

# Revelation Chapter 1

## Introduction and Salutation 1:1-8

### Introduction 1:1-3

The first few verses are an introduction to this greatest of all prophetic books:

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.* – Revelation 1:1-2

The first three words of this book in the original Greek language express the purpose of the entire work. The first word is "Revelation." It is also translated as "Apocalypse" (Gr. *apokalupsis*--disclosure, unveiling) which indicates that the information the book contains is meant to reveal truth, not conceal it. In other words, it is knowledge which can and should be understood.

One of the chief excuses people give for not studying this intriguing book is that it is too difficult to understand. Some people think that its meaning is hidden from them; that the frequent use of symbolism conceals the truth; that it is a waste of time to try to analyze these prophecies. If that were true, why would God give us this detailed information? And why would He call it a "revelation," an unveiling of truth?

When I was a boy I witnessed an important event in Idaho Springs, Colorado, the little mountain town where I grew up. It was the day of the

unveiling of a statue in the town square. The image had been set up at night and was covered with a huge cloth. We had been waiting for this big event for months. Finally, the day arrived, and most of the people of the town were there for the occasion. There were speeches, musical performances, and a carnival atmosphere as we all waited for the big moment to arrive. Finally the time came, and with great fanfare, the cloth was slowly pulled away from the statue. There it stood in all its glory; and we all went wild with our applause. At last we could see with our own eyes every detail of this valuable sculpture!

The “Apocalypse” is like the unveiling of that statue, but infinitely better. It is the revelation of God’s plan to bring the Earth and its inhabitants back into a harmonious state when Jesus Christ will reign over His creation in righteousness.

Because of the trials recorded in the book the word “apocalypse” has taken on an entirely different meaning to many people. It has come to mean “catastrophe,” “Armageddon,” and “the end of the world.” The book does predict dreadful events, including wars, plagues, earthquakes, and asteroid collisions. It does warn of an evil world ruler, persecutions, and the “mark of the Beast.” But it is NOT the unveiling of all these evil and dreadful things. It is the unveiling of something incredibly wonderful.

The second and third words are “Jesus Christ.” The clear implication here is that Jesus Christ is the central subject of the book. Therefore, the focus should not be on the Tribulation or Antichrist or the terrible events that are described in these pages. Bad things will happen in the future, but these are preparatory to the glorious coming of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in Chapter 19. This corresponds perfectly to Jesus’ own teaching in the Olivet Discourse that the coming trials are like birth pains (Matthew 24:8). An expectant mother may suffer greatly with hard labor, but when the result is a beautiful baby, she will always say that the labor was worth it.

“Jesus” is our translation of the Greek word *Iêsous* and the Hebrew word *Yeshua*, or “Joshua.” It means “Jehovah saves.” That is why Mary was told by the angel Gabriel to name Him Jesus, “Because He will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)

“Christ” is the third word. This is the English translation of the Greek word *christos*, or “anointed one.” It is the equivalent of the Hebrew

*meshiach*, or “Messiah.” Numerous passages in the Old Testament predicted a Messiah, who would partake of the divine nature and be a deliverer of mankind. He was seen as one who would atone for sin, and would also deliver His people from tyranny and establish His righteous kingdom. When Jesus came to Earth as a baby His mission was to pay for our sin. When He comes the second time it will be to establish His kingdom on Earth.

The focus on Jesus Christ is seen throughout the book. Chapter 1 includes a vision of Jesus in Glory. Chapters 2 and 3 are messages from Jesus to His churches, Chapters 4 and 5 are a heavenly scene with Jesus in view to prepare the reader to know that He is righteous in all the tribulation that will follow. In Chapters 19 through the end of the book, Jesus is shown to be the Coming King.

This revealed knowledge is given from God the Father to His son Jesus. This is in keeping with what He said in John 15:15:

*... for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

These things are to “shortly” take place. As you read through the New Testament you will notice that the writers expected Jesus to return at any time. In every age Christians have looked for His return, just as earlier believers had constantly been looking for the coming of Messiah the first time. Even in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century there were cynics who asked “where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Peter 3:3-4). Peter answered,

*But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. – 2 Peter 3:8-9*

One view of prophecy, known as Preterism (from the Latin word *praeteritus*, meaning “past.”) teaches that many prophecies, especially those in the Book of Revelation, were fulfilled during the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and/or the persecutions of the Roman Empire. Most adherents to this belief are “partial” Preterists because they still expect the literal

return of Christ and judgment of the dead. “Full” Preterists believe that all of Revelation has been fulfilled. They believe the return of Christ and the rest of the book are allegorical.

This view was originated by Roman Catholic writers and later adopted by some Protestants. It is incompatible with a literal approach to Bible study. Their explanations about how the prophecies of Revelation were fulfilled are not at all convincing the way the Old Testament prophecies were about the life of Christ.

An angel (the Greek word *angellos* means “messenger”) entrusted this revelation to John the Beloved, one of Jesus' twelve apostles. Many angels appear in the book, but one in particular seems to have been the messenger of these tidings to John. John himself was very old at this time, probably in his 90's. He was in exile on the island of Patmos because of his faith in Christ. John was the only one of the twelve apostles who, according to tradition, was not put to death for his belief in Jesus. However, one early story says that he was thrown into a boiling pot of oil and miraculously survived.

***Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.*** – Revelation 1:3

This is a very special promise about this prophecy. Of all of the 66 books in the Bible, this is the only one with a promise like this. It says that whoever reads this prophecy, or even hears it (since many people did not know how to read), will be “blessed.” To be blessed (Greek *makarios*, “extended”) means having the privilege of receiving God’s favor or provisions. It is sometimes translated “made happy,” but it is much more than that. It is an inner sense of well-being. Jesus started His famous “Sermon on the Mount” by giving The Beatitudes (Blessings) (Matthew 5:1-12).

If a person is to be “blessed” by reading or hearing this prophecy, it should be obvious that its contents should not cause him to be fearful or depressed. God has not given us a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7). In fact, “Fear not” is a recurring theme throughout the Bible. The Twenty-Third Psalm reminds us of this whenever we say,

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil; for you are with me;--Psalm 23:4a,b*

Fear is the opposite of faith. So it should be understood at the beginning of the journey through this vital portion of God's Word that it should build our faith; not cause a spirit of fear.

Revelation is meant to bring joy because of the outcome of its dramatic events. It predicts the triumph of good over evil, the restoration of the Earth to perfection, salvation of those who believe in Jesus Christ, and their deliverance from a corrupted world into one of indescribable beauty and opportunity!

Of course, readers and listeners who do not yet know Christ will want to be sure they are in a right relationship with Him. The Gospel is found repeatedly in the pages of this matchless prophecy, especially in the message to the church at Laodicea, the apostate church at the end of the Church Age. Chapters 2 and 3 will explore this in detail. But looking ahead, Jesus invited the people of that church to open the doors of their lives to Him. In that church many had a formal religious experience, but few had a personal relationship with Him:

*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. –  
Revelation 3:20*

A couple of warnings are in order here about using Revelation to do evangelism. First, be careful not to give people the wrong impression about the book. When I was in Jr. High School, and a brand new Christian, I made this mistake in a big way. I wanted to show one of my friends the seriousness of his lack of interest in Jesus. I thought it would be a good idea to read to him from Revelation about the seven vials of God's wrath. He listened, and was terrified. He could hardly say anything, but when he did, he blurted out, "If that's what the Bible teaches, I don't want to have anything to do with it!" Unfortunately, he avoided me the rest of our time together in that school. I hope that The Lord eventually sent him a more

sensitive person to share the Gospel.

Another caution about using the message of Revelation wisely is to not focus primarily on the glorious future that it portrays when talking to people who despair of this life. I knew one troubled soul who committed suicide to hasten her experience of heaven!

Now, notice that the blessing is not just for those who read or listen, but for those who “keep those things which are written in it.” The word used in the original Greek scroll is the verb *terero*, meaning “to guard” or “to keep.” This would be the very opposite of what some Bible teachers do today when they ignore it, or, as also is the case for a growing number of fellow-evangelicals, to deny that the study of prophecy is of any benefit, and may even impede their progress in building the Kingdom.

The final thought in this key verse of the book is this, “... for the time is near.” This carries forward the expression from the first verse, “things which *must shortly take place*.” As noted before, New Testament writers and Christians of every age have been expecting Jesus to return at any time. This is known as the doctrine of “imminence,” a belief that Christians should live their lives in the knowledge that Jesus’ return will take place suddenly and unexpectedly, and they should be ready for that glorious event!

When Jesus ascended into heaven, an angel told the watching crowd of disciples,

*This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. – Acts 1:11*

The apostle Paul called this coming event “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). Some people like to read the end of a book before the rest to see if they even want to spend their time on it. Chapters 19 through 22 of Revelation are all about the fabulous ending of the story. It is all wrapped up in the return of Jesus. Here, in fact, are the last two verses of the Bible:

*He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.”*

*Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. – Revelation 22:20-21*

## Salutation 1:4-5d

*John, to the seven churches which 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, and from Jesus Christ,--Revelation 1:4,5a*

The original books of the Bible were handwritten on scrolls. These scrolls were made of papyrus or parchment, Papyrus was manufactured by processing the pith from the papyrus plants in a manner similar to the way modern paper is made from wood pulp. Parchment was a later improvement because it was made from more durable animal skins. Sheets of these pages were glued or stitched together, and then rolled up for storage. These rolls were called “scrolls,” and they were read by unrolling a page at a time, while rolling up the previous page. The words on the pages were handwritten with great care. Chapters and verses were added much later for convenience, and are not considered “inspired” by God.

Our word “paper” is derived from the Greek word *papyrus*. Our word “Bible” comes from the Greek words *ta biblia*, meaning “The books.”

The writer of the book is John, one of Jesus’ Twelve Apostles. He names himself at the beginning of this letter so that the readers will not have to go to the end of a bulky scroll to discover his identity. He had already stated in the first verse that Jesus was the true author of the prophecy, and that it was simply *entrusted* to John by an angel to record. John and his brother James were known as the “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17) before Jesus called them to be with Him. The two of them with Peter formed a leadership “inner circle” among the disciples who were with Him at special times, such as His Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1 ff.) and prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before He was crucified (Matthew 26:36 ff.). He is often called “John the Beloved” because although he never identified himself by name in the writing of his Gospel, he did refer to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23). At the time of the writing of this book he was the last living representative of the Twelve Apostles.

The letter is directed to ***“the seven churches which are in Asia.”*** These were seven local congregations in the seven cities that are mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3 of the book. They were very different from one another, as is the case among churches today. Being unique, they were given differing messages about their conditions.

These messages might also apply to different local churches or even denominations of churches that exist today. Some are like the Apostolic church at Ephesus, others like the persecuted church at Smyrna, and so on.

The messages also prefigure different periods of church history. These historical periods will be analyzed when we study the messages given to each church in Revelation 2 and 3.

There is something significant about the number seven in the Bible. From the seven days of creation in Genesis (Genesis 2:1-3), through the seven angels having the seven last plagues in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 10:7; 21:9 ff.), the number is used consistently to symbolize completeness or perfection. In fact it is found 36 times in the 22 chapters of the book.

Symbolism is used frequently in this prophetic book. But symbolic language is not necessarily difficult to understand. It may deter those who are not adequately informed, but for those who follow good rules of interpretation, and take the time to study the whole book, along with the rest of the Bible, the symbols will usually become clear and very meaningful. Many of them are explained in Revelation itself, and the rest can be discovered by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

John’s salutation to those who would read the letter is similar to the formula that the apostle Paul often employed. It starts with the words, ***“Grace to you and peace.”*** These profound words encapsulate the essence of the Gospel. First, grace means “undeserved favor.” This one word alone is shorthand for the whole process of salvation. God created sinless humans and placed them in a perfect environment, but in order for them to love Him of their own free will, He decided to give them the ability to choose good or evil. When they chose to disobey His will, and eat the forbidden fruit, they failed the test and broke the one simple rule the Lord had given them.



However, instead of forsaking His creation, God provided the most amazing solution to their sin problem. His One and Only Son would be sent to Earth to become a man in order to pay for their sin (and ours) by His own sacrificial death on the Cross. (Genesis 3:15; John 3:15; 2 Corinthians 5:14-17; Ephesians 2:8-9). And in the meantime, while waiting for that salvation to be accomplished, God provided a temporary covering for their sin. They did not deserve such love and provision, and neither do we. But that is what grace is all about.

Those who experience God's grace by receiving Christ as their Savior may then enjoy peace! The Gospel promises peace *with* God because of Christ's work (Romans 5:1), and also the peace *of* God, which passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

These benefits of grace and peace are a further proof that the study of eschatology (end- times) should not cause fear and distress, but should result in peace of mind.

This incomparable gift of saving grace and peace comes from God Himself. In this salutation God is seen in His triune nature: as the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ the Son. ***The Father*** is said to be, ***“Him who is and who was and who is to come.”*** Theologians describe God as “omnipotent” (all-powerful), “omniscient” (all-knowing), and “omnipresent” (everywhere-present at once). He is not limited by time the way we are. He exists in the “now.” But He existed also in the past. And He will exist into eternity.

Likewise this grace and peace come from ***The Holy Spirit***. Here He is described, using the symbolism of the number seven. The wording is, ***“And from the seven spirits who are before His throne.”*** This expression does not occur anywhere else in the Bible. Here in Revelation it occurs three more times (Revelation 3:1; 4:5; and 5:6). In all of these, the wording is “seven spirits *of God*.” The meaning surely is, God the Holy Spirit, in all of His perfection.

In the third place, this salvation comes from ***God the Son: Jesus Christ***. We might have expected a different order – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, in this book Jesus is central, and He is about to be displayed in the rest of this introductory chapter in ways that He had never been known before.

*...and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. – Revelation 1:5*

Continuing the description of Jesus, John gives three memorable portrayals of our Savior. This begins a very long list of names and titles for Him in Revelation. You might like to keep track of them as you study the book. One of these names is found in the very first verse (**Jesus** – “Savior”). One title was also given there (**Christ** – “Messiah”).

He is **the faithful witness**. The Greek word is *martus*, and it has two important meanings in this book. The first meaning is “testimony,” as in a courtroom setting, where the witness tells what he or she has seen or heard. John 1:18 says that Jesus is the only one who has truly seen God the Father, and He has told us about Him. In John 8:38 He said, “I speak what I have seen with My Father.”

The other meaning of *martus* is one who gives his life *because* of his testimony. Our word for this is “martyr.” In every age there have been many Christians put to death for their faith. In most cases they could have lived if they had been willing to deny their belief in Jesus, but they would not give up their faith! Jesus Himself was a martyr. He was crucified for telling the truth about Himself. He was willing to die in order that we might live:

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8 (Read the whole chapter for more about this).*

As seen in the previous verse, His death was the fulfillment of God's gift of grace. Our first parents accepted God's forgiveness. At that point sin offerings were instituted, even though they were not made a formal law until Moses' time. We know this is true because of the offerings that Cain and Abel made. Cain's offering was not acceptable because it did not involve the death of an animal (Genesis 4). This was a constant reminder that “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 3:23).

When Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51). This symbolized the end

of the need for the sacrificial system. Before His death animal sacrifices were just a “covering” for sins until the Lamb of God would make the perfect offering:

*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. – Hebrews 10:4*

*For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever. – Hebrews 7:26-28*

Next, Jesus is called ***the firstborn from the dead***. This is an obvious reference to His resurrection. Jesus paid for our sins by His death, but each person must accept the gift of eternal life (John 1:12; Romans 10:9-10; Revelation 3:20). His resurrection was the proof that He was who He claimed to be and His death really was acceptable to the Father. The whole long chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 is devoted to the subject of the resurrection. It gives many convincing reasons to believe it, including the fact that there were more than 500 eye-witnesses. In verse 23 Paul called Christ the “firstfruits” of the resurrection, and added that believers will also be raised at His coming.

One more impressive title is given in this verse. Jesus is said to be ***“the ruler over the kings of the earth.”*** This is primarily a preview of His Glorious Return, which will be mentioned in verse 7, and described more fully in Chapter 19. When He comes to Earth again, it will be as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Revelation 19:11-16).

In one sense Jesus already rules over the kings of the Earth, and in another way He is not yet “King of Kings” in the way He will be at His second coming. You might remember that during His temptation, the Devil offered to give Him the earthly kingdoms if He would just worship him (Matthew 4:9-10). He could make that offer because on our sin-corrupted planet, evil is thriving. That is why the Devil is called the “god of this

world” (2 Corinthians 4:4), and the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). There is no comparison between the evil empires of this world system and the future righteous kingdom Jesus will establish. On the other hand, as God the Son, He is still sovereign over His creation. God does set a limit of what He will allow. Psalm 75:7 says, “But God *is* the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another.”

Jesus had told his disciples that the Kingdom of Heaven was “at hand” (Matthew 4:17). He knew his offer to be King at His triumphal entry would be rejected. Nevertheless, He will come in great glory in the future to establish it (Luke 21:25-31; 22:18, 30). In Acts 1:6 the disciples asked Him, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He told them they couldn’t know the time, but when the Holy Spirit would come, He would enable them to be witnesses to the whole Earth.

Evidently the Kingdom was not to be established at that time. He would not yet reign on Earth, and the disciples would not yet reign with Him, but they would spread the message of the Kingdom, even as He had been doing.

That is why Jesus taught us to pray “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as [it is] in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). We still pray that way because even though His Kingdom does already exist in Heaven, and He is our King already, the Kingdom still has not yet been established here on Earth.

Jesus told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36-37).

Born-again Christians are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven (Philippians 3:20). However, we are also citizens of our earthly nations. That’s why Jesus told His disciples,

*“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”*— Matthew 22:21

While we are here, we are ambassadors, representing Christ and His Kingdom:

*Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. – 2 Corinthians 5:20*

During this time, we establish outposts of the Kingdom in our homes, churches, missions, and other Christian enterprises. We seek constantly to gain new members of the Kingdom by following Christ's example of ministering to people's needs and giving them the Gospel. There is much "Kingdom work" to do now even though it has not yet been fully established on Earth.

### **Dedication 1:5e-8**

*To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. – Revelation 1:5e-6*

These words form a dedication of the book to the Lord Jesus Christ. It would be better if this section came at the beginning of a new paragraph since it begins a new thought. This is the problem of man-made chapter and verse divisions.

This section is a "doxology." In many churches doxologies are recited or sung. They are usually scriptural passages that give glory (Greek *doxos*) to God.

Jesus is called, "**Him who loved us.**" What could be a better thing to say about anyone? I have presided at funerals for people who were known to very affectionate. It is not unusual to hear one person say, "We were best friends. She really loved me." Afterwards another person might say, "She loved me, and I thought we were best friends." Another would say, jokingly, but sincerely too, "I know she loved me the most."

If this can be true of fallible human beings, just imagine how much more it can be said about God the Son, when the Bible assures us that "God is love" (1 John 4:16).

The timeless children's song declares,

Jesus loves me! This I know,  
For the Bible tells me so;

Another great musical reminder of this truth is the chorus of an old hymn,

Out of the ivory palaces,  
Into a world of woe,  
Only His great eternal love  
Made my Savior go.

John 15:15 records that Jesus told the disciples that He no longer called them servants, but friends. On the night before Jesus was crucified, He washed His disciples' feet. John affirmed that Jesus "loved them to the end" (John 13:1). This love relationship is so deep that the apostle Paul taught that the church is called the Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27, 32).

Of course, God the Father loves us also. According to the matchless words of John 3:16:

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.- John 3:16*

The result of Jesus' great love is that He has **washed us from our sins in His own blood**. This kind of imagery is not common in a love story. But unfortunately, the only way that the hero of this amazing true drama could save the object of His love was by dying in her (our) place! As mentioned earlier in this verse, Jesus was the "firstborn from the dead." His primary purpose in coming to Earth the first time was to be a sacrifice for sin. John the Baptist called him "*The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:27). He paid the price, "*once for all when He offered up Himself*" (Hebrews 10:27).

Jesus Himself said,

*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. –  
John 15:13*

And the apostle Paul gave us this theological perspective:

*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:5-11*

As a result of Jesus' love and sacrifice for us, He **has made us kings** (literally: "a kingdom") **and priests to His God and Father**. While the focus is still on Jesus, this part of the dedication to Him names us as the beneficiaries of His work. As a result of the great salvation He has provided, He has given us vital Kingdom work to do (Colossians 1:3). We are kings in the sense that one day, when He establishes His Kingdom on Earth, we will reign with Him (1 Corinthians 6:2; 2 Timothy 2:12).

Another great privilege that is ours as a result of His death is the work of the priesthood. As mentioned in the previous verse, when Jesus died on the cross, He provided the one perfect sacrifice for sin. The veil to the Holy of Holies in the Temple was miraculously ripped in two, symbolizing that the old sacrificial system was no longer unnecessary. Not only that, but as Peter would later explain, the role of the priesthood was expanded to include all true believers:

*You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. – 1 Peter 2:5*

*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; – 1 Peter 2:9*

Why is this so special? In the Old Testament, under the Mosaic Law, the priests were intermediaries—standing between the people and God. The people would give the priests their requests. Then the priests would intercede for them in prayer. And only once each year, the High Priest alone entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for his own sins and for the sins of the people (Hebrews 9:7). But now, all who have placed their faith in Jesus have this direct access! Furthermore, as priests, all of us have the privilege and responsibility of interceding for the needs of others:

*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* – Hebrews 4:6

Did you wonder about the phrase, “to His God and Father”? Is that an indication that Jesus is not God? Not at all! In this passage God the Father calls Jesus “My Son.” In the first chapter of Hebrews the Father calls the Son “God!”

*But to the Son He says:  
“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;  
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.* – Hebrews 1:8

The Father also says in that chapter that the Son is the Creator, and the “express image” of His (the Father’s) person (Hebrews 1:1-12).

Whole books of theology have been written to show that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three equal persons in the Holy Trinity. One early statement (called The Athanasian Creed) expressed it this way: “The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods but one God.”

Who can fully understand God and His ways?

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.  
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.”* – Isaiah 5:8-9



God is not limited by our physical universe, which is something He created. We have some understanding of our three-dimensional world, but we cannot hope to fathom the complexity of our multi-dimensional God, who is utterly beyond His created universe.

No illustration of the Trinity is perfect to our limited understanding, but here is my favorite. Suppose we lived in a two-dimensional world and had no concept of the third dimension. Everything would look like lines and points to us. Even a circle would look like a line, but it might get dimmer on the ends to show that it curved away from our point of view. Now, suppose a sphere should pass through our flat world. At first, when it touched our plane it would appear as a dot. As it entered further through the plane it would become a line, and the line would grow longer until it was half-way through. Then the line would gradually shrink, and finally disappear.

Inhabitants of such a world could not understand what had happened nor could they conceive of the true shape of the sphere.

Neither can we fully understand our Great God. But we can join with John and countless others since his time who have echoed this doxology to both the Father and the Son, ***To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.***

Glory is a vital subject in the Bible. It occurs many times in Revelation. At this point we will just begin the discovery of what glory means in God's Word. It starts with God revealing something about Himself to His creatures. He displays His glory. His creatures then acknowledge His greatness by honoring Him and praising Him. They give Him glory. This partial revelation of Himself sometimes took the form of light, as in the case of the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud that accompanied the Children of Israel (Exodus 13:21-22 and 16:10). 1 John 1:5 declares that "God is light." His first creative act was to say, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:2). The Gospel of John, also written by the same author as Revelation, begins with a beautiful summary of God, of creation, of life, and of light. It also introduces the creative power as "the Word." Then the Gospel reveals this:

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14*

Toward the end of Revelation “The Word of God” occurs as one of the many names of Jesus. And on the journey there will be many other occurrences of “glory” in the book.

Continuing the dedication of Revelation, John said:

***Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. – Revelation 1:7***

The whole book of Revelation is like a movie thriller, complete with supernatural heroes and villains, sci-fi scenarios, and unbelievable special effects. Verses 7 and 8 could be considered a trailer for the movie. It is just a little preview of the fantastic conclusion of this age and the beginning of the next! Notice that even in this preview, the good overcomes the bad and there is a happy ending.

***Behold*** is the dramatic translation of the Greek word for “look.” We will see it many times in this book, whenever there is something that needs special attention. **He is coming!** This is the central message of the entire Revelation. Not only was Jesus a living example of all that a human could be; and the only one who was sinless and powerful enough to pay for our sin; and was raised from the dead to prove that He was who He claimed to be; but, wonder of wonders, He is coming back to Earth again!

There are many reasons why it is essential for our living Savior to physically return to this privileged planet.

He is coming again to complete His role as Messiah. Old Testament passages predicted that Messiah would come to deliver God’s people from evil government and establish a righteous kingdom (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5; etc.). However, some of the messianic prophecies indicated that He would be a “suffering servant” (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; etc.). It is now clear that He had to suffer first to deal with the sin problem, and later He will reign. He did offer to reign (John 12) but He knew He would be rejected. So He came the first time to proclaim the Gospel—the “Good News”—and to be a sacrifice for the sins of the world, but He is coming a second time as King of Kings (Revelation 19:11-16). This first chapter of

Revelation describes His dramatic appearance as the righteous judge and mighty warrior (verses 12 through 16).

He is coming again to replace the evil world systems with His righteous kingdom. In the book of Daniel a series of dreams and visions depicted the flow of world empires from the time of Babylon until the end-times when Jesus will come to destroy evil kingdoms and establish His own righteous one (Daniel Chapter 2; Chapters 7 through 9; Chapters 11 and 12).

He is coming again to fulfill His promise to His followers:

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” – John 14:1-3*

This aspect of Christ’s Second Coming is a separate event from His Glorious Return at the end of the Tribulation period. It is called the Rapture, and is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. The most obvious difference between the Rapture and the Glorious Return is that in one, believers meet Jesus in the air and are taken to where He is, and in the other, Jesus comes to Earth, bringing believers with Him. There is strong evidence in the book that the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation.

When Jesus returns to Earth at the end of the Tribulation, it will be **with clouds**. John had been among the disciples on the Mount of Olives on the day that Jesus ascended into heaven:

*Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” – Acts 1:9-11*

In the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Revelation Jesus is seen in the clouds when He initiates judgment on the Earth, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter it is said that the heavens will open for Him to return to fight the Battle of Armageddon.

By some method, unknown in John's days, it is said that when Jesus returns, **every eye will see Him!** Today we can picture this because of satellite television signals and the Internet. It is likely that the world's attention will be drawn for days or weeks to Israel, where the evil world dictator will be gathering representatives from all over the Earth to fight this epic battle. The cameras will be in place, and when Jesus appears, it will be made visible to people everywhere. It is likely that even the poorest of people will have an inexpensive mass-produced smart phone or some other means of viewing this phenomenal event.

The expression, **even they who pierced Him**, would be a reference to the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the siege by all nations against God's holy city. At that time many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will realize that they misunderstood who Jesus was. When He returns in glory, they will believe that He is their Messiah!

*“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem.”--Zechariah 12:10-11*

This mourning by God's chosen people in Jerusalem will be a good thing. It is a sign of repentance that will lead them to salvation in that day (Romans 9, esp. vv. 25-27).

**And all the tribes of earth will mourn because of Him.** While the people of Jerusalem are delivered from their enemies, they will mourn for their pierced Messiah but the nations all over the Earth that have sent their soldiers to die in this battle will mourn *because* of Him.

Will all of this really happen? Revelation gives this double affirmative: **Even so, Amen.** “Even so” comes from the Greek word *nai*, “yes,” “assuredly so” (as in “Let your yes be yes”--2 Corinthians 1:18). This affirmation is followed by “amen,” meaning “so be it!” Therefore we had better believe it!

***“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”*** – Revelation 1:8

*I am* is the personal name of God that was revealed to Moses. Before Moses’ time God revealed Himself as *Elohim*, the plural form of the Hebrew word *El*, meaning “strong one:”

*Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?”*

*And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”* -- Exodus 3:13-14

Who was speaking here in Revelation? It is God, of course. It might have been the Father, giving His endorsement of this prophecy. Some think that it was Jesus, who could make the same claims about His eternal existence and power. Or it could refer to the whole Trinity, especially since the prophecy was said to be, in verses 4 and 5, from the Father, the Spirit, and the Son.

***The Alpha and the Omega*** refers to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. As you have probably noticed by the reference to original Greek words in the text, the book was written in Greek. The world government of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century was centered in Rome, and was known as the Roman Empire. However much of the culture of the time was shaped by the previous empire, Greece. The Greek language was the trade language of that period of history. A similar expression, “from A to Z,” means “from the beginning of a subject to the end of it, and everything in between.” Therefore, only the One True God could make such a claim.

Some important manuscripts omit the words, ***The Beginning and the End***, but this expression is just another way of saying “the Alpha and the Omega.” This brings up the question of the reliability of Scripture. It is safe to say that a great many more manuscripts of the Bible have been found than those of any other ancient book. In addition, more scholarship

has gone into “textual criticism”—the study of the variations in the text—than for any other book. In the process there are many minor differences in the words used and different opinions as to whether or not a certain phrase, like this one, belongs to the original work.

Textual variations lead some people to doubt that the Bible is trustworthy, but the more people learn about this process, the greater confidence they have in God’s Word. The scribes were incredibly careful when they copied Scripture. They were much more cautious than modern scholars are about proofreading our writing, and if errors were found they discarded the page and started over. It is thought that most added words were notes made in the margin by students, and mistakenly included in later copies. Sometimes a scribe would make an inadvertent substitution of one word for another that had the same meaning.

The bottom line on this subject of variations in the text is this: *no known alternative reading of any part of the Bible would change any of the major doctrines of Christianity.* Even though there are minor variations in later copies, it is reasonable to believe that the whole Bible was “inerrant in the original manuscripts:”

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.* – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

***Says the Lord (God), “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”*** This final identification of the speaker could also apply to the Father, who is often called the Almighty (Greek *pantokrator*—“ruler over all”), the Son, who “is to come,” or the entire Trinity. In any case, it is so good to know that God reveals the future and gives it His stamp of approval.

## **THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST    1:9-18**

### **(The things which you have seen)**

This begins the first of three major divisions of this Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is a vision of Jesus that is quite different from the way His followers had pictured Him before. They had correctly thought of Him as

the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah, the Savior of mankind, the perfect human, the greatest teacher in human history, their best friend, their King, and, in many other ways, the most amazing of all people. To them He was infinitely loving, forgiving, and wonderful.

He called Himself “meek” (Matthew 11:29). That expression is misunderstood in our days, but the original listeners knew that the Greek word for “gentle.” did not mean weakness. To be gentle one must first have great strength. A gentle person is careful how that strength is used.

He claimed equality with God in a variety of ways, including some of his descriptions of Himself. He said, “I AM the light of the world” (John 8:12), “I AM the bread of life” (John 6:35) and “I AM the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).

Jesus has been the subject of more paintings, more poems, and more books than any other person in history. People have tried to summarize His greatness with masterpieces like “One Solitary Life,” and “The Incomparable Christ.” But no one has stated His greatness and His fame better than the apostle John, the writer of Revelation, at the end of his Gospel:

*And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. – John 21:25*

Still, in addition to all that was known about the Lord Jesus, the things that John saw next, and described for us, are totally beyond any concept that people had accepted before that time. There will be new and shocking information about Jesus in this section. But first, we need to learn about the background of this new material.

### **Preparation for the vision 1:9-10**

***I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.--Revelation 1:9***

The writer identifies himself as “**I, John.**” It would not have been necessary to include the personal pronoun, “I,” (Greek *ego*), but by doing so, John emphasized the fact that this vision could be trusted since it came through him. He was by now a very old and highly respected person, and the last of the original apostles. He had also written the Gospel of John and three letters or epistles: First, Second, and Third John.

However, when he identifies himself as “your brother,” he shows the humility of a true Christian, not lording it over others because of his age or his position, but speaking to them as a brother--a member of God’s family. What he wants to share with them is something that every family member should know.

He also speaks as a ***companion in the tribulation*** that most of them were enduring at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.

The word used for tribulation (*Greek thlipsis*) also means “persecution.” Much of the material in Revelation is about suffering for the cause of Christ. Persecution and martyrdom are prominent themes, in Chapters 2 and 3, where the history of the Church Age is depicted. Also, during the Tribulation Period, starting with the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter, a growing number of believers will be put to death for believing in the Word of God.

Christians had been persecuted since the beginning of the Church Age. In Acts Chapter 4 Peter and John were threatened by authorities for preaching about Jesus. In Acts 5 Peter and other apostles were imprisoned for their faith. In Chapters 7 and 8 a young man named Stephen was arrested for sharing the Gospel, and he became the first Christian martyr. Another young man, a Pharisee named Saul, gave permission for the event, but this Saul was witness to a special revelation of the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), and he eventually became the apostle Paul. Paul himself suffered great persecution (Acts Chapters 13 to 15; 2 Timothy 3:11; 2 Corinthians 11:23-26). He was imprisoned for his missionary work while Nero was Emperor of Rome (Acts Chapters 23 through 28), and according to tradition he was beheaded. (Nero set fire to Rome and accused the Christians of causing the destruction.)

Tradition also taught that ten of the original twelve apostles were put to death--by sword, crucifixion, and beheading. Judas killed himself after betraying Jesus. And, according to Tertullian (AD 160-225), the



Emperor Domitian tried to kill John by throwing him into a cauldron of boiling oil, but it had no effect on him. Jesus might have alluded to John's escape from death in John 21. In verses 18-19 of that chapter Jesus gave Peter an idea of how he would have met a martyr's death. Peter then asked about John's future:

*Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."*

*Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?" – John 21:22-23*

John also told the readers of this prophecy that he was a companion with them in the ***kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ***, Revelation focuses on the Kingdom (Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven)--See the earlier discussion about verse 5 where this issue is explained. Here is a quick review of that section: Jesus is King, and those who belong to Him are citizens of His heavenly kingdom. However, the Kingdom is still "in heaven," and we are taught to pray that it might come to Earth. This prayer will be answered when Jesus returns as King of Kings. In the meanwhile, we do have Kingdom work to do, including evangelism and discipleship. And we are ambassadors to the world while we are here.

John and his fellow-believers experienced the ***patience of Jesus***. Jesus had demonstrated the utmost patience in His own suffering, and is still incredibly long-suffering in regard to the establishment of His kingdom on Earth.

This vision was given while John was in exile ***on the island that is called Patmos***. Since tradition says John survived the boiling oil, he was banished to the little barren volcanic island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea near Asia Minor where the Seven Churches addressed in Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation were located (This is modern Turkey). Like most other major religious revelations, this great vision was given to John in the setting of a wilderness experience.

John's "crime" was his faith in Jesus Christ and his determination to share that knowledge with others. He said he had been sent to Patmos ***for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ***. Again,

“testimony” is the Greek word *martus*, from which we get the word “martyr.”

***I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet,***--Revelation 1: 10

A fascinating aspect of Revelation is the way this prophecy was given by God to John.

He wrote, ***I was in the Spirit***... It was evidently assumed that Christian readers at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century would understand this special state of mind. The work of the Holy Spirit includes the concepts of divine revelation, inspiration, and illumination.

The writer of Hebrews said this:

*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son,*--  
Hebrews 1:1-2a

Here are some of those “various ways”: Direct conversation (Genesis 2:15-17; Exodus 33:11), a burning bush (Exodus 3), thunder (Job 37:5), a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:5-12), etching on stone tablets (Exodus 31:18), talking animals (Numbers 22:28-30), dreams--their own (Daniel 7) or other people’s (Daniel 2), visions (like a dream, but while one is awake--Genesis 15:1; 1 Samuel 3; Isaiah 1; Acts 10:1-15), announcements by angels (Daniel 10; Luke 1:26-38), voice from heaven (Matthew 3:17), even the proverbial “handwriting on the wall”(Daniel 5). But the most clear and memorable of all God’s communication was the life, the work, and the words of Jesus Christ!

## **Revelation**

In this case God spoke by way of a vision (Revelation 9:17) that included some of these other methods as well. John was prepared for reception of a vision by being "in the Spirit."

The Holy Spirit was active throughout the Old Testament, “filling,” or “coming upon” various people for certain purposes (Exodus 35:31; 1

Samuel 16:13; Psalm 51:11). He began a new, permanent intimacy with believers after the death of Christ. Jesus had predicted His arrival and indwelling. He said the Holy Spirit would be “another Helper” (John 14:15-18--Greek *parakletos* --“companion, comforter”) who would assist them in many ways, including the ability to accurately remember what Jesus had taught them (John 16:5-11).

When a person accepts Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up residency in him (Romans 8:9-11). Being "in the Spirit" is referred to elsewhere as being "filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18) and "walking in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). This is the privilege of every true Christian: to surrender himself or herself to the direction and empowerment of God's Holy Spirit. There is no thought here of entering a trance by use of drugs, hypnosis or other occult practices. John was simply in the right frame of mind for this relation by being filled with the Spirit. The revelation itself came as a vision rather than a dream.

The Holy Spirit is also instrumental in two other aspects of understanding God's Word. These aspects are called Inspiration and Illumination.

## **Inspiration**

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. -- 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

The key word in this verse is “inspiration.” The Greek word is *theopneustos*--“God-breathed.” The word “Scripture” meant the recognized books of the Bible (Acts 17:11, 1 Corinthians 15:3, etc.), which at that time would normally mean the Old Testament. Notice however, that in 1 Peter 3:15-16 the apostle Peter equated Paul's epistles with “the rest of the Scriptures.”

Peter also described the process of inspiration in this way:

*For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. -- 2 Peter 1:21*

The word “moved” is the present participle of the Greek verb *phero*. Its meaning is “carried along.” Peter, being a fisherman, might well have pictured this as the external power he experienced when his boat was carried on the crest of a wave. As a preacher, it would have applied to what happened to him on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was first given to believers (Acts 2), and he was able to deliver such a powerful message that about 3000 people believed in Christ!

This would be a good place to mention the concept of “*dual authorship*” in the Bible. All of the books in our Bible, which were generally accepted by the Early Church and confirmed by godly and scholarly church leaders at the councils of Hippo Regius in 393, and Carthage in 397, are literally considered “God’s Word.” The original manuscripts of each book were believed to be inerrant (without error).

At the same time, one may see that the different human authors had their own vocabulary and style, and therefore did not merely write words dictated to them.

By contrast, many “New Age” authors claim to have “channeled” the words of extraterrestrial beings, which they call “ascended masters.” If this is true, the spirits behind their writings are demonic (“fallen angels”-- Revelation 12:4; “doctrines of demons”--1 Timothy 1:4). Such people are not truly authors. They are merely stenographers. Their writing was dictated to them by another being.

Returning our thoughts to the work of the Holy Spirit, He has revealed divine truth to certain people, has foretold future events, and has enabled them to accurately record these revelations. At the same time, He was able to use the unique personalities of the human writers to express their message.

Therefore, the Bible has “dual authorship.” God is the primary author, and by His Holy Spirit He communicated the exact content of these writings through various methods as mentioned above.

## **Illumination**

The Holy Spirit also illuminates the Bible. Since He lives within us, He enables us to understand the Word and apply it to our lives. The Bible contains mysteries, parables, allegories, and other revelations that may not

be understood by those who do not have the Spirit. Here are some passages that teach this truth:

*“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you. – John 15:12-15 (Jesus)*

*But as it is written:*

*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,*

*Nor have entered into the heart of man*

*The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

*But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*

*These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For “who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ. – 1 Corinthians 2:9-16 (Paul)*

## **Interpretation**

Another important related issue is the matter of interpretation. God revealed this information by the Holy Spirit, He inspired his chosen servant John to record it, and He gave us the Spirit to help us understand it. The issue now becomes, how will we choose to look at the book? Peter gave some good advice about this:

*And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.--2 Peter 1:19-20*

Without going into great detail, there are several ways that people have interpreted Revelation. The *Preterist* view was mentioned in the first verse of this commentary. Preterists relate most of the book to the events of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, revolving around the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and/or the persecutions by the Roman Empire.

Another school of interpretation is the *Historicist* view. This school of thought tries to relate the various parts of Revelation to key events in history. The results vary from teacher to teacher and from age to age, always trying to make it mean something that doesn't fit.

Then there is the *Idealist* point of view. They don't even try to connect the narrative to historical or future events. To them it is just a pool of mythical events that have some spiritual application.

Our approach, and that of most people who take the Bible literally, is the *Futurist* view. We accept what the vision claims for itself--that it is about future events. (For a good discussion of these views, see the introduction to *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* for Revelation 1-11.)<sup>1</sup>

The vision was given to John *on the Lord's Day*. This, of course is Sunday, and it is now common for us to refer to Sunday in this way, but this is the only place in the Bible where the expression is found. Most Christians worship the Lord on Sundays, but Jewish people observe the Sabbath on Saturdays.

Christianity was originally a Jewish sect, since Jesus and all of His disciples were Jewish. Jesus taught on the Sabbath (Mark 1:21), and He caused controversy by healing on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:10-12; Mark 3:1-4). In the early days of the spread of the Gospel Christians apparently observed the Sabbath, especially in their missionary work, where, for example, it was Paul's custom to find the Jewish people first (Romans 1:16), and spend at least three Sabbaths reasoning with them (Acts 17:2) before sharing the Gospel with the Gentiles.

However, right from the beginning, Sunday was special to Christians because it was on that day of the week that Jesus was raised from the dead. All four Gospels mention that His resurrection was on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). John also recorded the fact that it was on that first day of the week, *while the disciples were gathered together*, that Jesus appeared to them (John 20:19).

Later, when the apostle Paul was ministering to new believers at Troas, the people met on the first day of the week, behind closed doors, to share a meal and to hear his final message there (Acts 20:7).

As Gentile believers became more numerous, and Jewish opposition grew, the church became more independent, while not denying their roots in Judaism.

The Jerusalem Council decided that Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised (Acts 15). Circumcision was a special sign of the covenant between God and His Chosen People, the Jews (Genesis 17:9-14), and, for that matter, so was the Sabbath (Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12). In his instruction to Gentile converts, Paul told them that they did not need to be circumcised the same way as their Jewish brethren (Colossians 2, esp. v. 11). And he added this about festivals and Sabbaths:

*So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. – Colossians 2:16-17*

By the time John penned Revelation, nearly a generation later, it was common to refer to Sunday as the Lord's Day.

Today practicing Jews still observe the Sabbath, which is Saturday. When we visit the hotels in Israel, we notice that the food served on the Sabbath is prepared in advance, and some of the elevators are set to automatically stop at every floor so that the devout will not have to even push a button!

There are also some Christian Groups, such as Messianic Christian congregations, that do observe the Sabbath.

One other thought needs to be considered on this matter. Some commentators think that, in the context of this vision, the "Lord's Day" might mean "The Day of the Lord." This would mean the Day of Judgment

spoken of by various Old Testament prophets (example: Joel 3:14) and New Testament writers (example: 2 Peter 3:10). The answer to this is that this introductory section is talking about the church, even though some judgment will be involved, not the end of this age. Furthermore, the Greek construction would not be translated that way. As others have explained, *kuriake hemera* is “Day of the Lord,” but *hemera kuriou* is “The Lord’s Day.” It is interesting that Revelation doesn’t use the expression “Day of the Lord,” even at the Battle of Armageddon or the creation of the New Heaven and New Earth.

The actual vision begins with a startling sound. John says, ***I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet.*** This is the first of many loud (Greek *me-gas*--“great”) sounds that will punctuate the headlines of this story. The literal meaning for the word for trumpet (Greek *salpig-gos*) is “war horn.” It symbolizes the calling of God’s people to action. With all of the other Old Testament symbolism in this picture, it would probably have sounded like a shofar, or ram’s horn. It produces a very loud and unforgettable sound!

However, the sound was not a trumpet, but a voice “like a trumpet.” When John looked, he saw that the voice emanated from his Savior and his beloved friend. But this is not the way he might have expected to see the gentle shepherd; the loving, patient teacher whom he knew so well.

In his Gospel John had written these most-memorable words:

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. – John 3:16-17*

Jesus came the first time to fulfill the prophecies that Messiah would be a suffering Savior. But He is coming again, and even as John wrote about His first coming, he felt compelled to warn that He was coming again--this time as Judge of those who do not believe:

*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. – John 3:36*



Would Jesus' voice be so loud? Consider this: His was the supernatural voice that brought the universe into being! God the Son was the very creator of our world, and He did it by His voice. The record of each day's work of creation began with "Then God said..." (Genesis 1). The New Testament affirms in several places that it was Jesus who created all things (John 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2-3).

Such a clear and powerful voice! It demands our attention for what comes next.

**Presentation of the vision 1:11-18**

**The Revelation to John 1:11-16**

**The Golden Stands 1:11-12**

*Saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."* – Revelation 1:11

Jesus declared, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega.*" This is the second of four occurrences of this expression in Revelation. The first two are found in this first chapter of the book. The first was in 1:8, where it was apparently God the Father speaking, but possibly God the Son, or the whole Trinity. In this verse the claim is made by Jesus Himself. In the last two chapters of this vision there a similar shift--from God the Father in 21:6 to God the Son in 22:13. All of this just underscores the reality that the Three Persons of the Trinity share the same divine attributes of the One True God.

This, by the way, is another of the many names for Jesus in this book. If you are keeping track, it is followed by an eighth appellation, *The First and the Last*. This is another way of saying the same thing. "The First" comes from the Greek word *protos*, which was derived from the preposition *pro*--"before." In more recent times, when scientists discovered the atom, they named the first and most basic element of the atom the

“proton.” It is no wonder then that the apostle Paul was inspired to write this description of Jesus:

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. **And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.** And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. – Colossians 1:15-18*

The Greek word for “last” is also interesting. It is *eschatos*, from which theologians have named the entire discipline of “eschatology,” the study of “last things”

When I was a young teenager, just before I accepted Christ as my Savior and Lord, I would sometimes go out at night and lie on the grass, looking up at the sky. Like millions of people before me, I would try to imagine how far the universe extended. At the edge of the universe, was there some kind of boundary that held it all in? With or without a boundary, what was beyond that? How could there be a limit to it? On the other hand, how could there *not* be a limit? Try as I might, I was never satisfied with the limited knowledge I had about the subject.

Today astronomers tell us how many millions of light years wide they think the universe is. It is so much bigger than I could have ever imagined, but the same problem is still there. How could it have any boundary, but then again, how could it not?

The same dilemma applies to God Himself. How could He possibly be eternal—have always existed, before He ever created the Universe? On the other hand, how could the One True God *not* be eternal? If He were not, and something else caused Him to come into existence, wouldn’t that earlier “something” be the True God?

God is infinite and eternal. Our problem understanding this just causes us to fall back to God’s own explanation given in our notes on verse 6 above. In Isaiah 5:8-9 God says His thoughts and ways are just much higher than ours!

The words of the wonderful hymn, “Immortal Invisible” by Walter Chalmers Smith express a proper acceptance of God’s incomprehensible attributes:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Next Jesus tells John, ***And what you see...*** The information about to be given to him is a “vision,” and “seeing” all of these things will involve many of his other senses as well. He should then ***write in a book*** all of the detail he will be given. In John’s time a book would normally be a scroll.

He was then told to ***send it to the seven churches which are in Asia***. How the book would be sent is not described, but when the apostle Paul wrote his letters, he often mentioned that a trusted accomplice would travel to the recipients and deliver it by hand. Once the original was delivered, handwritten copies would be made and distributed to other churches.

The churches in Asia were familiar to John because he had evidently presided over them before his banishment

The number “seven” is used again (cf. 1:4)—this time to indicate that the messages would apply to all the churches, since seven is symbolic of completion. In the coming verses there are also seven golden lampstands and seven stars associated with these churches.

Since the Book of Revelation is a book of prophecy, the symbolic meaning of these messages in the first two chapters is to foretell the history of the Church Age. This prophecy applies to seven periods of church history.

However, the seven churches did actually exist in Asia. There were individual collections of Christians in seven actual cities, each with their strengths and (usually) weaknesses. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century all of the believers in any given city were considered part of that city’s church. So the vision will address the church in each of the cities just as Paul’s epistles had done many years earlier (The church at Corinth, the church at Colosse, etc.).

One can also find in these seven churches the general characteristics of various types of churches that have existed in each time period, and still exist today. This would mean that there are still “apostolic” type churches today, like the one in Ephesus; churches with many martyrs, like the one in Smyrna; and so on.

Now the churches are named: *to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea*. There are messages for each of these in the next two chapters.

***Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, -- Revelation 1:12***

John wrote, ***Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me.***

The word for voice is *phōnē*, meaning “sound.” The word has come into our language in many forms, all having to do with hearing. Words like microphone, phonetics, and telephone are very common, and it appears the word will be prominent in the future as well, because of the importance of “smart phones.”

The great voice of the Jesus the Creator was like a trumpet in verse 10. Here it is like a human voice, and in the next sentence it will be described as the sound of many waters. The supernatural and futuristic aspects of Revelation would require any human author to use similes like these and other symbolic language. Properly understood, the nearly endless symbolic expressions in the book should shake us free from our limited ways of thinking.

John identified the first thing that he noticed at this point: ***I saw seven golden lampstands.***

This vision is not of the seven-branched lampstand in the Temple, but of seven individual stands, suitable for holding the oil lamps that were used for light by nearly everyone in those days. Oil lamps were more practical than candles, which would burn out too soon. They could be carried by a person to light his way, or placed on a safe lampstand in the home.

The lampstands were gold, showing that they were not ordinary furnishings of a home, but costly, ornate fixtures in a public place.

What did these lampstands symbolize? Here is an example of the fact that we mentioned earlier, that many of the symbols in Revelation are explained in the book itself. Revelation 1:20 equates the seven lampstands to the seven churches that were about to receive important messages from the Lord.

Jesus told His followers, who comprise His church, that they are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16). But that light is a reflected light, because He also boldly claimed that He *is* the light of the world (John 8:12). Light is a most amazing spiritual picture of truth and salvation. Since Christ indwells true Christians (Galatians 2:20), they should allow His light to emanate from them. Together, as a church (Greek *ekklesia*—“called-out”, “an assembly”) they are to be a light to the dark world around them.

Gold is often symbolic of deity, as in some of the articles in the Temple. So the light that comes from the church is from God.

### **The Glorified Savior 1:13-16**

***And in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man,***— Revelation 1:13a

Up to this point, John had noticed only the seven golden lampstands. But now he realized there is an important person standing there ***in the midst of the seven lampstands***! The Greek word for “in the midst” is *mesos*, meaning “middle” or “among.”

John wasn’t sure about who this person was at this point in the vision, but He would soon realize that it was the Lord Jesus Himself. How appropriate for Him to be right in the middle of His church! He promised it would be so:

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. — Matthew 28:18-20*

The apostle Paul expressed just how close Jesus is to those who believe in Him:

*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. – Galatians 2:20*

If we were in John's shoes, we would have had the same difficulty recognizing Jesus here because he appeared very different from the gentle Savior John had known so well. However, he did see a resemblance to Christ because he described Him as ***one like the Son of Man*** (Greek: *hōuios anthropos*). The Gospels call Jesus "the Son of God" in many places, but He is also "The Son of Man." In fact, this was Jesus' favorite title for Himself, and He used it often (Matthew 8:20; 12:40; 24:27; Mark 10:45; Luke 6:5; John 3:13-14, etc.--about 80 times!).

Why was His humanity so important? It comes from an Old Testament concept of the "Kinsman-Redeemer." The law had provided that a close relative could pay for the debt of a family member to release him from slavery (Leviticus 25:48, 49). This was the theme of the beautiful and romantic book of Ruth, where Boaz became Ruth's redeemer (Ruth 3:9-14). Thus it was thought that Messiah would redeem believers.

In Philippians, Paul explained the awesome reality of Jesus becoming man to die for our sins!

*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. – Philippians 2:5-8*

In Romans he explained why Jesus had to be a man in order to pay for man's sin. Adam's sin corrupted the human race and passed on to each person a propensity to do evil. The apostle had already established this sad fact where he wrote,

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. – Romans 3:23*

Then he gave the good news:

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8*

Finally he showed that since sin was a failure of mankind, a righteous human being would need to pay the price.

*Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. – Romans 5:18-19*

***. . . clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; – Revelation 1:13b-14***

John wrote that in his vision, Jesus was no longer an “ordinary” person, but one who was totally majestic and awesome. After the resurrection, Jesus was already changed. He was in perfect condition, even though He had been crucified just three days earlier. He could conceal His identity or reveal it as he did to Mary, and later to the disciples on the Emmaus Road (John 20:15-16; Luke 24:30-31). He could walk through the walls of the Upper Room to appear to the disciples (John 20:26), and could rise into the heavens without a spacecraft (Acts 1:9-10). Paul explained that after the resurrection we also will have an incorruptible body:

*So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. – 1 Corinthians 15:42-44*

This glorified Jesus was *clothed with a garment down to the feet*. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century people normally wore robes. But the robes of certain dignitaries were distinctive. They might be colored or embroidered. Kings, judges, priests and Pharisees were recognized by their special attire. On the other extreme, prophets would often have robes that were plain and coarse, befitting their messages of warning.

Jesus would be entitled to wear any of these uniforms. He is prophet, priest, and king! However, His role as judge might be the most significant in this vision. He is portrayed in so many ways in this book, but here He is seen most definitely as the Judge--first of His church in the next two chapters, and then of the world in its end-time condition. As the Righteous Judge, He commends and rewards those who do what is right, but condemns and punishes those who practice evil.

John commented on the belt or sash of this particular robe. Jesus was *girded about the chest with a golden band*. The Greek word for "band" is *ζώνην*--"belt." It was very wide, extending upward to his chest. This description causes some commentators to prefer the image of a priest, since the priestly attire often had this kind of girdle. Wide belts of this sort could hold money or other personal items, and might even be referred to as one's purse (Mark 6:8). It was gold, which could symbolize royalty, so that other commentators view this as a kingly vision. But gold is used in many places throughout the Scriptures to symbolize God (as in the Tabernacle and the Temple). And it is God who has the right and responsibility to judge the church and the world.

Next John recorded that *His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow*. White like wool is an appropriate description of the grey-white hair of an elderly, wise person. The pictures we see of English and Early-American magistrates and legislators usually show them in their white wigs. For many, it was just the fashion of the day, but it was understood that it made them look older and wiser.

However, there was no such fashion in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. Jewish and Christian readers would undoubtedly have thought about an earlier end-times vision by Daniel that was strikingly similar to this one.



*"I watched till thrones were put in place,  
And the Ancient of Days was seated;  
**His garment was white as snow,  
And the hair of His head was like pure wool.**  
His throne was a fiery flame,  
Its wheels a burning fire;--Daniel 7:9*

That vision was of "The Ancient of Days," a description of God Himself as the Eternal One. As already mentioned in this first chapter of Revelation, the attributes of God are freely ascribed to Jesus as well, because He is God the Son.

In Daniel's vision the robe was "white as snow," while in John's vision the hair was also described this way. In the Bible, this is a description of purity and holiness (Psalm 51:7; Isaiah 1:18).

The Son also appears in Daniel 7 as separate from the Ancient of Days:

*"I was watching in the night visions,  
And behold, One like the **Son of Man**,  
Coming with the clouds of heaven!  
He came to the Ancient of Days,  
And they brought Him near before Him.  
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,  
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
Which shall not pass away,  
And His kingdom the one  
Which shall not be destroyed. – Daniel 7:13-14*

As a side note here, the most interesting and significant connections exist between the Old Testament book of Daniel and this Book of Revelation Christ. Daniel is often called "The Apocalypse of the Old Testament." John was certainly aware of the contents of Daniel before he ever received this vision. But he was not reciting the words of Daniel or even commenting on them. This was a fresh, separate "unveiling" of the

same truths revealed to Daniel hundreds of years earlier, and it makes both of the books even more credible.

When two people have virtually the same vision, it behooves them to ask themselves if there is some spiritual message there of special importance. I have not had much personal experience with such dreams, but I will share one that I knew must have been from the Lord. In high school, soon after I had met Barbara, my wife to be, but before we had ever even dated, we both had the same dream one night. I was president of the Youth for Christ club that had a weekly meeting after school on Wednesdays. I dreamed that we were having a “backwards meeting.” It was my responsibility to plan themes for each week’s meeting to keep it interesting. So I thought that the dream could just have been a random idea.

I mentioned it to my sister, Joan, before we both went to school the next day. While a number of club members were setting up for the meeting, my sister came to me with surprising news. Evidentially, Barbara had dreamed the same thing! Joan got us together. I told Barbara the first half of my dream, and she told me the second half! We all thought it was amazing, but didn’t know what it meant. We decided that maybe someday we would plan a “backwards meeting” for the group.

In those days we had a special speaker each week, provided by the YFC leadership in the area. I had not met him before, but, as usual, I found out who he was, then introduced him to the group. To our complete surprise, the first thing he said was, “Let’s do something different today. Let’s all turn our chairs around, and I will speak to you from the back of the room--just for fun!”

Barbara, Joan, and I all looked at each other in disbelief. We never did understand why the speaker did it, except to get focused attention. But we did sense that the Lord wanted Barbara and me to pay attention to each other. We recently celebrated our 53<sup>rd</sup> anniversary.

But back to a more important matter, the Book of Daniel will be referenced often in this study of Revelation. Here is another section of Daniel that is very similar to this verse in Revelation

*I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like*

*burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.* – Daniel 10:5-6

*Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come.”* – Daniel 10:14

The next thing John noticed was Jesus’ eyes. He wrote ***and His eyes like a flame of fire.*** This is definitely a picture of judgment. This expression is found again in Chapter 2, verse 18 where Jesus corrects the corrupt church at Thyatira; and also in Chapter 19, verse 12 when He returns to fight the Battle of Armageddon.

Sometimes people describe the look of anger this way. As the righteous judge Jesus has “righteous indignation” against those who have rebelled against His loving and gracious gift.

The concept of His burning eyes is reminiscent of Paul’s teaching that Jesus will judge the works of believers, and only what is good will remain. Whatever is useless--wood, hay and stubble--will be consumed by the fire (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

Throughout the Bible, God is depicted as fire in various ways. Some of these are: The burning bush (Exodus 3:2-4); The Pillar of Fire in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21); a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29); and Tongues of fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:3).

***His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.*** – Revelation 1:15-16

***His feet were like fine brass.*** The bronze feet are an additional picture of judgment, since bronze was the material of the Altar of Sacrifice (Exodus 27:1-4), and of the serpent in the wilderness, one of God’s most graphic judgments of sin. (Numbers 21:5-9; John 3:14-18).

Again, these symbols are very similar to Daniel’s vision that we just cited above (Daniel 10:6).

The Greek word for “fine brass” (*chalkolibano*) is found only here. It is a compound word combining “brass” and “incense.” It is thought that the idea being conveyed is that the color is not just the orange of brass, but mixed with yellow like frankincense. It could depict a mixture of brass and gold, and is translated here as “fine” brass.

John continued to describe the brass feet, *as if refined in a furnace*. Refining metals usually requires the use of a large, very hot furnace. Smaller quantities of some metals can be melted in a heavy pot over a kitchen fire.

When we were kids, we would sometimes melt small pieces of lead in this way to make toy soldiers. In those days most people didn't know it was bad to be exposed to lead. It was fascinating to watch a bar of cold, hard metal gradually melt in the pot like an ice cube does. It then became a little blob of liquid. It always had some impurities in it, so the surface would be dull. We could "refine" it by using a cold spoon to skim the impurities off the top. It would then be shiny and pure. We could see our reflections in it. Then we carefully poured it out into the molds to finish the project.

Peter had this refining process in mind when he explained that the trials believers must endure (which sometimes could be discipline) would produce a purified faith.

*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,--1 Peter 1:6-7*

This is certainly a picture of Jesus standing as judge in the midst of His church. In His messages to them He mentions certain things they are doing right, but with most of them He finds serious faults that need to be corrected. His judgment is not meant to destroy them, but to correct them if they are willing to change.

Even in our secular judicial system, the purpose of judgment, especially of lesser crimes, is to bring about improvement. Prisons were once called “penitentiaries,” meaning a place of penitence or repentance. They have not always done such a good job of making this happen, but the hope is--and in some cases it turns out this way--that the prisoner will

change his mind about breaking the law, and, when he is released, he will be a good citizen.

In Hebrews there is a wonderful explanation of the Lord's discipline:

*And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:*

*“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,  
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;  
For whom the LORD loves He chastens,  
And scourges every son whom He receives.”*

*If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*  
— Hebrews 12:5-11

Discipline in the home is not punishment, but teaching. In the field of education, different subjects are called “disciplines.” And in the church, those who are learners are called “disciples.”

In the light of this lofty purpose of judgment or discipline, it is both startling and comforting when John portrays Jesus this way: ***and His voice as the sound of many waters.*** The harsh trumpet-voice mentioned in verse 10 has changed to something like a mighty river, a waterfall, or the sound of the ocean's waves reaching the shore. Those who hear these sounds usually understand the power behind them, but they are nevertheless drawn to them, and learn to find a sense of security in their constant roar.

***He had in His right hand seven stars.*** The meaning of this symbol is interpreted in the vision itself. In verse 20 of this same chapter we are told that they are the angels of the seven churches. The word "angel"

(Greek *aggelos*) literally means "messenger." Therefore the messengers to these churches might be their pastors. This will be considered in greater detail when we get to that point.

Why are they called "stars"? The word star (Greek *aster*) is used in many ways in the Bible. Right here in Revelation it is used as a description of Jesus; of important people--like the twelve Patriarchs of Israel; of angels; of fallen angels or demons; and of asteroids or meteors. Stars make good symbols for many reasons. They are beautiful. They are fascinating. And, as in this verse, they are used for navigation or direction.

Perhaps the description of Jesus that is most difficult to picture is this: ***out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.*** This expression naturally brings to mind this verse about God's Word:

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. – Hebrews 4:12*

It is obvious that Jesus faithfully taught God's Word, but, most amazingly, in John's Gospel, he actually called Jesus "the Word," who spoke the Creation into being, and later became flesh and dwelt among us! (John 1:1-3; 14; cf. Genesis 1)

Jesus has the authority to declare what is right and true, and what must therefore be done. And He has the power to cause whatever is spoken to come to pass.

Jesus will be described with a sword in His mouth in the message to the church at Pergamos (Revelation 2:12). Finally, at the Battle of Armageddon His only weapon will be the sharp sword out of His mouth (Revelation 19:15, 21). The ultimate power of the judge is the ability to put the offender to death (if necessary).

In addition to all the other striking aspects of this vision, John said that ***His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.*** Just as a person dare not look directly at the Sun, a glance at the face of Jesus was so brilliant that, according to the next verse, John fell at Jesus' feet like a dead man.

John had actually seen Jesus in a similar way when he was invited to join his brother James and Peter for a most unusual occasion, the Transfiguration of Christ.

*Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother led them up on a high mountain by themselves; <sup>2</sup> and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. – Matthew 17:1-3*

It is interesting that even though the other three Gospels all recorded the Transfiguration, John did not include it in his account of Jesus' life. This is probably best explained by the fact that John's Gospel was written much later than the other three (known as the "synoptic" Gospels), and he knew that the episode was already well-reported. His Gospel usually gave additional information not found in the others.

#### **The reaction of John 1:17-18**

***And when I saw Him, I fell at his feet as dead. But He placed his right hand on me saying to me, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and Death. – Revelation 1:17-18***

John wrote, ***When I saw Him, I fell at his feet as dead.*** Like other people in the Bible who received such visions (Isaiah 6:5; Ezekiel 1:28), he was terrified!

***But He placed his right hand on me.*** John was revived by the glowing vision of Christ, who touched him and identified Himself with several meaningful descriptions. One of the most amazing things about the earthly life of our Savior was the way he mingled with people and freely touched them, even though they might be diseased and sinful. He touched John with the same hand that was holding the seven stars. The right hand of any dignitary is considered a place of honor (Matthew 25:31-34). Just a touch by Jesus was all John needed to go on. It is a sensation that Christians

of all ages have experienced when they needed it most. In the words of Bill Gaither's famous chorus,

He touched me, oh He touched me  
And oh the joy that floods my soul  
Something happened and now I know  
He touched me and made me whole.

Jesus continued to tell John, **“Do not be afraid.”** Fear is a natural survival instinct. It is one of the most negative and uncomfortable of feelings. It is sometimes considered the opposite of faith and courage, and therefore to be avoided. But there are times when fear is helpful. One notable example is “the fear of the Lord” which the Book of Proverbs calls, “the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 1:7). Such fear is explained as “reverence,” because if a person truly reveres God, he will be afraid of the consequences of disobeying Him.

The Greek word for fear is *phobos*, and it is incorporated in many words in our own language. (claustrophobia, hydrophobia, etc.--A very long list is available on the Internet at [www.phobialist.com](http://www.phobialist.com).)

On the other hand, when one trusts the Lord, there is no need to fear. Some have noted that the Bible adjures us so many times not to be afraid that a different verse could be chosen each day of the year to remind us of this fact. Paul says that God has not given us a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7). The greatest antidote to fear is to abide in God's presence and to follow His direction. Then we can say, as the Psalmist did,

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;--Psalm 23:4*

Years ago, when I was planting a church in Southern California, and was working as a “tentmaker” in my father's construction business, I learned something about overcoming fear. We occasionally had to modify propane tanks. A welder was required to do the job, but if the tank had already been used, it was not safe to cut into it with an acetylene torch until it had been properly neutralized or decontaminated. We paid to have that process done, but a welder would still not be willing to believe that it was



safe unless I would stand right next to him while he did the welding. It made sense. He knew that I would not take the chance if we had not done the job correctly!

God reminded Joshua that he could be strong and courageous because He was with him (Joshua 1:9). Jesus encouraged His disciples in the same way when he gave them the Great Commission:

*Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And **surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**” – Matthew 28:18-20*

Again, Jesus said, **I am the First and the Last.** See the notes on verse 11.

Then Jesus said, “***I am He who lives,***” affirming His resurrection. In this chapter the narrative alternates between John’s descriptions of the awe-inspiring Christ, and Jesus’ own words. In verse 5 John had already described Him as “*the firstborn from the dead.*” Throughout the book the concepts established in one place are often reinforced in other portions of the vision.

He added, “***and was dead.***” That fact should be obvious, but He emphasized it to counter the idea of some skeptics that He didn’t really die on the cross. Such doubters say that he just “swooned” during the crucifixion and was resuscitated later by His disciples to deceive the people. This error has persisted to our own time with such theories as “The DaVinci Code,” which claims that He went on to wed Mary Magdalene and live in seclusion with his family. Of course, doubters cannot explain how He could have survived when He suffered so greatly, and was pierced with a spear so that blood and water came out (John 19:34). Medical professionals say this condition was caused by a broken heart.

In the Bible “death” never means annihilation. Instead, it means “separation.” Physical death is the separation of the physical body from the non-physical aspects of a person. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul said, “*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole **spirit, soul, and body** be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Some theologians think that soul and spirit are the same. It is true that in some places in the Old Testament the two words seem to be used interchangeably. However, considering the story of Creation and the types of living organisms on our planet, it makes more sense to see them as separate. When the Lord created plants their physical bodies had the basic functions of life, including nutrition, elimination, growth, and reproduction. When He created animals, they had all of these functions plus the aspects of personality: intellect, emotion, and will (think about your pets). They had both body and soul. Then the Lord created the first human by a special act. Humans would have had a body and soul, like other animals, but God gave them a spirit so they would be, in that special sense, “like” God. Jesus said “God is spirit” (John 4:24).

*Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” – Genesis 1:27*

*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. – Genesis 2:7*

The word “breath” in Genesis 2:7 (Hebrew *neshamah*) also means “spirit.”

So, physical death is separation of the body from the soul and spirit. There is also spiritual death, separation of our human spirit from God because of sin:

*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, – Ephesians 2:1*

When a person is “born again” (John 3:3), his spirit is reconciled with God (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

A third and even worse separation is the “second death,” which is mentioned four times in Revelation (2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). The second death means eternal separation from God. This is what will happen to a person who dies physically while he is still dead spiritually.

Jesus died physically on our behalf, and it could be said that He tasted spiritual death when our sins momentarily separated Him from His Father, and He cried out, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” (Matthew 27:46).

Yes, Jesus was dead, but in victory He declared, “***and behold, I am alive for evermore.***” His goal was to provide eternal life for us (John 3:16), and we know that He succeeded because of His resurrection, which He had predicted:

*“A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. – John 14:19*

***Amen*** is like a spiritual punctuation mark in the Bible. It means “So be it!”

Furthermore, Jesus said, ***and I have the keys of Hades and Death.*** Hades is the name of the place of departed spirits. It is seen as the enemy of the church (Matthew 16:18). Since Christ's ascension (Ephesians 4:8-10), it is the temporary abode of unbelievers who have died and await their final judgment (Revelation 6:8; 20:13-14). The concepts of hell and hades will be explored when we get to these passages.

## **THE PRESENCE OF JESUS CHRIST IN THIS AGE**

**1:19-3:22**

**(The things which are)**

**Insight about the Church 1:19-20**

***Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. -- Revelation 1:19***

Verse 19 is the *key* to the book. The three parts of Revelation are:

- 1- What you have seen--*The Person of Jesus Christ--Revelation 1:9-18*
- 2- What is now--*The Presence of Jesus Christ in This Age – Revelation 1:19-3:33*
- 3- What will take place later--*The Program of Jesus Christ For The Future--Revelation 4:1-22:21*

Jesus told John to **Write**. In verse 10 the process of divine inspiration was considered. Once a servant of the Lord was given inspired information, it would then need to be written and carefully preserved. The Holy Scriptures are all written books. The Greek word for “scripture” is *graphē*. It means “sacred book.” It is found in the New Testament, but is not used in Revelation. However the vision is called “a book” in Chapter 1, verse 11, and in several verses of the last chapter (22:7, 9, 10, 18, 19). Our English word “scripture” comes from the Latin word *scriptura*, which in turn is a translation of the Greek *graphē*.

John was expected to write ***the things which you have seen***. It was not supposed to be John’s own ideas about the future, but specifically the revelation that he was seeing. The most valuable testimony is an eye-witness account (1 Corinthians 15:6).

John was to write what he had seen so far, and then the rest of the vision—thirty or more pages in one of our typical printed Bibles. It might have been that he could stop and write every once in a while as he received the message, but if not, the Lord would certainly bring every bit of it back to his memory as he wrote.

Then he was to write ***and the things which are***, referring to the messages to the Seven Churches in Chapters 2 and 3. As mentioned earlier, these were short letters to seven very different churches that actually existed in Asia, in the area known today as Turkey. They reflect the strengths, weaknesses, and the Lord’s will for each church.

Because of their variety, most churches that exist today could identify with one of these seven types of congregations. Because of that, sensitive Christians might find valuable lessons in these messages that apply to their own current circumstances.

Since Revelation is a book of prophecy, it is completely reasonable to see these seven churches in another way as well. In fact, this should be the primary way of viewing them. That is, each church stands for a period of time in the history of the church, from the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) when it formally began, until the future date of the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58). This will be discussed this more in Revelation 3:10; and 4:1).

John would also be expected to write ***the things which will take place after this***. This is the major part of the vision, revealing the main

events of the seven-year Tribulation period, the Campaign of Armageddon, the earthly reign of Christ and the New Heaven and New Earth (Chapters 4 through 22).

The Greek for “what will take place” is *ginomai*, which means “to come into being.” This hints at the fact that God has ultimate control of the future, as discussed under verse 5 of this chapter.

The Greek *meta tauta* is translated “after these things.” This is a normal expression for transition both in John’s Gospel and in Revelation. *Meta* is a Greek preposition that can have many meanings, depending on the context. One of its normal meanings is “with” and another is “after.” When it is used with the pronoun *tauta*--“this, these,” it signifies the beginning of a new segment of time. Its first use here in Revelation is to identify the third major section of Revelation. The history of the Church Age is outlined in the messages to the Seven Churches in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 4 starts with these very words, *meta tauta*, to begin telling what will happen after the Church Age.

***The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches. – Revelation 1:20***

At this point ***the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand and the seven golden lampstands*** is explained. The Greek word *musterion*, means “anything hidden.” In the New Testament it generally refers to a truth not revealed in the Old Testament, but now made known.

Jesus employed this word in Mark 4:11 in connection with parables--stories designed to transmit truth to those who will receive it and hide it from non-believers.

The word “mystery” is mostly used by Paul, especially in relation to the church (Ephesians 1:9-11; Ephesians 3--whole chapter, esp. vv. 3,4,9; Ephesians 5:32--including the Rapture: the end-point of the Church Age--1 Corinthians 15:51); temporary blindness for Israel (Romans 11:25); and the Gospel being taken to the Gentiles (Romans 16:25--26; Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 1:26-27; 4:3; 1 Timothy 3:16).

In Chapter 3 of our book, *Connecting the Dots: A Handbook of Bible Prophecy*, Lambert Dolphin and I show how this word “mystery” is used to convey the vital truth that the church, which is a major part of God’s plan, was not revealed in the Old Testament. The church evangelizes the world during the period of the blindness of Israel. However, there is a definite beginning and end of the Church Age and those who do not distinguish between Israel and the church cannot understand prophecy.

John did not use the word “mystery” in his gospel or epistles, but he wrote it 4 times in Revelation: in this verse, where it most definitely applies to the church; and in 10:17; 17:5 and 17:7--where it describes the conclusion of certain aspects of the end-times.

The next expression is the first of many places in Revelation where the book defines its own symbolism. It explains: ***The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.*** This simplifies the vision considerably but we must still choose between two possible meanings of the word “angel”. The primary use of the Greek word *aggelos* is “messenger.” In the Bible it generally conveys the idea of supernatural messengers. In various parts of Revelation the word is used for both human messengers and that separate class of created beings called “angels.” Angels are spirit beings, but they can take on human or other forms when they appear to men. There is much to discover about these creatures, but the discussion of good and bad angels will be saved for later portions of this commentary.

In the context of the Seven Churches, it seems most logical that the angels are human messengers, or the pastors of the churches.

The last part of this verse is another explanation of an earlier symbolic expression. It says, ***and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.***

The word “church” (Greek *ekklesia*, meaning “assembly”) was a common word in Jesus’ day for any gathering of people. It was used especially to designate a public meeting, or what might be called today a “town hall” meeting. Jesus endowed the word with His own special significance when He announced that He would form His “church” (Matthew 16:15-19). *Ecclesia* is formed from two words (*ek*, “out of” and *kalleo*, “to call”). Therefore such an assembly is “called out” for some special purpose. This is an excellent description of Christ’s church, since each member of it has been “called” by God (Romans 1:6-7; 8:28-30; 1

Corinthians 1:2, 24-26; 2 Timothy 1:9). This calling brings to mind our Lord's careful personal selection of each of His disciples. He said *"The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10). Paul said plainly, *"There is none who seeks after God"* (Romans 3:11), but Jesus loves us and initiates the relationship with us.

The seven lampstands were first mentioned in verse 12. This verse (20) specifically explains the symbolism. Each lampstand represents one of the seven churches of Asia that are about to receive special messages from the Lord. The image of light is used universally for the concepts of truth, beauty, security, and whatever is good. Light dispels the darkness, which in turn is symbolic of falsehood, and evil. Jesus taught this principle in His Sermon on the Mount:

*"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. – Matthew 5:14-16*

---

<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Revelation 1-11*, [Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999], pp. 9-11.