Jesus returns, his coming is imminent. Imminent does not mean immediate. When it comes to prophecy, time as chronological sequence is of secondary importance. Did the early Christians believe that Jesus was likely to return in their lifetime? Probably! Peter was aware that some scoffers would ask derisively, “Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” He reminds them that “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with (us), not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Pet 3:4, 8, 9)

3. “*Look, he is coming!*”

The most frequently used exclamation in the book is, “Look (*idou*)!” It occurs over twenty times. It is appropriate partly because of the visual nature of the book and partly because it is a startling summons to take note. It invites the attention of the hearers to an important announcement or scene. (e.g., read literally, 1:18 – “*Look, I am alive for ever and ever.*” 4:1 – “*Look, a door standing open in heaven.*” 4:2 – “*Look, a throne!*” 5:5 – “*Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah . . .*”

Its first usage is arresting indeed:

“Look, he is coming with the clouds,  
And every eye will see him,  
Even those who pierced him;  
And all the peoples of the earth  
will mourn because of him.  
So shall it be! Amen. (1:7)

Here two important prophetic motifs are combined. In the first place there was Daniel’s vision of “one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.” (Daniel 7:13, 14; cf. Mt. 24:30; Mark 14: 61-63) Jesus clearly claimed to be the person described as the Son of Man in Daniel 7. That is why Ethelbert Stauffer contends that “son of man” is the most pretentious title that anyone could have used in the ancient Near East.<sup>12</sup>

The other passage, also descriptive of the coming Messiah, is found in Zechariah 12: “They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.” (Zech. 12:10) There was a partial fulfilment of this prophecy when Jesus was crucified. (John 19:33-37) The reference to “those who pierced him” includes people throughout history who

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<sup>12</sup> Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 19.

through outright opposition or careless indifference, consciously or unconsciously identify with that act or piercing.

“Look, he is coming!” We are to live in that expectation. Whenever the church has genuinely expected that the second coming could occur at any time and has looked forward to that day, it has had a correct perspective on time. It becomes obvious. “Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Phil 3:20) It was important that Christians living in the Roman Province of Asia at the turn of the first century have their eyes fixed on what is eternal. It was important that they see the present age as transitory. **We, no less than they, need a correct perspective on time.** No matter how short or long this present age lasts, it is not the ultimate reality. No matter whether the world lures us with its attractions or hounds us in its antagonism, we look forward to the great day when Jesus will return with power and great glory. Have you been looking forward to his return? If, for whatever reason, the “blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ,” (Titus 2:13) has faded into the background, I pray that it will again be a conscious expectation. “Look, he is coming!” Perhaps today!

### **Conclusion**

It’s a great book and we are in for a treat as we study its message together. It will challenge us and it will inspire us. When all is said and done, we should be stronger and more balanced Christians for having spent time in its pages. This is the revelation that God gave Jesus to pass on to us; it contains important truth that he wants us to know. So let’s join in the benediction of the book by making sure that we “take to heart what is written in it.” (1:3)

Some months ago, Karen Heimbuch recited the entire Book of Revelation at the Peace Portal Alliance Church. How I regret having missed that recital. I believe it was most uplifting. I was given the CD. Never have I ended a sermon like this, but I think it is fitting to do so today. If you are able, please stand with me as we listen to the inspiring recitation of chapter one.

“Look Who’s in Charge”  
1<sup>st</sup> in a Series on the Book of Revelation  
Ellis André  
04/02/2007