

Our Lord in Glory

Revelation 1

Since it was first revealed, this book has brought tremendous encouragement and controversy. It speaks of the indescribable majesty of our risen Lord and the utter depravity of a Christ-rejecting hellish world. In its message, we'll see God Almighty upon His throne and the debauched Satan sitting in rebellion upon his. We'll be told of the course of events during the age in which the church faithfully spread the Word and when she failed by corrupting its message. We'll see that there have been those in the church who were true, and sadly, those who were twisted; those who hungered for God and those who craved the rewards of the god of this world, the devil.

The book of the Revelation, however, is primarily focused beyond that age and upon two theaters of action – those we call heaven and earth – which explode with the most amazing, beautiful, terrifying and catastrophic activities during the up coming and final days of the creation as we know it.

Intuitively, we've always recognized this and as a consequence, reacted or 'interpreted' the Revelation based upon our personal expectations, hopes and desires concerning that end. Rather than looking to the entirety of the Bible for its own

interpretation of the amazing story herein, men have sometimes butchered the book and based their teaching of it on fantasy or self interest. Others have 'played it safe' so to speak and simply cited scholars from earlier times whose language is flowery and full of praise but still leaves us guessing.

And so, it remains somewhat mysterious to the overwhelming majority of us, but it should not. I won't attempt to explain the myriad opinions that surround parts of this book – time would fail me. Neither do I consider what I'll offer to you for your prayerful consideration as any kind of 'final word'. Rather, I encourage you to read with as much objectivity as you can and then search the scriptures to "see if these things be so".

If you're reading this, it's likely that you already sense or truly believe that we are living in the final hour of the age preceding Christ's return. You know the days are short and that the consequences of being unaware of the times is dire to say the least. On the other hand, the blossoming blessing of anticipating, as a believer, the return of our King is what the scripture says actually hastens His coming. I hope you'll find the 'fullest bloom' of that joy herein even if it's in the midst of tribulation.

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. The Revelation is the great 'taking the lid off'. It is the disclosure of Jesus Christ. But it came straight from the Father, God Almighty, who gave it to Jesus to show His servants. It is not intended for His enemies or those who in ignorance consider themselves 'neutral'.

Although the span of earthly time this book covers is lengthy from our perspective, its beginning is even at the time of its delivery and thus the phrase, "shortly take place". To "signify" is to "mark" or show, and we will indeed see that this was a true 'audio-visual' experience for the apostle John (not to mention, spiritually overwhelming!) As a result, he bore witness to three things – what God said, what Jesus Christ personally exhibited and all the visions 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. With 66 books in our Bible, this is the only one that promises a blessing to those who 'digest' it. The requirement is not that you simply scan its contents or peruse it in a scholarly fashion. You can't simply flip through its pages, neither can you just tear through it with your Greek lexicon and expect the blessing (though lexicons are important). You must read, hear and keep. That is, you must "know again", understand, and "prevent escape".

There's a sense in which reading itself is knowing something again, perhaps a confirmation of something you already 'knew' deep within your heart. It also implies the value of reading the text over and over. Understanding is more than knowing; it's when the 'light goes on' – the great "Ah-ha!" And keeping is critical, for everything in this sin-filled world works to take away that "Ah-ha!" and replace it with a "Ho-hum." You must prevent the escape of that understanding into the abyss of apathy.

But you won't do that if you figure the time is far away, will you? Fortunately, for every sincere believer, the time is indeed near and always has been. That's because you are not rooted in this world. God's servants know their home is in His presence and it is only a heartbeat away.

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: John's ministry was far greater than these seven literal congregations and in no other epistle do we find an address to multiple specified churches in this manner. It is not clear that John even ministered personally to all seven. So why address this missive to these seven and deal with them individually in the next two chapters? Why not an individual letter to each as virtually all the other epistles do or a general letter as with James or Jude or John's other missives?

Apart from this distinctive, we'll see that the Revelation is different from every other letter of the New Testament in another way. As we have already read, this is the only 'epistle' which records its divine origin – it says for itself that it came specifically from Father God and Jesus Christ. A fine point, I know, but it is not directed by John to an audience all of whom he had ministered to; nor is it addressed to the general assembly of the believers everywhere. Significantly, it is directed specifically by Jesus as an important part of His Revelation.

Therefore, to interpret it as being only a literal message to those historical congregations is missing the point. The audience itself is a revelation.

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,... Here is the greeting from Father God and the Holy Spirit. Yes, it says seven Spirits. This may be the seven fold spirit that is described in Isa 11:2, but I'm much more inclined to believe just what it says which indicates that the Holy Spirit is seven and yet we know from other scriptures that He's one. After all, the trinity itself is three in one. This also aligns with the next two chapters in which the Spirit or one expression of the Spirit speaks to each of the seven churches.

and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from

the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. Here is the greeting from Jesus -- past, present and future. "Faithful witness" speaks of His perfect life and ministry to Israel. "Firstborn from the dead" is clearly His resurrection and status in heaven until His return. "Ruler over the kings of the earth" is equally "Ruler over the leaders of Israel". Here's where we must introduce a principle of prophetic understanding and theological truth in general.

In the writings of some of the early church fathers was a heretical doctrine that spread to influence church teaching for nearly 1700 years. It is called substitutionalism – a big word for a simple but very erroneous concept. It simply was the notion that after Christ's death and resurrection, God was through with the Jews. It is true that God brought judgment to the people of Israel for rejecting His Son. And it is true that the primary witness to the world after that point has been the mostly gentile church.

But it is heresy to teach that God's promises, His stated commitments prophetically to His chosen people have ended or even altered. That makes God a 'flake', a precocious deity and short sighted. It positions Him as scrambling to somehow make things right when we fail – managing the cosmos by putting out fires so to speak. It's an insult to His omniscience and character.

Nevertheless, throughout the church age, this travesty of evil, a

self-serving Narcissistic view, has permeated so much theological understanding that even when it is acknowledged as wrong, it still slithers its way into our teaching from time to time.

Having said that, let me forewarn you that a LOT of what we'll study in the Revelation, though it can often be appropriated or appreciated by the church, is only understood in the context of keeping Israel as the focal point of its prophecy.

OK, in many other portions of prophetic scripture, "the earth" refers to the land of Israel. The word "world" on the other hand refers to the whole world and often implies the gentile nations (as does the sea). As the church has been far and away comprised of gentiles, we have lost a handle on prophetic types or imagery like this, partly due to this substitutionalism.

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. Isn't it just amazing that Christ would do this for slobs and losers like you and me?? He loved us, laved us and laid on us the last thing we ever deserved – a royal and holy relationship with Father God.

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. When Jesus literally ascended into

the clouds of heaven after His resurrection, an angel present told the disciples that He would return in like manner. And when He comes, everyone will see Him. It won't be done secretly or in some remote location hidden from view. It will not only be in plain view but it will be like lightening crashing from one end of the sky to the other.

Who was it that pierced Him? It was the Romans who were ruling over the land of Israel at the time, and vicariously, it was the Jews who insisted on his execution by way of crucifixion. Indeed, "tribes of the earth" again speaks of the tribes of Israel for we read in Zechariah 12:10 *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 have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.*

"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." With John's epistle-like intro you may have lost track of the true Source of this message so God makes it crystal clear. It's almost like He's looking over John's shoulder watching him write.

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. Many of the people for whom this message is given were or will be in great trial. Most of the people of that part of the Roman Empire in John's day would have been aware of the conditions on Patmos. There's really nothing like it in our modern penal systems. Even the Russian gulags were tame by comparison.

They had tried to poison John but he didn't die. Then they had tried to boil him in oil and he still didn't expire. If you're a Caesar of Rome, what do you do?? The guy won't die and it's embarrassing. So you put him on a rock in the middle of the Aegean Sea with a bunch of your worst criminals and torturous conditions. Surely, you can shut him up there.

Patmos was the Alcatraz of the Roman Empire. Thus John starts this letter with a word of empathy for all who suffer for the cause of 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." Everything up to this point was penned as an introduction by John post facto, after he received the Revelation. But now it begins. Evidently, John was meditating in prayer and/or worship when he heard the voice of a trumpet giving

him the heads up on Who was speaking to him, then came the directive to scribe everything he saw and to send it to the seven specific churches.

The Lord spoke through Isaiah, *Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.* (Isa 58:1) In parts of this book, the Lord will be doing the same thing. As for the voice coming from behind him, we are reminded of another word given to Isaiah:

And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left. (Isa 30:20,21) So, with the appearance and direction of these first words we're already given a foreshadow of their purpose – transgression, adversity and affliction.

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. Later in this book, we will read that Jesus is the "candle" or "lamp" which in the original language specifically speaks of a light that is set upon a

lampstand. So here we have seven stands that are designed for displaying Jesus as this Light and they are golden. Gold in the Bible pictures or is associated with royalty and faith. We'll see in a moment that that fits as well. Additionally, in the middle of these stands is someone Who looks like the earthly figure of Jesus and He is clothed as a King.

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; Each part of Christ's glorified appearance is important. The whiteness of His head and hair speaks of purity of thought; His flaming eyes speak of the penetrating insight and thus the understanding He has. The brass appearance of His feet speaks clearly of judgment and it's a fiery judgment. The sound of His voice "as many waters" speaks of trouble. David wrote in Psalm 18, *He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me.* And in Psalm 93 we read, *The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea.* And of course, the first "many waters" we recall from scripture is the flood of Noah that covered the earth. So why does the Lord's voice sound like

this? Later in the book, we'll note other situations in which a voice or voices sound like many waters but here, it is possibly because judgment and tribulation are on His mind. On its own, many waters can refer, like the sea, to the gentiles. The noise is like the crashing waves of the ocean.

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. We'll see in a moment what these stars represent, but here it's significant to note that they are in His right hand. This speaks of ownership, authority and control. Out of His mouth goes forth His Word which, as the book of Hebrews says, pierces into the heart of man. And when you look at Him, it's blindingly brilliant. This is no "Sweet Jesus" or "Cute Little Lamb" but a mere glimpse of the glorified state of the Creator of all things seen and unseen -- the risen Judge and Ruler of all the cosmos. It is absolutely overwhelming for John.

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." John collapsed, evidently in fear of the awesomeness of Christ. In tender mercy, Jesus reached out His nail pierced hand, laid it on His

disciple, told him not to fear and then told him why – the power behind fear is death, but Jesus conquered death and in the process took possession of the keys to death and hell. But what's that "Amen" doing there in the middle? Doesn't that just come after prayers? Actually, Amen means "firm" and implies trustworthy. In chapter three, we'll see Jesus call Himself the Amen. Here, it's Jesus saying, "John, believe it! It's firm and trustworthy."

Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. Pay attention to this! This is the divine outline for the Revelation. "The things which you have seen" is Jesus in the midst of the golden candlesticks holding the seven stars. It's the risen glorified Son of God – chapter one.

"The things which are" is the church age which John was in at its beginning (and which we are in at its conclusion). This is covered in chapters two and three.

"The things which will take place after this" will begin in chapter four. When will it take place? After this. What this? The things in chapters two and three – the church age. "After this" or "After these things" will run from chapter four to the end of the book and will cover the rapture, the throne room of heaven, the tribulation, the second coming of Christ, the millennium and the new heaven and earth!

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. This is really the introduction to chapters two and three. We already know that the function of the churches is defined by what they are – lampstands. They are made specifically to hold the Lamp – Jesus Christ – in a prominent place. When the church tries to be any thing else, it falls short. Jesus is not standing in the midst of seven sports arenas or seven country clubs or seven polling booths or ... you get my drift. He's in the midst of seven golden lampstands made to put Him on display, not themselves.

And the seven stars, "the angels" -- if we consider the fundamental function of a star, just as we did with the lampstand, we note that a star, more than anything else, is known for shining in the darkness. Jesus said in the gospels that while He was in the world, He was the light of the world and He is also known as the "Bright and Morning Star". In addition, He told those who believed in Him that they too were the light of the world.

When Jesus was crucified, deep darkness covered the land even though it was mid day. And that darkness has continued, in a spiritual sense, ever since.

In the next two chapters, a single angel is addressed for each church. In other scripture, we are

told that the archangel Michael stands watch over the people of Israel. In like manner, it could be that these angels stand watch over their respective churches. The problem with this, however, is that each address from Christ clearly is meant for the congregation and unless the angels are each members of the groups, the addresses don't make sense.

Since the Greek word for angel means messenger, some people think this may be referring to the pastor/teacher of each church. That seems to make sense, but it cannot limit the application of the addresses to the historical congregations for we are told in chapter 22 that the whole book of Revelation is prophetic.

As we study chapters two and three, it will be evident that there was a historical application, but more importantly, what Jesus says to each church is intended to be heard by the whole church throughout the ages and it serves as a prophetic description of the seven eras within the church age.

So, as those who shine the light of the gospel in the dark world and those who are responsible to Christ for the spiritual care of the church, I'm inclined to think of the angel of each church as the historical pastor/teacher as well as each and every gospel sharer since then in that particular environment or era. Of course, there are many stars in any group of sincere believers aren't there?

Daniel was told concerning his own people, *Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of*

the firmament and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Dan 12:3)

And Jesus has these stars in His right hand. That implies strength and control. The preaching of the gospel is only as effective as it is done in His strength, not by human schemes and means. The fruit is His doing as well.

Now, just how well has the assembly of lampstands and the constellation of stars lived up to their structure and design. Have they been doing what they were made to do? Just what does Jesus, Who is in their midst, have to say about it? What do His flaming eyes see? We'll find out.