

THE COMMENTARY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

THE CREDENTIALS OF THE BOOK Rev. 1:1-8

AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK.

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THE PROLOGUE OF THE BOOK. (Rev. 1:1-3)

THIS IS THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST, WHICH IS FROM GOD AND DELIVERED TO JOHN BY AN ANGEL. (Rev. 1:1)

The word "shortly" is the Greek word "*en tachei*," which means quickly or suddenly coming to pass. (See Luke 18:8, where this word is translated "speedily") It does not mean that the events will happen immediately or in a short period of time from the writing of the book, but means when the events begin they will occur in quick sessions when they begin. The Amillennialist and the Preterist fail to take this fact into account when they conclude that the earth has been or is presently in the Tribulation. After the rapture the events of future prophetic history as the Book of Revelation records will rapidly follow one after the other.

John states that he is an actual eyewitness to the accounts of the book, which is the testimony of Jesus Christ Himself. (Rev. 1:2) The blessing of the book is not to those who just read the book, but to those would live according to the message of the book.

A person can read this book out of curiosity and with an interest in the prophecies of the future. Yet, just having head knowledge of the literature is of little value unless the principles presented are applied. Example: In Chapters 2-3, Christ speaks to the churches concerning their strengths and weaknesses. The reason for the addresses was that each church mentioned could know where it stood in the eyes of God. When Christ gave the churches warnings, it was meant for the churches to take immediate action to remove the source of Christ's displeasure. The message of the Book demands a response and the coming events of the biblical history should be taken to heart and should govern our

everyday lives. It should be an admonishment and encouragement to believers as they serve Christ.

THE SALUTATION OF THE BOOK. (Rev. 1:4-6)

The Apostle John is the author, and is the son of Zebedee and Salome, the brother of James. John at the writing of the Book was on Patmos as a prisoner because of his testimony for Gospel. (Rev. 1:9)

Patmos was a Roman penal colony. Its size was 28 sq. miles, 10 miles long and 6 miles wide. It was a volcanic Island with peaks as high as 200 feet. Today it is called Patino and is located 28 miles South of Aegean Sea with a population of around 3000 people.

The period in history when the Book was written was during the Domitian persecution. Roman law stated no Christian who was brought before the Tribunal court and would not recant and deny their belief in Jesus Christ must be punished. The reason for the persecution occurred when the Jews refused to pay poll tax to Capitolinus Jupiter. Domitian, revered himself as God and used the Latin title, "*dominus et deus*" meaning "our Lord and God" and demanded the worship of everyone within the Roman Empire.

The Jews had previously been exempt from emperor worship, thus Christians were seen as an offshoot of Judaism and benefitted by not being persecuted. However, in time this changed and Christianity was called "contagion of superstition" in a letter from Pliny, governor of Asia to Trajan the Emperor.¹ The word "contagion" refers to the spreading of a disease. This letter revealed how strong and widespread Christianity was growing and that its growth alarmed the Romans. As a rule Christians were only punished or tried if someone informed on them. The greatest enemy to Christians was the Jews who were their chief accusers before the Roman government. When a person was accused, he was asked three times if he were a Christian. He was released if he agreed to sacrifice to Emperor or recanted, but if he refused to recant his testimony and deny Jesus Christ he was cruelly put to death or imprisoned. Thus, Christians were not only in danger of the government, but by the Jews who reported them to the officials.

The Book is giving special instruction to the seven churches in located in Asia. These churches were located at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The area the Bible refers to as Asia is roughly the area now called Turkey. Its boundaries were to the north by the Black Sea, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles. The Aegean Sea was the western border and Syria and the Mediterranean Sea to the east and south. Asia Minor would refer to a smaller portion of greater Asia which was a high mountainous plateau in near the southern coast.

There are seven churches mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3. Many see the spiritual state of these seven churches as representative of periods of time in church history. Clearly history shows that the churches have gone through varying periods of faithfulness, persecution, apathy and corruption. This view sees these churches as characterizing the various periods of church history as beginning in John's day and continuing until the Rapture of the church.

Ephesus	30-95 AD (John's Day)
Smyrna	95-305 AD (Years of Persecution)
Pergamos	315-500 AD (Growth of Papal Power in Rome)
Thyatira	500 AD - to the destruction of world church in the coming Tribulation (Daniel's 70th Week).
Sardis	1500 AD - Reformation to Tribulation.
Philadelphia	1800 AD - to Rapture.
Laodicea	1900 AD - to merger with world church during the Tribulation.

It is not clear who are the "seven spirits which are before His throne." Some see the seven spirits referred to in verse 4, as a reference to the Holy Spirit citing Isaiah 11:3 which mentions the sevens spirits of the Lord, Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Might, Knowledge, and Fear. Others see them as angels who are before the throne. The most likely view is that these are the angels who will pour out the judgments on the earth in the Tribulation.

John states this letter is from Jesus Christ Himself to seven churches in Asia. (Rev. 1:4-5) Jesus is described as the "the faithful witness." Christ is the believer's legal witness before God who imparts His righteousness to Christians forgiving their sins and justifying them before God. Christ is the key and only witness for us. (See Rev. 3:14) He was first called this in Isaiah 55:4.

Christ is said to be "the first begotten of dead." Jesus died on the cross as all men die, yet He was the first to be resurrected never to die again. Colossians 1:15, states Christ was the "firstborn of every creature." Christ died for our sins and arose victorious conquering both sin and death. Through faith in Him men can have the sure hope to be raised with Him unto eternal life. Because he arose, those who trust Him will also be resurrected.

John pours out his heart in praise in this doxology. He proclaims Christ as the Prince of Kings of earth. Satan is referred to as the prince of the powers of the air, and the prince of this world (Eph. 2:2, John 12:31). He is not the prince of the kings of earth. Revelation 11:15 proclaims the day when "*The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever.*" Daniel 4:37 recognizes Christ as the king of earth, Matthew 22 as the King of Jews, Revelation 19:16 as the King of Kings and Genesis 8:25 as the Prince of Kings of the earth. John praises Christ because He, "*loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.*" The proof of Christ's love of us is that He suffered and died for us and thereby washed our sins in His own blood.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY. (Rev. 1:6)

God has made believers to reign with Him as kings and priests unto Him. God takes a sinner, a rebel and makes him a king! This refers to the church age saints as ruling with Christ in the future. 1 Corinthians 6:2-3 states the saints (Christians) will judge (rule) the world and angels. Colossians 1:13-14, says he, "translated us into his Kingdom of His dear son." 1 Peter 2:9, declares that saved men and women, are a "*chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*"

THE PROMISE OF THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST. (Rev. 1:7-8)

In Acts 1:9, the angel told the disciples at Jesus' ascension into Heaven that Christ would return in like manner as He ascended, that is returning in the clouds. Jesus in Matthew 14:3-51, foretells the events of His Second Coming. In verse 30, He says He will come in the sky. (See also Mark 13:3-37, 14:62, Luke 21:5-38) At His second coming there will be signs in the heavens as Christ approaches, and the nations of earth who are gathered in the middle east to battle Israel and the Antichrist, will stop fighting one another and turn their weapons toward Christ. (See Dan. 7:13; Matt. 25:30, Luke 21:26-27; Rev. 19:11-16)

The verse states that those that pierced Him would see Him coming in the clouds. This does not mean those who actually thrust the spear into His side at Calvary, but refers to the nation of Israel who rejected Him and who was ultimately responsible for His death. (See Zech. 12:10)

Further the verse says all nations of earth will see Him in the clouds returning. How this is possible we do not know, yet the verse's meaning is clear and says that all the nations or peoples of the earth would see Him approaching. Many have suggested that the world could watch the Second Coming on television which seems practical, but the event could be so spectacular that it could be seen from anywhere on earth.

Note that at the sight of His Coming, in all His glory and power the peoples of the earth will wail or mourn. Think of the emotion and feeling of those who have rejected Him. When they see Him coming, they will know, without doubt, Christ really is God, and the Bible is surely the truly the very Word of God. Think of the fear, emptiness and hopelessness of those who are lost. They now fully realize it is too late . . . too late . . . all is lost! Most of all, unbelieving Israel will finally be forced to accept that Jesus was the Christ.

JESUS CHRIST STATES WHO HE IS. (Rev.1:8)

"Christ is the Alpha, and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." This presents the

full credentials of the One that is giving this revelation and this truth. He is God, the Creator, the Almighty. This is why this book is so important. The book is God revealing His will on the earth, and the truth that victory is coming and God's will, will be done.

John was in God's will even in prison! Would you believe it could be God's will for you would be to suffer great difficulties and trouble? The first book of the New Testament that was written was the Book of James. God had been silent for four hundred years since the Book of Malachi was written. Therefore the first thing God says to mankind after four hundred years of silence is "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing*" (James 1:2-4).

God says we should rejoice because the "*trying of our faith worketh patience*" (James 1:3). Circumstances should never hurt or cause the Christian's faith in the Lord to waver. James is saying; do not be alarmed at trials because it is working to create patience, meaning trust in God. James 1:4 gives the reason, "*that you may be perfect, complete, wanting nothing!*" Completeness that means maturity in Christ comes from testing.

Paul who experienced great trials of persecution and difficulties said to the Philippians, "*But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel*" (Phil. 1:9). The problems we encounter in our daily lives should be seen as opportunities to show forth our faith in God and be a testimony of His abiding presence.

It is worth noting that the first book in the Old Testament (the Book of Job) and in the New Testament (the Epistle of James) both deal with the trials that come in the believer's life. Christ was beaten, and crucified and His message rejected. Why would anyone today think it would be any different for us than it has been in the past! 2 Timothy 3:12, says, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" John was fully in God's will, not allowing circumstances to hinder him and he heard the Word of the Lord.

Unless we are willing to seek God through obedience, prayer, and Bible study we will remain weak and cannot be used of the Lord. Suppose you removed a baby from its mother and it was not fed. In a short time it would die. Suppose you never allowed a child to exercise or even walk? What would happen? Babies left alone in an experiment by the Nazis' in Germany died. Even so if our spiritual souls that are not nourished by God's Word we become weak and little able to do anything for Christ or experience the joy of being a child of God.

Jesus declared this was His program and plan. (Rev. 1:11)

This verse proclaims that Christ is alive! Jesus speaking to John declares He is Alpha and Omega, which are the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet. Jesus using this term is saying He is the beginning and the end of all things. (See John 1:1-3, Col. 1:17, Heb. 1:3) Jesus is saying "It's my program. You are only on the scene today, but I always have been. I'll complete what I have begun."

THE CONTENT OF THE VISION THAT JOHN SAW. (Rev.1:12)

The Seven golden lamp stands (candlesticks). The word "candlestick" literally means "lamp stands" as they did not have candles in the 1st Century and used oil lamps. These golden lamp stands are symbolic references for seven of the churches in Asia. As a lamp gives forth light so the true New Testament church is the source of spiritual light in the world. Note that Christ's message is addressed directly to the local churches through their pastors. Christ's message was not addressed to a hierarchy, pope, prophet, or other authority over the local churches. This is further evidence that God's program on this earth is through the local church, and not by some manmade hierachal church organization.

The identity of those represented by this symbolic language is explained in Revelation 1:20. The seven lamp stands are the seven individual churches. The seven stars of verse 16 are identified as the "angels." The word "angels" is the Greek word "messengers." Thus Christ is addressing the messengers to these churches who are their pastors. Every true minister called of God to pastor a local church is under divine authority of Christ. (See Acts 20:28) Every true pastor receives his instruction and direction from Christ and not from any institution or authority outside the local assembly. The responsibility of the pastor is to teach the whole counsel of the Word of God. The fact that God is speaking to the pastor means that he is to deliver the message of God to those to whom God has given him charge. Although pastors are not to "lord over" the congregation, this passage shows God sees them as His messengers to His people.

CHRIST IS DESCRIBED AS BEING "LIKE UNTO THE SON OF MAN," OR A HUMAN. (Rev. 1:13-16)

Christ is pictured as clothed with a long flowing garment that extended down His feet. He has a golden sash (girdle) around His chest (paps). The Lord's head and hair are white and his eyes were a flame of fire. His feet are described as appearing like fine brass or fine bronze glowing in a fire and when He speaks his voice sounds like many rushing waters. Jesus is standing in the midst of seven golden candlesticks, as Revelation 1:20 explains, which are the seven churches of Asia Minor, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (See verse 11).

The local New Testament church is the Lord's creation and as Ephesians 5:25 says "... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." The picture is that He is in the center and the churches are around Him. His close relationship to the churches and His authority over them are depicted by His position. It is easy

for a church to lose sight of Christ presence in their midst. It is also important to understand that after giving this vivid and overpowering picture of Jesus Christ the Bible mentions His word. You cannot separate Jesus Christ from the Word and John 1:1 confirms this proclaiming He is the Word.

Hebrews 4:12 also uses the term "*sharp two edged sword*" in referring to the Word of God. Here it too, the reference is to God's word going forth in great power from the very lips of Christ. On the Mount of Transfiguration, and when Christ appeared to Paul on the Damascus road he was seen in a blinding white light. (Matt 7:2, Acts 9:1-5) John describes the countenance of the Lord's face as the full brilliance of the Sun. John recorded Jesus' own words in proclaiming His character and position, "*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*" (John 8:12) Light dispels darkness and as John states in Revelation 22 in the coming New Heaven and Earth the only light will be the Light of Jesus Christ and there will be no longer any physical or spiritual darkness on earth.

JOHN REACTION AND CHRIST'S ASSURANCE. (Rev. 1:17-18)

John is so overcome by seeing Christ in all his glory that he falls at the Lord's feet as if he were dead. But as awesome and fearful as Christ appeared he reaches down and places in right hand on John and in an act of assurance and tells John not to be afraid. He says to John, "I'm your Lord, the One you served and for me have endured great persecution. I'm the eternal One who loved you and you walked with on earth. I am Jesus who was crucified and was resurrected. Don't be afraid John. I the One who loved you and only I have the keys to hell and death."

THE KEY TO INTERPRETING THE BOOK OF REVELATION. (Rev. 1:19)

The first principle of Biblical interpretation is to let the Bible interpret itself. It is sad to see so many who are offering interpretations to Scripture that blatantly ignore this vital principle. Verse 19, is the key to interpreting the Book. God tells John "*to write the things which he had seen in the past, the things that were at the writing of the book, and the thing that will happen in the future.*" The past, present and future is presented by God as literal events of history. There is nothing here which suggests that the events are anything but literal history. For any commentator to ignore this verse and proceed to spiritualize the literal statements of this book is nothing less than criminal. (See Rev. 22:18-19)

For example, the Amillennialist spiritualizes the events of the Tribulation and concludes the earth is now in that period. The Preterist position sees the events as happening in the First Century. Both positions are blatantly false and ignore the literalness of this Revelation from God. In all of history there have never been any events that compare to the world wide destruction the book of Revelation says are coming as the various judgments are poured out on earth. To conclude that some past historical event compares with the catastrophic events described in the Book of Revelation is lessening what God plainly says and distorts His words. The scope of

these devastating judgments is worldwide. In contrast every example given, by those who try to relate them to past history, was to a local or regional happening. To relate them in some symbolic way to former times is to blatantly ignore what God has recorded for us?

When God says for example in Revelation 6:8 that when the Fourth Seal judgment is released on earths that one fourth of all people on the earth will die, that is actually what will happen. There is nothing confusing about God using four living beings (beasts) to carry out the seal judgments.² We may not fully understand at present who are the various riders of the horses of Revelation 6, but we can be sure of results of their judgments. More will be said about this later. When in the past 2000 years have such catastrophes happened as described here? The world has not seen the Tribulation yet, because it is future, but it will happen exactly as revealed in God's time. When it does come, those that witness the events will fully understand what the symbols God uses refers to.

Revelation 1:19, says the events of the book are presented in a threefold division of time and the divisions are very clear. Those who interpret the book must apply these divisions to their interpretation. In interpreting Scripture we must first fully know the whole scope of the material. One must look within the material for the understanding of what it means. Note that in verse 20, God explains who the seven golden lamp stands are and also the identity of the seven stars He holds in His right hand. When trying to understand the symbolic language of the Bible, we need to let the Bible explain it to us.

For example in the book of Daniel, God explained to him in Chapter 11 who were the symbolic figures early mentioned in Chapters 7-9. Today looking back into past history, we know clearly that the symbolism of Daniel fits perfectly the characteristics of the various nations in which it is referring. From history it is clear that Babylon was the head of gold; the Medo-Persian Empire was the chest of silver; and the bronze thighs referred to the Greek empire under Alexander the Greek. History shows that the legs of iron represented the Roman Empire and the feet of iron and clay is a future kingdom which will be the Revived Romans Empire under the Antichrist. During and after these events of the Tribulation the symbolism will be vividly clear to all. Jesus often used symbolism in His parables, but later explained clearly what the symbolism meant. Here too, is a classic example of this principle. Let God explain the meaning of the symbols and if He gives no explanation then we should accept them at face value and not speculate.

THE INTERPRETATION WHICH REVEALS THE IDENTITY OF THE SEVEN STARS AND THE SEVEN CANDLESTICKS. (Rev. 1:20)

The seven stars are the seven messengers (*angels*) of the seven candlesticks which are the seven churches of Asia. It is significant that these pastors are shown in a place of honor and protection which is in Christ's right hand. It should be noted that the seven stars are not presented as a group, but as individuals. Christ did not address His instructions to these churches through a pope, prophet, church hierarchy, deacons, trustees, or committees, nor did He

speak to them collectively. Jesus sets the precedent that He speaks directly to the local churches through His messengers who were the pastors of these churches. Nowhere in the word of God is there any example of God directing His local churches in any other way. There is no example or reference in the New Testament to a universal or catholic church. A church has one Head that is Jesus Christ and He speaks directly to His local assembly (*ekklesia*) through His appointed pastor who is His messenger or undershepherd. God's program for this dispensation of the Church Age is He is working through local churches and there is no universal assembly.

1

Pliny, *Pliny to the Emperor Trajan, Letters 10.96-97*, about 111 A.D.

²"beasts." See the later comments on Rev. 4:6 for a full explanation.