

**REVELATION 1- INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER**

We will now cover the last book of the Bible –the book of Revelation. It is a fitting ending of God’s revealed Word, for, just as Genesis is the book of *beginnings*, so Revelation is the book of *endings*. It projects forward to the consummation of God’s Plan of Salvation, with God the Father finally dwelling with mankind by bringing the New Jerusalem to a new earth--it is the end result.

The term “revelation” comes from a translation of the Gk. word, *apokalupsis*, from *apo* – *away from* and *kalupsis* – *a veiling*, so it means an unveiling or opening a curtain to reveal what is behind. And what is behind is God’s will being fulfilled—all He has planned to do from the start out of love for us.

The general consensus is it was written around A. D. 95 by the Apostle John, who was exiled to the island of Patmos, on the Aegean Sea. Christ had prophesied that John would be one of the apostles who would live the longest (see John 21:22-23).

Revelation is filled with *many symbols* and is intimately related, above all, to the symbols in the *book of Daniel*. In fact, *the symbols* of the human image in Dan. 2 and later, the multi-headed beast power in chapters 7 and 8 *are continued* in Rev. 13 and 17 as now going *from John’s time to Jesus’ Coming*, a *key point* in understanding Revelation.

One of the reasons for these symbols is so not all who read them on their own could figure out what they mean, but would need God granting special understanding. Another reason was so this book could *survive* the scrutiny of Roman censors and later, of religious organizations that wouldn’t know many of the symbols *actually* describe them.

We are now ready to begin with the first three verses: “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*. 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” (Rev. 1:1-3).

The first thing to ask is, whose revelation is it? It is actually *God the Father’s*! Few commentators give Him the credit and in a biased way focus only on

Jesus Christ. But here it says God the Father is the *source* of it and Jesus then *reveals* it to the Apostle John in a series of visions by way of an angel, so there are actually *four agents* involved.

Next, notice there is a *blessing* associated with the reading and obeying of this book--the first of seven blessings given. So it is not to be shunned because it might seem difficult to understand or avoided due to the terrifying scenes depicted. Also we are to apply its teachings, not just read them, by obeying God’s commandments (Rev. 22:14).

We read, “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, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. 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” (1:4-6).

God inspired this letter to be sent to seven congregations in what is today western Turkey. It was a *circular letter*, for it was sent to each place according to a *postal route* of the Roman Empire, starting at *Ephesus* and then ending in *Laodicea*.

Notice how Jesus is called “the *firstborn* from the dead,” refuting the idea that the souls of the dead are now alive in heaven or hell. Also, Jesus has already qualified as “ruler over the kings of the earth” although Satan has not yet been removed from his position nor has Jesus begun His rule. He is also equipping His Church team of future kings and priests as He prepares to return to the earth (see Rev. 5:10). As G. E. Ladd explains, “The *church* is the *new and true Israel*, inheriting the spiritual privileges of the Old Testament people of God” (*A Commentary of Revelation*, 1972, p. 27). This is a key reference to understand what “Israel” will mean in the rest of the book of Revelation.

Next, John writes, “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. ‘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'" (Rev. 1:7-8).

Here is a detailed description about Christ's coming. Notice "every eye will see Him," showing it will be a visible and a worldwide appearance. In regard to those who "pierced Him," firstly, it is a general reference to the Jewish people who have rejected Him, as the prophecy in Zec. 12:10 says, "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." Secondly, it applies to *all* of mankind, for He died for all our sins and was pierced because of all of us. Also, "mourning" here means *lamenting and regretting* Christ's coming, for it will be the end of man's rule and worldliness.

John continues, "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. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 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'" (Rev. 1:9-11).

Here John explains where he was when he began to receive these trance-like visions and was to send a circular letter to these seven churches. He was in a desolate island called Patmos, a land 6 by 10 miles across, in the Aegean Sea.

Barclay mentions, "Banishment to a remote island was a common form of Roman punishment. It was usually meted out to political prisoners and, as far as they were concerned, there were worse punishments. Such banishment involved the loss of civil rights and all property except enough for a bare existence. People so banished were not personally ill-treated and were not confined in prison on their island but free to move within its narrow limits. Such would be banishment for a political prisoner; but it would be very different for John. He was a leader of the Christians and Christians were criminals. The wonder is that he was not executed

straight away. Banishment for him would involve hard labor in the quarries. Sir William Ramsay says his banishment would be 'preceded by scourging, marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground, a dark prison, and work under the lash of the military overseer.'"

The Bible Knowledge Commentary adds, "According to several early church fathers (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius), John was sent to this island as a prisoner following his effective pastorate at Ephesus. Victorinus, the first commentator on the Book of Revelation, stated that John worked as a prisoner in the mines on this small island. When the Emperor Domitian died in A.D. 96, his successor Nerva let John return to Ephesus. During John's bleak days on Patmos, God gave him the tremendous revelation embodied in this final book of the Bible...John's revelation occurred on the Lord's Day while he was in the Spirit. Some have indicated that 'the Lord's Day' refers to the first day of the week. However, the word 'Lord's' is an adjective and this expression is *never used* in the Bible to refer to the first day of the week. Probably John was referring to the *Day of the Lord*, a familiar expression in both Testaments. 'In the Spirit' [means] he was projected forward in his inner self in a vision, not bodily, to *that future Day of the Lord* when God will pour out His judgments on the earth."

Next, he says, "Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, 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; 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" (Rev. 1:12-16).

Here begins the visual part of the prophecy. What he sees is Christ in all His glory with symbols of His authority. He is clothed similarly to an O.T. High Priest (Ex. 28:4), for He is now *our* High Priest. Surrounding Him were seven golden lampstands that in Rev. 1:20

represent “the seven churches” whose message Christ will reveal from God the Father.

Regarding the seven lampstands, it is indicative of Jesus in the midst of His Church, as its Head, and the way they are described from a beginning stage to the time of His return, it appears He will be there throughout seven church eras, for there were many more than these seven churches at that time. It doesn’t make much sense to refer just to seven local churches as a total number.

John says about Christ’s appearance, “His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 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. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid 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 forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. 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’” (Rev. 1:14-20).

Ladd brings out, “Christ shares this feature with God the Father himself (Dan. 7:9), whose raiment is white as snow and the hair on his head like pure wool. In Daniel, these features belonged to the ‘Ancient of Days.’ John used them to show that Christ *shares* eternal existence with the Father.”

The phrase, “His eyes like a flame of fire” is also found in Rev. 2:18 and 19:12, and likely mean His all-knowing sight, His righteous discernment and His wrath against all ungodliness.

The terms, “His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace” depict something powerful, sound, and stable. His voice is like “the sound of many waters” and pictures the mighty roar of a waterfall. Having seven stars in His hand means He instructs His seven angels over these churches, portraying the ultimate care He has for them.

Christ having a two-edged sword coming from His mouth simply means that His word will be carried

out as powerfully as needed, and the irresistible strength of His judgment (Heb. 4:12). Just as in Genesis 1:3, God spoke and it was done.

His face shining as the sun in its strength shows the glory that He has, just as in the vision of the transfiguration, “his face shone like the sun, and his clothe became white as the light” (Mt. 17:2).

At this sight, John fainted and was revived by Christ, who comforted him by revealing He was the Jesus that had been with Him on earth and who loved him so affectionately. He also reminds him He now has the keys of Death and Hades, or the grave, so He can unlock that state of the dead in the future and bring about the resurrections.

Notice now the instructions He gives to John, “Write the things which *you have seen*, and the things *which are*, and the things which *will take place after this*” (1:19).

So part of the revelation deals with things as they presently were, referring to local conditions in these seven churches, but they are not limited to that since Christ will also reveal future events dealing with the Church as well. Here again we see the prophetic duality, just like in the Old Testament prophets, where some things were for their time and yet, for the end time as well.

As God told Daniel when perplexed by the future events, “Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, ‘My lord, what shall be the end of these things?’ And he said, ‘Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end’...‘But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance *at the end of the days*’” (Dan. 12:8-9,13). John also would not understand the end-time events, but he would grasp the local events happening in those seven local churches he had overseen.

So ends the first chapter of Revelation, and as can be seen, there is much symbolism that is explained right there, so we don’t have to speculate about them, while other symbols will be elucidated later. One of the key concepts is that Christ is speaking primarily to His Church, not to the Jews of that day, nor what is part of physical Israel at this time. For Christ is preparing His kingdom and is calling men and women from all walks of life to be part of His Church and in the future--to become kings and priests under Him in the coming Millennium!