

THE BOOK OF  
REVELATION

THE ULTIMATE  
WORSHIP ENCOUNTER

THE NOTEWORTHY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
RELIGION'S TRADITIONAL APOCALYPTIC VIEW  
AND WHAT JOHN ACTUALLY EXPERIENCED

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## CHAPTER 2

# HAS TRADITIONAL RELIGION ENTIRELY MISSED THE POINT?

Traditional perception has failed to see several vital aspects of John's revelation. There are numerous seldom-explored yet fundamental features of the most elementary questions such as what, where, when, why, how and even who, that traditional religion, for the most part, fails to properly examine or even consider. Interestingly, there are not just one or two but many essential, yet often unnoticed issues.

The traditional perspective frequently fails to consider:

- **What:** What is this about, what is the complete picture? To the typical religious perspective, the “big picture” has been largely overlooked in favor of snapshots, segments and snippets.
- **Where:** Where is John? There are two aspects of this question—establishing the physical setting and circumstances surrounding John's experience and locating him emotionally—recognizing his emotional state.
- **When:** Does the vision address the *when* question? Is it conveyed to John as if distant and remote or with urgent immediacy?

- Who: Who was John and what qualified him as the initial recipient of this greatest of revelatory visions? Why was he selected?
- Why: The principal and crucial matter on which the entire revelation rests: why is this revealed? Is there more to the account?
- How the numerous smaller points of supporting evidence scattered throughout the 22 chapters consistently authenticate our central premise.

Considering each of these vital factors directly influences how we view the overall portrait John paints and conveys in the Book of Revelation. These aspects must each be included in the overall equation and are absolutely essential to an accurate perception.

I remember my first scuba diving venture to any significant depth some years ago. My partner on this particular dive happened to be wearing a dive suit with a bright red stripe on each arm—easily seen, easy to keep track of. At a depth of about 55 or 60 feet, I suddenly realized my partner was missing and partnership is critical to safe scuba diving. Of the four or five divers within my vision, none had the red arm stripes. The surprise became a growing concern before I remembered a small notation from my recent training.

As sunlight travels into depths, the water absorbs the various colors of the color spectrum at different rates. Portions of that light fail to reach past certain depths and thus disappear more quickly than others. Reds and oranges, for


instance, are quickly absorbed and at that depth, anything that was red appears blue. Realizing this, I quickly rediscovered my partner right beside me—the one with the blue stripes on his arms.

When examining the Book of the Revelation, these additional fundamental factors must be considered in order to see a fuller picture.

### *Critical Disclaimer*

Having established that, it is also essential to again state we are *absolutely not* judging as insignificant many of the studies and writings on eschatology, the approaching end time events or understanding the signs of the times. They indeed hold great value for the church and for each believer individually as this season of eternity rushes toward conclusion. They provide a road-map for imminent events that no believer can ignore. Furthermore, they certainly are an important part of the revelation. Our assertion is simply that there is more. There is another perspective from which to view the whole.

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### *Our Premise—A Discourse on Worship*

As we begin to examine these vital factors from a new perspective, we will see that John's Revelation is a discourse on what true worship is and the critical role it plays in the kingdom, in eternity and in the broad revelation of this vision.

Let's examine the seldom-explored aspects.

#### WHAT-The Big Picture

Have you ever taken a photograph of a beautiful panoramic view in hopes of capturing the experience? I clearly recall the feeling that accompanied my first encounter with the Grand Canyon. Its indescribable natural beauty captivated me! The serene beauty of that wonder of God's creation was so immense and so vast. In an effort to capture a memory or the experience, I took many photographs.

When I later retrieved my prints from the developer, I excitedly opened the envelope, thumbed through the results and to my disappointment, discovered it just wasn't the same. So much had been lost in the translation. The colors were there. Specific points of interest had been individually captured but we had lost the big picture. The over-all, jaw-dropping panorama couldn't quite be appreciated by viewing my little snap shots.

This closely parallels our view of John's revelation. If we focus on snapshots, striking individual occurrences and points

of interest, we might miss altogether the big picture—the all-important context surrounding many of those highlights.

Most people today focus on snapshots. Many have become completely satisfied with examining those snapshots with no thought of stepping back and considering the bigger picture. Religion has come to consider much of what John experienced as secondary to his account of coming cataclysmic events. But to John, those alarming apocalyptic snapshots were incidental to the bigger picture, the overview.

#### WHO-Who was John?

Who was John and what were his qualifications? Who are we truly talking about and who exactly was it that God selected to receive and convey this amazing revelation?

We have apparently presumed that John was chosen simply because he was convenient or the next guy in line. Some have gone as far as to say the last guy in line. God could easily have orchestrated for anyone to receive this vision. I believe John was specifically selected not randomly picked. Why?

A key ingredient to recognizing John's big-picture is understanding his perspective. *John was a worshiper.* Often

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called the Apostle of Love, throughout his writings we find vivid reflection of the worshiper's heart. Through the Gospel of John and each of the Epistles of John, he provides keen insight into fellowship with God and into personally and intimately knowing God.

*This is life eternal...*

We see into John's heart in the 14<sup>th</sup> through the 17<sup>th</sup> chapters of the Gospel of John. He gives us a vivid image of a place of relationship with our heavenly Father, a secret place, wherein greater works than Jesus did, we can do. Religious tradition has clouded this almost to obscurity by presuming John's 14<sup>th</sup> chapter account of Jesus statement is talking about Heaven When Jesus declares "*In my father's house are many mansion's, if it were not so I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you...that where I am, there you may be also...*"<sup>3</sup> He is not speaking of a distant heavenly residence.

Through a combination of snapshot mentality and translation uncertainty, we have lost what Jesus made available and what John tried to convey. John understood that Jesus was declaring 'in my Father's presence are many secret places, many abiding places... I now go to the cross to prepare one for each of you... that where I am *spiritually*, there you can be also!' Immediately following, Jesus furthers the impact

with, 'the works that I do, you shall do, and greater... because I go'<sup>4</sup> to prepare a place. '*...A spiritual place and a position where you can ask anything in my name and I will do it.*'<sup>5</sup>

Today we must completely remove this passage from its context to apply it to a heavenly structure, residence, or destination. By doing so, we miss entirely the pivotal point of this four chapter discourse. This overall subject is obviously worthy of much closer scrutiny than we are able to afford within the pages of this book. It receives much fuller attention in "*Worship, The Gateway to God*".

In John 17, John offers this capsule of the gospel from Jesus' prayer in John 17:3, "*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee...*" personally and intimately.

"Knowing" God is not a reference to a casual acquaintance, but rather to a deep and intimate relationship. 'Knowing' God refers to an intimacy from which there is always a resulting birth. The same inference is used in Genesis 4:1, "*And Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived and bare Cain*".

Moses was certainly well acquainted with God yet in Exodus 33:13 he cries out, "*Show me thy way that I may know thee*", followed five verses later by, "*I beseech thee, show me thy*

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glory"! To the Philippian Church, the Apostle Paul wrote that in Christ, his express purpose was, "that I may know Him..."<sup>6</sup> and he counted all else loss for the "excellency of knowing Christ Jesus."

This is important spiritual terminology and not simply a gesture. It is not hero worship. Paul later writes to Timothy, "I know whom I have believed..." indicating the depth of personal relationship. In Matthew 7, concluding the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus further illustrates the depth of meaning of the phrase by stating to those who had prophesied, cast out devils and done many wonderful works, ...but I never *knew* you. He was certainly not referring to passing acquaintance, but rather to a lack of deep interpersonal relationship.

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John, similarly, is declaring that 'knowing' God—a personal, intimate fellowship with Him—equates to life eternal. In 1 John 1:2-4 he further emphasizes, "*We have seen and bear witness of that eternal life and now show it to you that you may, along with us, enjoy that fellowship with the Father and Jesus Christ. We write this to you that your joy may be full!*" We find John in 1 John 4:8 saying that if your life is love-deficient; it is because you do not personally know God.<sup>7</sup>

Additional insight is revealed in 3 John 2. "*Beloved, I*

*wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*" This passage is often a lightening rod for doctrinal dispute typically because many focus on snapshots.

Paraphrasing John, he says, "beloved I certainly desire for your life to be blessed in all aspects of the physical realm", but he then adds this essential requirement—"to the same extent that you are spiritually growing and prospering in Him—to the same extent that you have a personal relationship with Him". Who was John? He was more than anything else, a worshiper.

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Even John's life reflected his unique relationship with Father. Try as the Roman's might, they could not execute John and finally gave up trying. Fox's Book of Martyr's records of John, "The 'beloved disciple,'... From Ephesus he was ordered to be sent to Rome, where it is affirmed he was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. He escaped by miracle, without injury. Domitian afterwards banished him to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. Nerva, the successor of Domitian, recalled him. He was the only apostle who escaped a violent death."<sup>8</sup>

John documents his vision from a worshiper's perspective. The entire book of Revelation reflects his worshiper's heart. Some have proposed that John simply became the Revelator by default because he was the only apostle still alive. Whether

or not he was the last one standing, he was selected because the potentially terrorizing revelation had to be expressed through the heart and eyes of a fervent worshiper in order to avoid overemphasis of the wrong message. In spite of this, we have effectively, missed it anyway, in effect missing, so far, the rest of the story.

It is seldom expressed through the eyes and heart of a true worshiper and more often discussed and preached with a strike of terror because the perspective is distorted—not seen

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through a worshiper's eyes. Religion has successfully thus far missed the point for two reasons. First we have failed to recognize the initial experience had to be expressed through a worshiper's heart and eyes or its representation would terrorize. Second, it is equally impossible to accurately interpret John's experience today unless considered from the same perspective: John's perspective – viewing through the perception of a worshiper. In other words, true *revelation*, when passed on will become mere *information* unless interpreted from the same point of view or seen from the same perspective.

God selected John the Beloved with sovereign purpose to be the heart and eyes through which this revelation would

be effectively conveyed. Again, God could obviously have selected anyone; He could have positioned anyone to receive the vision but John's selection was divinely specific.

If we were to dispatch an individual to appraise an unknown, uncharted area, we would certainly send the person best qualified to bring us the description most relevant to the purpose of the exploration.

If a geologist went to the moon to bring back a lunar description, he or she would return with details of the minerals, rock formations, terrain, and colors. On the other hand, an athlete sent with the same task may recount the physical demands and the thrill of semi-weightless high-jumping without ever noticing colors, minerals and topography.

John had a degree of understanding of what he was about to experience. As the athlete would be excited by semi-weightless exercise and the geologist by exceptional mineral deposits, so John was already preprogrammed to be electrified by a specific portion of the vision. He had a revelation of true worship. I believe he, better than any other disciple, understood true worship; which was the central reason why he was the apostle who received *The Revelation*. This vision would have

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been entirely misinterpreted if not delivered through the passionately engaged heart of a worshiper. That is also the prime reason we are so easily sidetracked today as we assess John's vision. It must still be filtered through the eyes of a worshiper, and examined with the heart of a worshiper. Which brings us to one of the principal factors that religion has overlooked.

Traditional religion has viewed the WHY of this vision simply as: eschatology-understanding coming world events. But God's purpose is much greater, eternal and vertical.

It is impossible to accurately perceive John's revelation without first having a revelation of true worship. To truly grasp the WHY of this vision, why the "big picture" is important, it is essential to clearly understand what true

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worship is and what purpose it serves in God's kingdom. Worship is the way of life in heaven. It is the atmosphere of heaven, the language of heaven, the currency and the eternal lifestyle of heaven.

### *True Worship*

Churches all around the globe will this weekend conduct a "worship" service. It is a globally used

and accepted term, yet so very few of those events will include anything close to *true worship*.

I believe it has become the single most abused term in our religious, Christian language. Worship is not a generic synonym for a religious gathering. It is not a musical term. It certainly isn't slow songs as opposed to fast songs. It isn't 20 or 30 minutes at the beginning of a Sunday morning service. It is not a weekend activity, nor an occasional event. It cannot be casually, nonchalantly or indifferently expressed. Actually, it's not a corporate event and neither is it an act. It is a passionate, fervent, focused desire of a heart toward the Lord. It is personal, individual intimacy with the living God. It is not a physical activity or expression but rather a spiritual encounter that compels the physical to express. It is a heart-cry not based on cultural difference, stylistic preference, age, color, language or gender.

True worship is simply an earnest hunger of any heart, an impassioned pursuit of His presence.

True worship is the heart that cries "Father, *nothing* satisfies me like Your presence." As David said, "As *the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*" (Psalm 42:1,2 NIV). In Psalm 63:8, He says: "My soul followeth hard after thee..." Several other versions share this translation, "My soul clings to You." (NIV, NNAS, NRSV) Through the Amplified Version David says, "my whole being follows hard after You and clings closely to You."

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True worship is exclusively an engagement of the heart. The Father seeks (desires, requires, seeks after)<sup>9</sup> true worshipers! (John 4:23).

Let's further illustrate using the directional terms horizontal and vertical relating to the focus and desire of an individual's heart. In worship, every preoccupation with the horizontal, which is life and all its concerns, must yield to a consuming hunger for the vertical, that direct, personal, undistracted relationship with the Father. We could say the horizontal can

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represent ministry *for* God, in God's behalf, with the vertical representing ministry *to* God or worship! Pulpits and platforms around the world are filled with ministry leaders who have no idea there is a difference. Leaders' whose every moment of energy has been expended in ministry *for*—ministry in behalf of God. Leaders, many of whom have never once experienced a personal intimacy of true impassioned worship, a vertical relationship of ministry *to* God.

Historically, seminaries and Bible schools train extensively in horizontal technique, outer court procedure (if you will), with little or no reference to the true foundation of inner court, secret place intimacy. There is a vast difference between the two arenas.

Understanding *the* Revelation requires this recognition. To ever hope to understand the book, we must also see that it in actuality represents two separate levels of revelation, revelation on both the horizontal and vertical levels.

Yes, the striking images of dreaded end time cataclysm and all the surrounding details, (the horizontal, or the outer court), were certainly *a* revelation to John. But, they were not *the* revelation because the vertical profoundly and completely captured his heart. The overwhelming attraction was the vision of the lifestyle of heaven, the indescribably passionate experience of the Glory of God that, to John, rendered all the peripheral information incidental.

#### **WHERE—John's Creative Environment and Perspective**

Another important component is to understand *where* John was both physically and emotionally. Just as God could have orchestrated for *anyone* to receive this vision of visions, He also could have effortlessly done it *anywhere*.

As I assemble these thoughts, I am very blessed to be seated

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in my comfortable little office with my laptop computer, my bibles and other research materials. For added inspiration, I need simply glance out the window beside my desk at a peaceful view of sailboats on the Florida Intra-coastal Waterway.

John's creative environment, on the other hand, was strikingly different. The setting in which he experiences and documents this vision is the last place you'd think God would want him to fashion the concluding testimonial to our Bibles. Remember, for the Apostle John, the Isle of Patmos was not a vacation destination or retirement villa. It was judgment, a prison sentence. John was banished to the prison colony of Patmos occupied by the worst criminals of the day—not exactly Maui, Jamaica or our image of the Greek isles.

Don't you know the devil was thrilled when John was criminally sentenced to Patmos Island? But what the devil intended as evil and expected as conclusive to John's life, God turned into one of the Bible's greatest examples of victory. John affords vivid evidence supporting David's words of Psalm 23 that God always prepares a table in the presence of our enemies<sup>10</sup>. This is a glorious example that if we refuse the distraction of the valley, we can always find God's table in the midst of the circumstances—it is simply a question of focus. Anytime there is an enemy, there will always be a table—but only the focused heart, the undistracted worshiper, will ever notice.

We must also consider John's emotional perspective. This

vision was not as we would watch a television image or a theatre screen. John was translated directly into the midst of all that was happening. He was right there. He fully heard, saw, sensed, touched, interacted and lived with crystal clarity every moment of every event.

My Grand Canyon snap-shots just could not capture the amazing sounds of distant echoes or the soft crunch of fresh snow under my boots. They could not possibly portray nature's bouquet of fragrances drifting by my photographic perch or the chill of crisp wintry canyon air. John did not see an image on a screen or a snapshot on a page; *he was there*.

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Even before the vision begins, he is so completely overcome by the magnitude of the experience that he falls down as if dead<sup>11</sup>.

I love his words in chapter one,

*"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice... saying I am Alpha and Omega... And I turned to see the voice that spoke to me" (vss.10-12).*

*He adds in vs.17,*

*"And when I saw Him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me saying unto me Fear not."*

He totally and completely lived this experience. Notice

again, I... heard behind me..., I turned..., the voice spoke to me..., I fell at His feet..., He laid his right hand upon me....

In Chapter 4:1 John is told,  
*“Come up hither and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit and behold a throne...”*

### ***Urgency, immediacy***

Let’s consider the WHEN question.

It is important to recognize John’s perception of time and future as his revelation emerges. We have established just how completely captured he was physically, emotionally and spiritually by the vision. It is equally important to establish any form of time frame conveyed to John—were the events portrayed as distant or immediate?

Not only is John completely submerged within these events, but he also has every reason to believe they will begin without delay. This was not at all a prophecy of distant events in John’s understanding. He had no consideration whatsoever that this revelation was being documented for the church’s consumption, and for you and me to discuss 2000 years later. John certainly perceived a great urgency attached to the process.

We see the urgent tone in the very first verse and three times within the first chapter. *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ,*

*which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass”, 1:1.* The plea immediately follows to keep the things written in this prophecy for *“the time is at hand.”* Verse 19 says, *“Things which shall be hereafter.”* In chapters 3 and 4, Jesus stresses, *“Behold, I come quickly”* and *“Behold, I stand at the door.”*

Within the first four chapters, the immediacy of the message is emphasized no less than eight times. In the final chapter there are five equally urgent references. Three times Jesus repeats, *“Behold, surely I come quickly,”* and ends with the appeals, *“the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. ...Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”* In no way were these events distant or remote to John’s estimation; they were present.

Note especially the urgency repeated in 22:10. Having told John to write a book of what he sees (1:11), Jesus now states, do not seal up the sayings of the prophecy of this book, *“for the time is at hand.”*

For all John knew the terror of the seals, the trumpets, the vials, and all the creatures and happenings of the vision were poised at the starting line eagerly awaiting the opening signal. To him, everything he witnessed was imminent and right around the corner. To his knowledge, it would begin immediately after he passed his documented evidence on to the churches (1:11).

From our vantage point 2,000 years later, we naturally

tend to presume John wrote with the distant future in mind, but he did not at all envision the future like Jules Verne or George Orwell. He wholly lived the experience with the full expectation of immediate commencement.

### *Old story—from Prison to the Secret Place*

Turning your prison into a secret place experience is a common theme throughout the Bible. Apparently, John responds to this prison sentence as Paul and Silas responded to the Philippian jail<sup>12</sup>. Clearly his reaction to his circumstances invited the manifestation of the glory of God about which we now read. It's an often-repeated theme throughout the Word of a crisis environment transformed into a secret place experience, which in turn cradles or becomes the setting for a manifestation of God's glory! It is God preparing a table *in the presence* of the enemy<sup>13</sup>.

To clearly understand, we must recognize that John was indeed a worshiper. We must see the urgency clearly evident throughout the vision. It is equally necessary that we distinguish not only his living conditions on Patmos but also the extent to which John was submerged into the vision. We must of necessity step back from traditional religions collection of intriguing snapshots and view the broader picture. And most critical to completing our expanded perspective is a genuine revelation of true, impassioned, heart-consumed worship of the living and true God.