

Understanding Revelation - Topic 1

Jesus Christ the First and the Last

An exposition of Revelation Chapter 1

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Introduction to Revelation

The word Revelation is derived from the Greek word *apocalypse*, which means an 'unveiling' or 'revealing'. Consequently, just as the gospels are the unveiling of Jesus and the significance of His ministry during His time on earth in human form, the book of Revelation is the unveiling of the person and mission of Jesus after He completed His ascension into heaven. The book of *Revelation*, therefore, pertains to the activities and focus of Jesus Christ within this heavenly environment, and from where He guides and protects His church on earth, which is in a real sense His new earthly embodiment.

Revelation, therefore, reveals events in both heaven and earth which relate to the great controversy between the powers of light and the powers of darkness; between Christ and His arch opponent and oppressor of His people; between the church of Christ and the synagogue of Satan. It is within this context that the great sweep of prophecy in the book Revelation should be interpreted.

Revelation comes from God

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him...

This is God's revelation of Christ, which therefore can be nothing less than the complete and ultimate truth of the ages.

Purpose of the book of Revelation

...to show His servants...things which must shortly take place...

The preeminent purpose of the book of Revelation is to inform God's people of impending important events. As a consequence this book, above all, needs to be studied, explored, and understood by the people of God.

How was Revelation delivered to God's people?

As an indication of its importance, four Persons were involved in bringing the truths of Revelation to God's people - God the Father, Christ the Son, an angel of God, and the prophet John.

...And He sent and signified it by His angel to his servant John... v1

From God the Father, to Jesus Christ by His angel, finally to the prophet John - this is the biblical order by which God reveals His truth to His people.

How was Revelation recorded?

...who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to all things that he saw. v2

John was the author of this work. He recorded both what he was shown and what he heard in vision.

The Word of God, which was revealed through the prophet John, is also called the testimony.

...the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Revelation 19:10

This spirit of prophecy is the Word of God revealed through His prophet.

A special blessing on the public reading of Revelation

Revelation opens with a blessing on the reader and it closes with a curse upon any who add to or subtract from any part of it.

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it...

This text refers to the public reading of the book. Documents were rare and expensive to duplicate, and a good number in any congregation were illiterate. As a consequence important materials were read publicly to its audience. In the synagogue service at Nazareth for example, Jesus was given the Scripture to read publicly (Luke 4:16-17). Even today, as a matter of custom, the word of God is still publicly read in most church services.

There is a blessing accorded to the hearers of the book. This blessing was possibly necessary to encourage people to listen to its message. No doubt God foresaw how unpopular the truths of the book of Revelation would be once they were fully understood.

Finally, a blessing is given upon those who *keep* the things that are written in the book. The word *keep* in the Greek means 'to continually or habitually observe'. This necessarily calls for our investigation into what God commands His followers to habitually keep.

Interpreting Revelation

There are a number of laws of biblical interpretation which are to keep the Bible student from arriving at erroneous conclusions.

Revelation 1 demonstrates two of these principles. The first is the law of repetition and enlargement. The second is the law of the first and the last (see Appendix A).

Time period to which Revelation applies

...for the time is near. v3

This indicates that the book of Revelation applied at least to John's day - the first century AD. Through the years some have claimed that the book of Revelation was written only for John's day, for the seven local churches in Asia Minor, for the time of pagan Rome when fierce persecutions were meted out to the church by the Caesars.

On the other hand there are some who claim that the book only applies to the last days of earth's history and that everything in it should be interpreted in the light of the last days.

However the instructions of Christ Himself to John clearly reveal that the messages of Revelation are for the past, the present and the future.

Write the things which you have seen (past), and the things which are (present) and the things which will take place after this (future). Revelation 1:19

In fact a close examination of the book, as will be shown in later chapters, reveals that it applies to five different periods of time:¹

1. John's day
2. Time between John's day and the present
3. The present (the last days)
4. The close of the great controversy between good and evil
5. The new earth and the joy and triumph of the saints.

John's day

In John's day there was a special need for these messages. John was the only apostle still alive as all of the other apostles had been martyred in the early decades of the church's growth. Consequently, the Church of God, by the turn of the first century, was in great peril and there was need for counsel, guidance and comfort as perhaps never before.

The believers' first love was growing cold. The old standard bearers had fallen at their posts and the younger ministers, desiring for something novel introduced new aspects of doctrine that were pleasing but contrary to the fundamentals of the faith. This led to questioning the experiences of the past causing confusion and unbelief.

The eyes of many were turned from Jesus as the author and finisher of the faith, to unimportant trivia. Piety waned and satanic influences seemed to dominate.

At this time John was banished to Patmos. Never was his counsel needed more than now. True believers, now a minority, were facing fierce opposition. It looked as if the enemies of the faith would triumph, but Jesus Christ though in heaven, was in charge, 'I am with you always' He had promised and He converted the seeming disaster of John's exile into a marvelous blessing for the church.

On Patmos John had the opportunity to receive a revelation from God of Christ and his truth for the enlightenment of the churches that was to strengthen the churches to the end of time.²

How often in the history of the church has God turned 'a Patmos experience' into an untold blessing for His people?

The initial relevance of Revelation's message was to *the seven churches which were in Asia* (v4). The 'Asia' referred to was Western Asia Minor, ruled by a Roman proconsul.

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1911), 484.

² *Ibid.*, 581.

The Godhead introduced

...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... v 4, 5

The three members of the Godhead are featured:

1. **God the Father** *who is and who was and who is to come* - the unchangeable one. *I am the Lord, I change not. Malachi 3:6*
2. **The Holy Spirit**, likened to *seven Spirits*. This refers to the seven qualities of the Holy Spirit as presented by Isaiah the prophet. *And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him (Messiah) the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Isaiah 11:2.*
3. **Jesus Christ**, who is given three titles - *...the faithful witness, the first born from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. v5*

Significance of Christ's titles

1. **...the faithful witness** refers firstly to Christ's ministry on earth and His earthly witness for His Father - a fulfillment of the messianic prediction:
Indeed I have given Him (the Messiah) as a witness to the people Isaiah 55:4

What a faithful witness Jesus Christ was for His heavenly Father!

Secondly, in heaven Jesus is still God's faithful witness. We can safely depend upon His testimony concerning the Father.

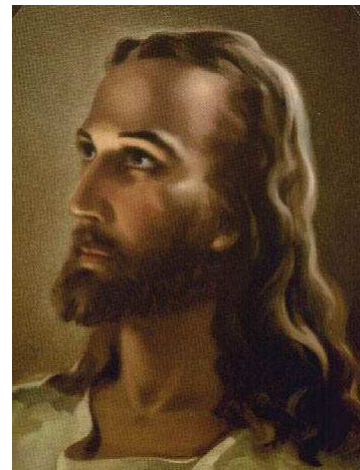
2. **...the first born from the dead...** The term firstborn could mean the *first* or *chief*. Jesus was the chief of those who have risen from the dead. He was not the first from the dead in regard to time, but He was the first in regard to status. At least three New Testament people had risen from the dead before Him - Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus and the widow of Nain's son. Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee that all others shall rise:

Because I live you will live also. John 14:19

This fulfilled another messianic prediction:

Also I will make Him (Messiah) my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. Psalms 89:27

3. **...the ruler over the kings of the earth...** Originally, Adam was the prince or ruler of this earth but he lost his position to Lucifer. Jesus won back this world and His rightful position at Calvary.



Christ's eternal love

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood... v5

To Him who loved (or loves) ***us***... Christ's love is eternal. Though He is at the centre of the universe, surrounded by millions of sinless adoring beings, there is no diminution or distraction from His love for human kind. As the gospel hymn says:

*O love of God, how strong and true, eternal, and yet ever new.
Uncomprehended and unbought, beyond all knowledge and all thought.*

...and washed us from our sins in His own blood... The word *washed* can be translated *loosed*. He has loosed us from the burden of guilt. However, it may include washing.

If I do not wash you, you have no part with me. John 13:8

The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:7

Only Jesus' blood can wash away sin: all other blood defiles. Jesus' sacrifice is the greatest demonstration of His love for humankind.

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

So great was Jesus' love for mankind that not only did He lay down His life for His friends, He also laid down His life for His enemies – for those who hated and crucified Him.

The priesthood of believers

...and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father...

The word *washed* is a direct reference to the Temple service of the Old Testament priesthood. Before entering the sanctuary to perform their duties, the priests washed in the laver set inside the courtyard. So to the rite's relevance to Christians; before they are initiated into the *spiritual* priesthood of believers they themselves must be washed, in a spiritual sense, in the blood of the Lamb.

*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the **washing of regeneration**, and renewing of the Holy Spirit... Titus3:5*

While Jesus is the literal priest to God the Father in the heavenly temple, believers are spiritual priests to God in the earthly sphere. The Greek renders the expression as 'a kingdom of priests' reminding us of Israel's old covenant; *you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation* (Exodus 19:6)

It was God's original plan for ancient Israel that they were to take the knowledge of the true God to all the nations of the earth; however because of their repeated disloyalty to God they failed in their appointed mission. As a consequence God's subsequent plan for taking the truth to the nations was to draw believers from all nations – to become the Christian church – and to make of them a spiritual kingdom of priests so that they could finally fulfill the one great purpose they had for existing on this planet.

*But you (Christians) 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*

Believers, as spiritual priests, are to intercede for all mankind. They are also (like priests of old) to teach all men and women about the great truths that have been entrusted to them - *go ye and teach all nations*. And like the priests of old, they are to offer sacrifices on behalf of all mankind. But their sacrifices are spiritual sacrifices, not the blood of sheep or goats.

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

A doxology of praise

...to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. v6

In the first seven chapters of Revelation there are four doxologies, each one stronger than the preceding. This first doxology is twofold. The subsequent doxology in 4:9-11 is three-fold; the third, in 5:13, is four-fold. The final doxology in 7:12 is seven-fold.

There is no doubt about how deserving Jesus is to receive the glory and dominion of all. Through His sacrifice He has won back the lost kingdom of this world. To accomplish all this He gave up His rightful glory, at the risk of losing it forever. He gave up His due dominion, and risked never having it returned. He left the heavenly courts and became a man. He lived a life of poverty and self-denial. He became a servant to a race that had rejected Him. And He died, even the death of the cross.

Yes, Jesus ran the risk of failure and eternal loss, but He conquered, so glory and dominion are rightfully restored to Him. In the light of all Christ has achieved on our behalf, the doxologies of Revelation are the very least human praise that is due Him!

Revelation's keynote – the Second Coming

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. v7

*Behold He is coming ...*The importance of the Second Advent to the Revelation is evident because it is mentioned in both the first and last chapters of the book.

Behold I come quickly....even so come Lord Jesus. Revelation 22:12, 22.

What we should realize is that most lines of prophecy in the book of Revelation conclude with the Second Advent. For example, it applies to the prophecies regarding the seven churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the three angels' messages, the seven last plagues, and so on.

One prominent Bible scholar declares,

*In one respect there is agreement, the Revelation aims at assuring the church of the advent of her Lord. It is the book of the Coming One – every school of interpretation will admit this...all appear to unite in regard to the Apocalypse as the book of the advent.*³

³ Charles J. Ellicott, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 17.

Significance of clouds

... *with clouds*... This phrase accords with the angelic promise at Jesus' ascension:

*This same Jesus... will so come in **like manner** as you saw Him go into heaven...Acts 1:11.*

...a cloud received Him out of their sight v9.

Jesus ascended to heaven in a cloud and He returns with clouds. Some claim that the clouds represent trouble - He returns in the midst of trouble: others claim that the clouds represent obscurity. However we should note that the term *clouds* originates from Daniel 7:13, which is, significantly, a Messianic prediction:

*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 (the Son) near before Him. Daniel 7:13*

This clearly shows that the clouds transport Christ into the presence of the Father. Who is it that transports the Deity? Does the Deity employ a special mode of transport?

He rode upon a cherub, and flew... Psalms 18:10

The chariots of God are...thousands of thousands (of angels); the Lord is among them. Psalm 68:17

Therefore it is the multiple millions of angels who accompany Christ at the Second Advent.

...all the holy angels with Him... Matthew 25:31.

From the distance at which they appear from the earth they will appear like a vast cloud because of their glory.

...and every eye will see Him... This indicates the universal extent of the Second Advent. Some believe that this refers to every spiritual eye, that only God's people behold Christ. But the text goes on to say *...And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him...* This implies that all on earth are aware of Christ's approach to the earth.

How is it possible for every eye to see Him? How could those people on the other side of the world see Him, for instance?

Does every human eye see the sun? Yes they do, even though it is not at the same time. So it will be with the population of the world at the end of the age. Every living person will see Christ, but not necessarily at the same time. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that every one on earth will see Jesus at the same time, at the Second Advent.

This statement demolishes the secret rapture theory which holds that only the saved experience rapture at the Advent, that Christ comes secretly and silently and snatches away the righteous while the unsaved do not witness the Advent at all. In fact so involved are the unsaved in the Second Advent that even some of their dead are affected.

A special resurrection

...every eye will see Him, even they who pierced (or crucified) Him...

How will those that *pierced Him* behold Jesus at the Second Advent, when they have been dead for about 2,000 years? This demands a resurrection. With this statement Jesus warned the Jewish leaders who condemned Him that one day they also would behold His return.

But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, 'I put you under oath by the living God: tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God'. Jesus said to Him, 'It is as you said.' Nevertheless I say to you, 'Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.' Matthew 26:63-64

Do we find other scriptures which confirm that there will be a resurrection prior to the Second Advent, in which the Jewish leaders could be raised up so they may witness this tremendous event? Yes we do, with references regarding the time of trouble immediately preceding the Second Advent:

At that time Michael shall stand up (or reign), the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:1-2

This resurrection could be referred to as a *partial resurrection*. Some of the saved and some of the unsaved are involved. Undoubtedly, the Roman soldiers who pierced Jesus, as well as the Chief Priest, and his cohorts, will be raised from the dead at that time in order to behold his return.

What a dramatic contrast this will be in comparison with the events which took place at the trial of Jesus. Now the tables will be turned. What a terrifying experience for those complicit in that injustice. Those who condemned Him so unjustly to the cruelest of deaths will now see Him return as King of Kings. The One whom they mocked in His agonies, whom they taunted to come down from the cross to demonstrate that He was really the Messiah, who even after His resurrection was the subject of the concocted rumour that His body was stolen by His disciples. Now He is seen returning in power and glory, just as He had predicted He would at His trial.

Here we see the justice of God displayed. For a time men may appear to have succeeded in their defiance of God, but finally the warning will be fulfilled:

Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord (Romans 12:19).

The world mourns in remorse

...all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. v7

Why do these tribes mourn? The reason is simply that they now know it is Doomsday for all the unsaved. But how do they know?

1. In the final proclamation of the last gospel message to the world, in what is called *The Loud Cry of Revelation 18*, the whole world will hear the truth of the Second Advent. Unfortunately the majority will spurn this final message of warning.
2. Amid the cataclysmic events of the Second Advent, there appears a dramatic sign in the eastern heavens, as Jesus predicted:

*...the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the **sign of the Son of Man** will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven... Matthew 24:29-30*

The shaking of the powers of heaven is described by the apostle John in Revelation 6.

The sky (atmospheric) receded as a scroll when it is rolled up. Revelation 6:14

At the Second Advent the clouds of the atmosphere roll away, enabling the inhabitants of earth to see into the distant heavens. Thus they see Jesus coming with the Host of Heaven. Initially the heavenly hosts appear as a small dark cloud in the distance: this is termed *the sign of the Son of Man*.

This small cloud must be so unusual, so dramatic and so distinctive that the whole world will instinctively know what it means. The very event they rejected and ridiculed when they heard it proclaimed is now taking place in awful grandeur. Imagine the abject remorse and terrible regret of the inhabitants of the world who have rejected the final merciful call. No wonder *all tribes of the earth* shall wail and howl because of Him. How important it is to heed the warning of Christ:

*Watch therefore for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.
Matthew 24:42*

Christ, the Alpha and the Omega

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. v8

Alpha and *Omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and this expression means "all embracing, all comprehending", an apt terminology when applied to God, the self-existent One. The term is used four times in Revelation and it applies to God the Father and God the Son.

Almighty is used nine times in Revelation and mostly applies to the Father, illustrating His omnipotence. It is also true that Christ is described in Scripture as the *Mighty God*. In fact, all the titles and prerogatives of the Father also apply to the Son. Christ is even addressed as *the everlasting Father* (Isaiah 9:6)

...I heard behind me a loud voice as of a trumpet saying, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega the First and the Last... v10-11

The book of Revelation is based on the Old Testament and the two Greek letters, Alpha and Omega correspond to the Hebrew letters *Aleph* (first letter) and *Tau* (last letter). These were associated with the High Priest of the Old Testament temple. In the first chapter of Revelation Jesus is also presented as a priest in the Heavenly Temple and *Aleph* and *Tau* are also connected with His role.

On the breastplate of the High Priest in the Old Testament were two stones called *Urim* and *Thummin*. The writing on the *Urim* commenced with the letter *Aleph* and on the *Thummin* it commenced with the letter *Tau*. The purpose of these two stones was to reveal the will of God. When it was essential to learn God's will in a matter, the High Priest consulted the Lord. If God responded in the affirmative, a bright light would appear on *Aleph*. If the answer was No, a cloud would appear on *Tau*. The *Aleph* and *Tau* or *Alpha* and *Omega* were the medium by which God revealed His will to man.

Who is God's medium of revelation in the New Testament? Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and man. The reason why Jesus is called the Alpha and Omega is to emphasise that he is the great Revealer, the Revelator.

*The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He **has declared Him**.
John 1:18*

*No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father
except the Son, and the one to whom **the Son wills to reveal Him**. Matthew 11:27*

John, the writer

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. v9

John gives Himself three designations –

1. *...your brother...* Although he was a leading apostle, the only one remaining, he still regards himself as a brother to the rest of the believers. No kingly power is revealed here, no "my lord bishop" or "your holiness" but *brother*, in response to the instruction of Jesus: *all ye are brethren*. There is no class distinction with Christ.
2. *... and companion in tribulation...* Persecution was afflicting the church and John was one with His fellow sufferers in their afflictions.
3. *in the... kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ...* This means remaining patient in Jesus in the present kingdom of grace. When we abide in Christ, power is given to enable us to patiently endure. It is no secret that we must endure much tribulation to enter the kingdom of God. Acts 14:22

Exile to Patmos

...on the island that is called Patmos...

This island, now called Patino, is situated off the south-west coast of Asia Minor. Sixteen kilometers by ten in size, it was almost treeless in Roman times and contained salt mines. It was a place of exile for low-class criminals and it is believed that John was also condemned to work in these mines.

...for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

John was exiled because of his fidelity to the Word of God. Note that the term *Word of God* is closely connected with the testimony of Jesus Christ. Some manuscripts read *the Word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ*, indicating that the word of God and the testimony of Jesus are identical.

Now we need to consider why John was on Patmos because of the Word of God.

Background to John's exile

More than half a century had passed since the organization of the Christian Church. During that time the gospel message had been constantly opposed. Its enemies the Jews never relaxed their efforts and they had at last succeeded in enlisting the support of the Roman Emperor against the Christians.

During the terrible persecution that followed, the apostle John did much to confirm and strengthen the faith of the Christian believers. He bore a testimony which his adversaries could not controvert and which helped his brethren to gain the courage to loyalty meet the trials that came upon them. When the faith of the Christians would seem to waver under their persecutors' fierce opposition, the old, tried servant of Jesus would tell the story of the crucified and risen Saviour with power and eloquence. He steadfastly maintained his own strong faith and from his lips came the same great message:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life...and we have seen and bear witness and declare to you... 1 John 1:1-3

John lived to a great age and was the last survivor of those disciples who had been intimately connected with the Saviour during His mission on earth. John witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the ruin of the temple that had been dedicated to the worship of the one true God. John's message was greatly influential in setting forth the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world. As a consequence, through his teachings many were converted from unbelief.

The rulers of the Jews were filled with bitter hatred against John for his unwavering fidelity to the cause of Christ. They concluded that their efforts against the Christians would avail nothing so long as John's testimony kept ringing in the ears of the populace. In order that the miracles and teachings of Jesus might be obliterated, the voice of the bold witness had to be silenced.

To accomplish this, John was summoned to Rome to be tried for his faith. Before the Roman authorities the apostle's doctrines were misstated by his opponents. False witnesses accused him of teaching seditious heresies. Through these accusations his enemies hoped to bring about the disciple's execution.

John answered his opponents in a clear and convincing manner, and with such simplicity and candor that his words had a powerful effect. Those who heard him were astonished at his wisdom and eloquence. However the more convincing his testimony, the deeper was the hatred of those who opposed him. The Emperor Domitian was ultimately filled with rage. He could neither dispute the reasoning of Christ's faithful advocate nor match the power that attended his utterances of truth; yet Domitian determined he would silence John's voice.

As a result, at the end of his trial John was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil; but the Lord preserved the life of his faithful servant, even as He had preserved the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace in the time of Daniel. Just as the words of condemnation were spoken, *thus perish all those who believe that deceiver Jesus Christ of Nazareth*, John declared:

*My master patiently submitted to all that Satan and his angels could devise to humiliate and torture Him. He gave His life to save the world. I am honoured in being able to suffer for His sake. I am a weak sinful man. Christ was holy, harmless, undefiled. He did no sin, and neither was guile found in His mouth.*⁴

John's words had their effect and John was pulled from the cauldron by the very men who had cast him in. But again the hand of persecution fell heavily upon the apostle. By the decree of the Emperor, John was banished to the Isle of Patmos, condemned *for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ*. Here, his enemies thought, his influence would wane and no longer be felt and that he would ultimately die of hardship and distress.⁴

Under Domitian, emperor worship became an issue for the Christians for the first time. Emperor Domitian proclaimed himself to be a man-god, and consequently worthy of worship. When John proclaimed Jesus Christ as the God-man his message confronted the self exaltation of the Emperor and the basis of his power. This was particularly true in the province of Asia, where John's letters were directed and where John had resided and laboured.⁵

Patmos visions given on the Sabbath

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day... v10

...in the Spirit... means that John was in vision.

...on the Lord's Day ... In the original Greek *the Lord's Day* is rendered *the Lord's*, as the word *day* is taken for granted: however it is not in the original text. This is one of the few verses in the New Testament that is used as authority for Sunday observance by the majority of Christendom, but the fact is that the text alone gives no clue as to which day 'the Lord's Day' is meant to be. To discover which day the Lord's Day is, it is essential that we examine other scriptures to determine its meaning and significance. Which Lord was John alluding to? Was it the Roman emperor who proclaimed himself as *Lord* at that time? Emphatically not! Was it the sun god who also was addressed as Lord, to whom Sunday was dedicated? Again the answer is as emphatically in the negative! The Lord

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* 568-570.

⁵ M.L. Andreasen et al., "The Revelation of St. John the Divine", in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Francis D. Nichol, ed. (Washington, Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1957), 7:721.

referred to here is Jesus Christ – *the One Lord, of one faith, of one baptism (Ephesians 4:5)*.

It is necessary, then, to establish which day is Christ's day. Which day does Jesus Christ declare Himself Lord of? This is easy to establish in that at least eight different scriptures the answer is given that the seventh-day Sabbath is the Lord's Day. Two verses from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament will serve as examples:

...the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. Exodus 20:10

...the Sabbath... the holy day of the Lord... Isaiah 58:13

The Son of Man (Christ) is also Lord of the Sabbath. Mark 2:28

For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Matthew 12:8

Scripture provides no hint that Jesus Christ could be Lord of any day other than the Sabbath. On the contrary, history clearly reveals that the title of *Lord's Day* when applied to Sunday, originated with sun worship. This was the pagan counterfeit to the biblical Lord's Day, which has always been the seventh day Sabbath of the fourth commandment.

As unbiased scholars have declared:

Our observance of Sunday as the Lord's Day is apparently derived from Mithraism. The argument that has sometimes been used against this claim, namely that Sunday was chosen because of the resurrection on that day, is not well supported. ⁶

As a solar festival, Sunday was the sacred day of Mithra; and it is interesting to notice that since Mithra was addressed as Dominus (Lord) Sunday must have been the Lord's Day long before the Christian times. ⁷

Lucien, the Catholic historian, declared –

In the year 325 AD Sylvester, Bishop of Rome, 314-337 AD officially changed the title of the first day, calling it the Lord's day. ⁸

The Lord's Day - another key to understanding Revelation

It has been suggested that just as John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day while receiving the visions presented in Revelation, so the reader must also possess the truth concerning the Lord's day in order to rightly understand Revelation. In other words, if we do not recognize the significance of the true Sabbath, we will fail to discern certain issues associated with the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the theme of this remarkable book.

⁶ G.J. Laing, *Survivals of Roman Religion* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931), 148.

⁷ Arthur E. Weigall, *Paganism in Our Christianity* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1928), Arthur E. Weigall, *Paganism in our Christianity* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1928), 145.

⁸ Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier (London: 1898). Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (London: 1898), np.

The seven churches of Revelation



...What you see write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia... v11

Why is the number of churches given as seven? Numerous godly scholars in the past have recognized that the names of the seven churches are symbolic of the true church in different periods of the Christian era. The number seven indicates completeness, and is indicative of the fact that the messages extend to the end of time, while the symbols used are to reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world.

According to Dr. Le Roy Froom, in his monumental book *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, over forty-four scholars agree that the churches represent the seven periods of the Christian church between the first and the Second Advent of Christ.

Revelation's setting – another key to understanding

Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me... I saw seven golden lampstands. v12

Seven lamp stands are first depicted in Scripture in the Holy Place, the first apartment of the Jewish sanctuary or temple. The fact that they are featured in this chapter of Revelation indicates that Book of Revelation is set in the context of the heavenly sanctuary. Revelation, as it unfolds, consists primarily of a series of sanctuary scenes, consequently, in order to understand the book correctly, it is essential to understand the truth about the heavenly sanctuary.



Christ portrayed

The Son of Man among the lampstands

...and in the midst of the seven lampstands, One like the Son of Man. v13

One of the important features of this record is that although Jesus Christ is God the Son enthroned in His glorified state, He still refers to Himself as the Son of Man. Jesus maintains His link with the human family. He is forever our elder brother: limited by His human flesh. What a comfort to His people amid their tribulation upon this earth. The One above who represents us is the *man* Christ Jesus. He possesses the same nature and has met the same temptations that afflict all mankind: He is therefore an understanding and sympathetic High Priest.



Jesus Christ stands among the lamp stands. These lamp stands represent the seven churches (v20), that is, the church of God on earth. Therefore this imagery depicts Jesus in the midst of His people. *Lo I am with you always...* (Matthew 28:20).

The glorified Christ

Revelation 1:13-16 is a description of the resurrected, glorified Christ. Eight descriptors are presented and we should be aware that the number eight in Scripture is a number frequently associated with resurrection and regeneration.

1. **...clothed with a garment down to the feet, and girded about the chest with a golden band. v13.** This represents kingly and priestly dignity: it applies to Jesus as a king-priest of the order of Melchizedek, the priest-king of ancient Salem. *You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6)*
2. **His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow...** This does not indicate decay or senility but the sign of venerable knowledge, mature judgment and solid wisdom.
3. **...and His eyes like a flame of fire v14.** Christ sees both the good and also the evil to which He is opposed and He aims to annihilate.
4. **His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace...** This suggests the treading down and destruction of all who choose sin (see Appendix B).
5. **...and His voice as the sound of many waters v15.** This conveys Christ's majesty, power and authority as Creator.
6. **He had in His right hand seven stars...** The right hand denotes power, authority and protection. The fact that the stars are in Jesus' right hand implies a close and protective relationship between Christ and His faithful servants.
7. **...out of His mouth went a sharp, two-edged sword...** This represents the power of Christ's word, especially in the execution of judgment.

8. **...His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength** v16. This signifies Christ's holiness and divinity. *Dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto* (1 Timothy 6:16). This reminds us of Moses' face, which after forty days in God's presence on Mt Sinai shone so radiantly that he was compelled to conceal it with a veil so that the people would not be overcome by its brilliance (Exodus 34:28-35). So it is with Jesus' countenance. In the fullness of His divinity in His glorified state, His whole person shines as does the sun.

There are ten parallels we can discern between Revelation 1:13-17 and Daniel 10:5-12. Daniel 10 brings to view a person who reveals to Daniel the coming king of the north. This individual is none other than the Son of God.

And when I saw Him I fell at His feet as dead... v17

This experience is similar to that of Daniel when Christ appeared to him. The prophet lost his natural strength but was then given supernatural power.

The First and the Last

...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 Death. v17-18

The expression *the First and the Last* is drawn from the Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. In both Isaiah and Revelation Chapter 1 it occurs on three occasions.

I the Lord am the first; and with the last I am he. Isaiah 41:4

I am the First and I am the Last; besides me there is no God. Isaiah 44:6

I am he, I am the First, I am also the Last. Isaiah 48:12

The significance of this term is that originally it was used by God expressly to encourage and comfort Israel in the time of Isaiah. The prophet was shown that Babylon would become a threat to Israel. Isaiah 39:1-2 records the visit of the Babylonians to Jerusalem to enquire about Hezekiah's healing. Overcome by the occasion, Hezekiah disclosed everything he possessed to the Babylonians. The Babylonians would shortly thereafter invade Judah taking away the spoils that Hezekiah had shown them.

Already Hezekiah had experienced a devastating invasion by the Assyrians only to be miraculously delivered (Isaiah 36-37). Now, in Isaiah 42-45, the prophet declared that though Babylon would conquer God's people, God would ultimately, in time, overthrow the Babylonians. (Isaiah 43:14; 44:26-28).

In the midst of this message of deliverance God titles Himself *the First and the Last*. The term means that in the great controversies between Jerusalem and Babylon, between Christ and Satan, God would be both the first and the last on the field of conflict. In other words, He would be completely victorious over His enemies and ultimately destroy them.

This same message is conveyed in the book of Revelation. The great controversy between good and evil - the conflict between the church and her enemies - is the theme throughout the book. This theme should underpin the interpretation of every prophetic outline. Thus in the introduction to Revelation, *the First and the Last* is a most fitting and appropriate symbol.

Jesus declares Himself as victor over the enemies of His people. He is the first on the battlefield - He is fully prepared, He is never taken by surprise. He is also the last on the battlefield, meaning that the enemy has either been put to flight or destroyed. Jesus has been and will be victorious always. Therefore His saints will triumph: the powers of evil will be overcome. Jesus will always be eternally the First and the Last.

The Source of eternal life

I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen...

The Greek renders this passage

I am... the living one (yet) I became dead and behold I am alive (or I am living) forever.

Here Jesus speaks of Himself as the living one. This conveys the notion of *continuously living*, indicating that Jesus has eternal life in Himself.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. John 1:4

*That was the true Light, which gives light to every man coming into the world.
John 1:9*

As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself. John 5:26

In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.ⁱ

I became dead... and I am alive forevermore. (Greek)

What a world of experience is packed into this verse! It alludes to Christ's agonies in Gethsemane and at Calvary, as well as to His glorious resurrection and His ascension.

The holder of the keys of death and the grave

...And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. The possession of keys represents the possession of authority and power. This passage tells us that Jesus has authority over death and the grave.

In Scripture the grave is likened to a prison – the prison house of Satan. Satan is the author of death.

...him who had the power (or dominion) of death, that is the devil. Hebrews 2:14

The grave is Satan's arsenal and stronghold.

*On this rock will I build my church and the **gates of Hades** shall not prevail against it (the church). Matthew 16:18*

The gates of Hades represent the stronghold of Satan. The great deceiver claims the dead as his property because they have transgressed the law. In order for Christ to conquer death and the grave it was essential that He enter the stronghold of Satan and seize the keys of that grim precinct.

*When a strong man fully armed guards his own palace, his goods are in peace.
But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armour in which he trusted and divides his spoils. Luke 11:21-22.*

By His death Jesus invaded Satan's stronghold. *He took part of the same (flesh and blood), that through death, He might destroy him that had the power (or dominion) of*

death, that is the devil. (Hebrews 2:14) This is a defining experience, one of the most dramatic episodes in the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

It almost goes without saying that Satan mustered all his forces, principalities and powers to keep Jesus imprisoned in the tomb. Not only were Roman guards keeping their watch, there were unseen watchers as well. Those superhuman angelic powers of darkness were present, unseen to the human eye. Had it been possible, the Prince of Darkness with his hosts would have kept forever sealed the tomb that held the Son of God.⁹

On Calvary Jesus displayed the marvelous love of God. It was in the tomb that He displayed the omnipotence (power) of God. In the tomb, the prison house of Satan, Jesus demonstrated His supremacy.

Having disarmed principalities and powers (of Satan) He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Margin – in Himself) Colossians 2:15

...he disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in Him. RSV

The devil and all the powers of hell, were conquered and disarmed by the dying Redeemer. The Redeemer conquered by dying.¹⁰

Thus His resurrection and ascension are a public, solemn triumph over the principalities and powers of death. It is striking that the heathen oracles were silenced soon after Christ's ascension.¹¹

During His earthly ministry prior to His resurrection, the creative power of Jesus, His deity, was dormant or quiescent within Him, otherwise He could never have experienced life as we know it. The miracles He performed at that time were performed by the power of the Father.

The Father who dwells in me does the works. John 14:10

Jesus chose not to use His own divine power. That would have given Him advantages over His fellow human beings, to whom He is the great exemplar. Jesus was totally dependent upon His Father. And, undoubtedly, heavenly angels played a part in the miracles of Christ.¹² In His resurrection, however, Jesus displayed His deity, His creative power, His omnipotence. He was

...declared to be the Son of God with power... by the resurrection from the dead. Romans 1:4

⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1898), 530.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 779.

¹¹ F.D.Nichol (Ed.), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, (Washington DC, Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1957), See Colossians 2:15.

¹² Robert Jamieson et al., *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1871), See Colossians 2:15.

Christ's deity

Jesus raised Himself from the dead, raising His humanity from death by the power of His divinity. He declared:

I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.
John 10:17-18

This means that the deity of Jesus did not die at the cross, for one of the attributes of the deity is immortality or deathlessness. It was never possible for His deity to suffer death. It was Jesus' humanity alone that died. He was, after all, the God-man. The deity of Jesus did not die otherwise it would not have been deity.¹³

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to the God who alone is wise
1 Timothy 1:17

...which He will manifest in His own time...the King of kings...who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light 1 Timothy 6:14-16

For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself John 5:26

As the Father raises the dead, and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. John 5:21

On that Sunday morning, when the mighty angel descended from heaven and rolled the stone away, he conveyed the Father's call for Jesus to come forth.¹⁴ A corpse could not respond to such a call. It was the deity in Jesus that responded. At that call, the deity of Jesus sprang into action and brought His humanity back from death. It was a formidable display of His power.

Thus, through this action, Jesus Christ declared with great power that He was the Son of God – God the Son. Christ had entered the stronghold of Satan, captured his armour, seized the keys of hell and death from the enemy's grasp and broken Satan's power forever.

Consequently the opening chapter of Revelation is a fitting prelude to this book, which foretells the life and death struggles of the believers in Christ. The One in charge, the One who leads the church, its Director, is He who has broken the power of death and the grave. It is a comforting image for the millions of martyrs who are portrayed as sacrificing their lives for Jesus Christ.

¹³ Psalm 91:2; Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 40:28; Romans 1:27.

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 143.

Revelation's scope

Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. v19

This verse informs us about the scope of the Book of Revelation.

Notice that all three tenses are used: past, present and future. As one commentator has declared:

In the Revelation given to him there was unfolded scene after scene of thrilling interest in the experience of the people of God, and the history of the church was foretold to the very close of time. In figures and symbols, subjects of vast importance were presented to John, which he was to recall, that the people of God living in his age and in future ages might have an intelligent understanding of the perils and conflicts before them.

This revelation was given for the guidance and comfort of the church throughout the Christian dispensation...on Patmos the disciple received a message, the influence of which was to continue to strengthen the church till the end of time.¹⁵

The seven stars

The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lamp stands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lamp stands which you saw are the seven churches. v20

The word *angels* in the Greek means *messenger*. In Revelation the stars are the messengers of the churches. But what do the stars represent? A clue is found in the book of Daniel.

Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever. Daniel 12:3

The term *star* refers to 'teachers of righteousness' – those who turn men and women away from sin through the preaching of the gospel of Christ. They are God's true and faithful ministers, teachers and servants.

This verse concludes the opening chapter of Revelation. It also introduces us to the great lines of prophecy that commence in Chapter 2 and which continue to the end of the book.

¹⁵ Ibid., 780.

Appendix A

Two laws of interpretation

In Revelation One, two laws of interpretation are demonstrated in the portrayal of Jesus as deliverer and destroyer (Revelation 1:5-6). This passage is couched in a form known as *epanados*.¹⁶ Eight Old Testament scriptures are employed. The first scripture is from the same book as the eighth scripture. The second scripture is from the same book as the second last scripture. The third scripture is from the same book as the third last scripture, and the fourth scripture is from the same book as the fourth last scripture.

The Epanados of Revelation 1:5-16	
1. <i>Revelation 1:5 Jesus Christ, the faithful witness</i>	<i>Isaiah 55:4 Indeed I have given Him (Messiah) as a witness to the people</i>
2. <i>Revelation 1:7 Behold He is coming with clouds</i>	<i>Daniel 7:13 one like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven</i>
3. <i>Revelation 1:7 and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him</i>	<i>Zechariah 12:10 they will look on me whom they pierced</i>
4. <i>Revelation 1:8 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.</i>	<i>Isaiah 44:6 I am the First and the Last; besides me there is no god.</i>
5. <i>Revelation 1:11 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last</i>	<i>Isaiah 48:12 I am the He, I am the First, I am also the Last</i>
6. <i>Revelation 1:12 I saw seven golden lampstands</i>	<i>Zechariah 4:2 a lamp stand of solid gold...and on the stand seven lamps</i>
7. <i>Revelation 1:13 one like the Son of Man v14 His head and hair were white like wool ...His eyes were like a flame of fire v15 His feet were like fine brass...His voice as the sound of many waters v16 His countenance was like the sun</i>	<i>Daniel 7:13 one like the son of man v9 the hair of His head was like pure wool Daniel 10:6 His eyes were like torches of fire and His feet like burnished bronze...the sound of His words like the voice of a multitude ...His face like the appearance of lightning</i>
8. <i>Revelation 1:16 Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword</i>	<i>Isaiah 49:2 He has made my mouth like a sharp sword</i>

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* 581.

Appendix B

Feet like fine brass

...His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace. Revelation 1:15

This represents treading down in judgment or punishment.

Behold the Lord is coming out of His place; He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth...for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. Micah 1:3-5

God came from Teman (or Edom), the Holy One from mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise. His brightness was like the light; He had rays splashing from His hand, and there His power was hidden. Before Him went pestilence, and fever followed at His feet. He stood and measured the earth; He looked and startled the nations... Habakuk 3:3-5

*Look on every one who is proud and bring him low; **tread down the wicked in their place.** Job 40:12*

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