

# **Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ**

By

**John Johnson**

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The glorious Lord having revealed by the prophets the coming of his Anointed, and the riches of grace and glory that should then appear; and their predictions being fulfilled in the Person of the Son of God, and in the Preaching of the Gospel of his Grace; and the transactions of his Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Glory, with the acts of his apostles, and the success of the Gospel in their days, being faithfully recorded for our comfort and instruction; it was his pleasure, in one book, entitled the Revelation of Jesus Christ to finish his testimony; wherein he is pleased to instruct his church of all things necessary for them to know, reflecting all the dispensations that should come upon them, to the end of the world. It is to the elect body, the chosen, the redeemed, the called, the sanctified of the Lord, this prophecy is directed, as it relates to them alone; and if any mention be made of the state of the nations, the powers of this world, national churches, or anything civil or religious that hath a dependence on worldly influence, it is only occasionally introduced to illustrate those things which immediately concern the Church of the First-born, which is written in heaven. So far as the children of light might be affected by such things as prevailed in the world, they are noted in the general, that they might not think the trials strange; that they might be upon their watch, to escape the snares; that they might humbly submit to the

afflictions, and patiently wait the times appointed of the Lord; and that they might rejoice to see the words of God fulfilled, &c. But if we look for the fulfilling of these visions in the reign of such an emperor, such a pope, such a king, or in such a particular nation, we shall wander into a wild maze, and utterly lose the clue whereby the Holy Spirit deigns to lead us. The Church of Christ was never designed for worldly empire; and for a few ages she was in her proper place, in subjection to the powers of this world in civil matters. And out of this position the true church of God never did remove, for the real followers of Christ never sought for earthly dominion; nor is it possible they ever should, so long as their Lord declares, "My kingdom is not of this world." But when false professors became numerous, the spirit of the world prevailed among them, and they set up an emperor of their own. This was the foundation of the greatest mischief that ever came to the Gospel Church, in any external dispensation; the persecutions under the heathen emperors were only whips, but this proved a deadly scorpion. Not that this was the first introduction of the beast of Antichrist, for he began to prevail in the days of the Apostles, {I Jn.2:18,} and had made a great progress before this time, otherwise he had never had such sway in the world; for it was not the real Christians, but the Anti-Christians, that set up Constantine. However, this stroke was a great augmentation of the power of Antichrist; and from this time he continued increasing in power, till he advanced himself to sovereign dominion over the nation; for when he had power to set up his deputy-king, the pope, and the nations willingly submitted to his government, it was then undeniable, that the reign of Antichrist {whose servant the Pope is} was arrived to its height.

Now it is very difficult to know the real situation of the true disciples of Jesus in these times, because those that are called ecclesiastical writers do not seem to have known anything of the true life and spirit of the gospel, nor of the real lambs of Christ, but only give us an account how religion went on in the world, and how things were approved or disapproved among the nations, and in the worldly church. {Dispensationalist writer J.N. Darby went on to say many years later that, "the yearbooks of

Christianity are the yearbooks of hell.”} But how things have been in every age with the children of light, nothing can be particularly known, only what may be gathered from the prophecies in the Scripture; and according to the best that I can gather, I think, from the time that formality and the spirit of the world began to make great advances in the visible church, till the time that false doctrine, false worship, superstition and idolatry became universal, this to me appears to be a time of the greatest difficulty that ever the New Testament Church has been tried with; for in the days of the Apostles there was some degree of purity, and since the beast of Anti-Christ obtained full dominion, the church has had a safe retreat in the wilderness, and the Dragon and his angels cast out into the earth; but while the true Christians continued embodied with the false, and the dragon and his angels maintained war in heaven, we may well suppose it a dreadful conflict, the believers endeavoring to maintain the truth of Christ against a superior number, who were endeavoring to corrupt it, yet retaining some hopes of prevailing, and not seeing their way clear to quit the worldly church, until it was evident the Lord had utterly left the main body of professors, and then it was high time for all those individuals that feared God to leave them also. “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”

After this separation, the Dragon being cast out of heaven, and the True Church taken into the protection of her Lord and Saviour, still the dragon remained in the earth; the saints having left him and his seed together, there was none to molest or oppose his ravage. Then we have given us in this prophecy, a general hint of the progress of Popery, in the darkness of the bottomless pit, the devouring locusts, and the king they had over them; but no particular account what should be transacted by any of their popes, forasmuch as whatever was done among them could not affect the children of God, who have no connection with them. Then there is a general hint of the outrages of the Mohammedan powers, under the similitude of four angels loosed; these appear to be raised up as a punishment upon the false professors of Christ. These are not much spoken of as deceivers; as they do not profess to believe in Christ, they are

not of Antichrist, whatever other deception may be among them; they are rather spoken of as destroyers, to lay the earth waste by an external plague, or overspreading of armies; and nothing appears pointed out distinctly of their particular empires or governments, either of any particular acts of the immediate successors of Mohammad, the Caliphs of Babylon, the Saracens, or the Turks, but all considered as one body.

After these, the papists having to the utmost of their power shut up the Holy Scriptures from the people, we have a representation of Christ holding his Testament open in his hand, to give light to the world; this was accomplished at the time called the Reformation, when many stood up against that imposition of the church of Rome, and maintained, that it was the right of all men to have the free perusal of the Word of God; and since that time the blessing has been enjoyed in many nations; this has been, and is, a matter of rejoicing to the children of God. Notwithstanding I make no doubt, that wherever any of the children of God were, in any age or nation, the Lord would grant them his Word, for he has bound himself by Covenant, to give it to all the true seed. {Is.59:21} But perhaps they might obtain it with greater difficulty; beside, it is now laid open to the world, that if any does not pay attention to it, they are left without excuse.

Not that the Reformation is of much signification to the nations, only delivering them from popish tyranny; but as to the benefit of the word of truth, the people in general appear as ignorant of it, and as unconcerned about it, as if they had never seen the Scriptures; and those that profess to follow it seldom pay any regard to it further than they imagine it speaks, or they can construe it to speak, according to the traditions they have already imbibed; for they fancy there was no church but the church of Rome, before the Reformation. It is true, there was no other church in this part of the earth that made a show in the world; neither is there yet, for all the Protestant churches are no other than branches of the church of Rome reformed; and reformation only alters the mode, it never changes the substance; therefore, if the church of Rome be a false church, no church reformed from her can be a true church. If any man be in

Christ, he is a new creature, not an old creature reformed; the children of God are spiritually gathered one by one, not brought in bodies together formed from the old rubbish. The Lord has had a church in all ages, but she has long been, and still is in the wilderness; therefore, in those days she was unknown to Papists, and to this day is as much unknown to Protestants.

For the seven thunders uttered by the reformers, after the mighty angel {Jesus Christ} had cried with a loud voice, were forbidden to be written, because they were of man, and not of the Spirit of God; for had those men been true followers of the Lamb, they would have obeyed his voice; "Come out of her, my people;" but they did not come out as Lot came out of Sodom, but stayed to reform the city Babylon, for which God had never given direction; and the nations they reformed only changed the mode, but continued still upon the same foundation of national churches, or at least they retained many of the old traditions, like the nations whom the king of Assyria placed in the cities of Samaria. {II Kgs.17:32-34} The children of light eat the word of life, and it is in their mouth sweet as honey, but their bellies are made bitter to see the Holy Testimony so disregarded by the professors of the nations and in the same position as they were before, they must prophecy again, the peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings, being governed by the same carnal principles as they were.

And it is by these bodies of people and nations we may expect the two witnesses of God to be killed, which are no other than the testimony of the Son of God and of the Spirit of truth; for among the Papists the testimony is so far banished already, that there appears very little left to be killed, nor even do they retain the dead bodies, or empty form of gospel truth; but those by whom these witnesses shall be killed, will still retain something of the dead form of doctrine and worship; and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And we may observe, the Holy One swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever, "That there should be time no longer;" or, that this should be the last time of trial to the world, and that there shall be no other general revolution or manifestation of God to the nations, till the seventh angel shall sound; therefore we may conclude, that the

Protestants of all denominations will be the people, who, in the spirit of the beast of Antichrist, by their dull and dry forms, and their carnal winds of doctrine, shall make war, and shall overcome, and kill the truth of the Son of God, and the testimony of the Spirit of holiness.

Upon the whole we may observe, that every part of this prophecy is entirely directed to the saints of the Most High, and nothing is contained therein, but what is for their benefit to know; and the facts represented relate either to the blessings of the gospel, or the oppositions which Satan makes against the gospel; or else to the destruction of the enemies, and the happy consummation of the saints. And the war so much spoken of is of a spiritual or mystical nature, Satan going about in a religious dress, to undermine or confound the truth of Christ, to decoy the young lambs of Jesus, and deceive the world with a false Christ. The malignant beast has no respect to kingdoms, empires, and worldly powers; those do not affect the children of light; for all the monarchs upon earth cannot bring one soul to Jesus Christ, nor prevent one from coming to him. All the concern the saints have with them, is only to submit to every ordinance of man, in civil matters; and pray for those in authority, that we, under them, may lead peaceable and quiet lives; for it may be in their power to molest and persecute, or it may be in their power to grant peace and liberty; and they may countenance and support false worship, but in the things of the kingdom of God it is impossible they should have any influence; for Christ hath said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Therefore nothing in the Book of the Revelation is intended as a description of any earthly powers or states, otherwise than as some hints might be necessary to illustrate the things relative to the spiritual warfare of the church.