

Jesus Christ – Alpha and Omega

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THE METHOD OF RECORDING IT
AN EXPOSITION OF REVELATION CHAPTER ONE

The word Revelation is derived from the Greek Apocalypse, which means an unveiling or revealing. The gospels are an unveiling of Jesus during his earthly ministry, but the book of Revelation is an unveiling of Jesus after his ascension. It portrays Jesus Christ in his heavenly state, in which He guides and protects his church on earth. It reveals things in heaven and things on earth in connection with the great controversy between the powers of light and the powers of darkness, between Christ and Satan, between the church of Christ and the synagogue of Satan. It is in this light that the great lines of prophecy in the book should be interpreted.

REVELATION COMES FROM GOD

“The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto Him.”

This is God’s revelation of Christ. Therefore it is the truth.

THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

“To show to his servants, things which must shortly come to pass.”

It is to inform God’s people, therefore this book needs to be studied, understood and explained to the people.

THE ORDER BY WHICH REVELATION WAS GIVEN

Four persons were involved in bringing the truth to the people. It involved God the Father, Christ the Son, the angel of God, and the prophet John. “He sent and signified it by his angel through his servant John.” This is the biblical order by which God reveals his truth to his people.

“Who bare record of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ and of all things that he saw.”
Verse 2

The word of God which was revealed through the prophet is also called the testimony.

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

The spirit of prophecy is the word of God that is revealed through a prophet.

A SPECIAL BLESSING ON THE PUBLIC READER OF THE BOOK

The book 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 that reads and they that hear the words of this prophecy and keep the things which are written therein for the time is at hand.” Verse 3

This means the public reading of the book. At that time and through most of history, letters and news items were publicly announced to the people. This was probably because some were illiterate. In the synagogue service at Nazareth Jesus was given the scripture to publicly read.[Luke 4:16,17] Today the word of God is still publicly read in church services. Then there is a blessing on the hearers of the book. This is probably to encourage people to listen to its messages. Maybe God foresaw how unpopular the book of Revelation would be.

Thirdly, a blessing on those that keep the things that are written in the book. The word ‘keep’ means to continually or habitually keep. This calls for our investigation as to what things God commands us to habitually keep.

THE PERIOD TO WHICH REVELATION APPLIES

“For the time is at hand.” Verse 3

This indicates that the book of Revelation at least applied 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, that it was for the time of pagan Rome and the fierce persecutions that were meted out to the church by the Roman Caesars. On the other hand there are some who claim that the book only applies to the last days of earth’s history and everything in it should be interpreted in the light of the last days.

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

“Write the things which thou hast seen [past tense] and the things which are [present tense] and the things which shall be hereafter” [future tense] Revelation 1:19

In fact, a close examination of the book, as will be shown in later chapters, applies the book to five different periods of time (*I*).

1. John’s day
2. To scenes in the past
3. To our day, the last days
4. To the close of the great controversy between good and evil
5. To the new earth and the joy and triumph of the saints.

SPECIAL NEED IN JOHN’S DAY

In John’s day there was a special need for the messages of that time. John was the only apostle still living - all the others had been martyred. The church of God was in great peril. There was need for special counsel, guidance and comfort.

“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 Patmos experiences into untold blessings for his people. Revelation was written first of all to the seven churches which were in Asia. [Verse 4] Asia refers to western Asia Minor, which was under a proconsul of Rome.

THE GODHEAD INTRODUCED

"Grace be to you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ." Verses 4, 5

The three members of the Godhead are featured

1. God the Father 'which is and which was and which is to come' the unchangeable one. 'I am the Lord, I change not'.
2. The Holy Spirit, likened to 'seven Spirits'. This refers to the seven qualities of the Holy Spirit as presented by Isaiah the prophet. (3)
3. Jesus Christ, who is given three titles:

"THE FAITHFUL WITNESS AND THE FIRST BEGOTTEN OF THE DEAD AND THE PRINCE OF THE KINGS OF THE EARTH." Verse 5

"The Faithful Witness". This refers first to Christ's ministry on earth and his earthly witness for his Father. This was a fulfillment of the messianic prediction.

"I have given him [Messiah] for a witness to the people" Isaiah 55:4 What a faithful witness was Jesus Christ to his heavenly Father.

In heaven above Jesus is still God's faithful witness. Upon his testimony concerning the Father, we can safely depend.

"THE FIRST BEGOTTEN OF THE DEAD" or "The firstborn from the dead"

The term "firstborn" may 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 importance. At least three New Testament people had risen from the dead before him, namely, 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 shall live also". [John 14:19] This fulfilled another messianic prediction.

"I will make him [Messiah] my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." Psalm 87:29

JESUS IS "PRINCE OF THE KINGS OF THE EARTH."

Originally, Adam was the prince or ruler of this earth but he lost it to Lucifer. Jesus in his mission to earth won back this world at Calvary.

"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests of God his Father to him be glory and dominion forever and ever Amen." Revelation 1:5, 6

CHRIST'S LOVE IS ETERNAL

“Unto him that loved [or loves] us”

Though Jesus Christ is at the centre of the universe, amid millions of sinless adoring beings, his love for man continues. There is no diminution. As the gospel song says, ‘O love of God, how strong and true, eternal, and yet ever new. Uncomprehended and unbrought, 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 wash you not 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

All other blood defiles, but the blood of Jesus alone washes away our sin. Jesus’ sacrifice is the greatest demonstration of his love for men. ‘Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.’ [John 15:23] So great was Jesus’ love for mankind that he laid down his life for his enemies - for those who hated and crucified him.

WE ARE MADE SPIRITUAL PRIESTS

The word ‘washing’ is borrowed from the service of the Old Testament priesthood. Before entering the sanctuary to perform their service, the priests washed in the laver in the courtyard. So with believers; before they are initiated into the spiritual priesthood of believers, they must be washed in the blood of the Lamb. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the WASHING OF REGENERATION and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Titus 3:5

“And has made us kings and priests unto God and [or even] his Father,” Verse 6

Jesus is the literal priest to God in the heavenly temple. Believers are spiritual priests to God in the spiritual temple on earth. The Greek renders it ‘a kingdom of priests’ reminding us of Israel under the old covenant; ‘you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ [Exodus 19:6]

God’s original plan for ancient Israel, was for them to take the knowledge of the true God to the nations, but they failed. God’s final plan in taking the truth to the nations, is by choosing believers from all nations - the Christian church - and making of them a spiritual kingdom of priests to fulfill his mission.

“But you [Christians] are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that you should show forth the praises of him who bath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2:9

Believers, as spiritual priests, are to intercede for men. They also [like priests of old] are to teach men. “Go you and teach all nations” and like the priests of old, they are to offer sacrifices on behalf of mankind. But their sacrifices are spiritual sacrifices.

“Ye also as lively [or living] stones are built up a spiritual house, an 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 forever” Verse 6

In the first seven chapters of Revelation there are four doxologies, each one is stronger than the preceding one. This doxology is two-fold. In 4:9-11 the doxology is three-fold, in 5:13 it is four-fold, and the doxology of 7:12 is seven-fold. How deserving is Jesus to receive glory and dominion? He has won back the lost kingdom of this world. To accomplish it, he gave up his glory, even at the risk of losing it forever. He gave up his dominion; he left heaven, he became a man, he lived a life of poverty. He was a servant and

he died, even the death of the cross. He ran the risk of failure and eternal loss, but he conquered and so glory and dominion are rightfully his. How we should praise him!

THE KEYNOTE OF THE BOOK

“Behold he comes in the clouds and all eyes shall see Him.” Verse 7

The first chapter of Revelation emphasizes the Second Advent of Christ and the last chapter emphasizes the same. “Behold I come quickly” “Even so, come Lord Jesus” Revelation 22:12, 22. Almost every line of prophecy in the book concludes with the Second Advent, such as the seven churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the three angels’ messages, the seven last plagues and so on. One 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.” (4)

SIGNIFICANCE OF CLOUDS

“Behold he cometh with clouds”

This accords with the angelic promise at Jesus’ ascension. “This same Jesus will come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven.” “A cloud received him out of their sight” Acts 1:9, 11. 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 it represents obscurity. The term “clouds” is culled from Daniel 7:13, a messianic prediction.

“I saw in the night visions and behold one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of days and they [the clouds] brought him [the Son] near before him.” Daniel 7:13
The clouds, it is clear, 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 did fly” Psalm 18:10

“The chariots of God are thousands of angels, the Lord is among them.” Psalm 68:17

Multiplied millions of angels accompany Christ at the Second Advent. “All the holy angels with him” [Matthew 25:31]. In the distance they appear like a vast cloud because of their glory.

“Every eye shall see him”

This denotes the universal extent of the Second Advent. Some believe that this means every spiritual eye, that only God’s people behold Christ. The text says, “All kingdoms shall wail because of him” indicating that all on earth are aware of Christ’s approach to the earth. But how will every eye see him? Is this not a physical impossibility? Those on the other side of the world could not possibly see him, it is said.

Does every eye see the sun? Yes, but not at the same time; so with the population of the world. Every eye sees Christ, but not 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 destroys the secret rapture theory which holds that only the saved are raptured at the Advent, that Christ comes secretly and silently and snatches away the righteous - that the unsaved do not witness the Advent. However, so involved are the unsaved in the Second Advent that even some of the unsaved dead are affected.

A SPECIAL RESURRECTION

“Every eye shall see him and they also that pierced [or crucified] him”

How will they behold Jesus at the Second Advent when they have been dead for just under 2,000 years? This demands a resurrection.

Jesus warned the Jewish leaders who condemned him, that one day, they also would behold his return.

“But Jesus held his peace and the high priest answered and said to him, I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said to him, ‘Thou hast said; nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall you see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.’ Matthew 26:63, 64

Do other scripture confirm that there will be a resurrection prior to the Second Advent in which the Jewish leaders could be raised up?

Yes! During the time of trouble immediately preceding the Second Advent.

“At that time shall Michael stand up [or reign] the great prince which stands for the children of thy people and there shall be a time of trouble such as there never was since there was a nation even to that same time, and at that time thy people shall be delivered every name that shall be found written in the book.. .and many of them that 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 is called by some, “the partial resurrection”. There will be some righteous and some wicked involved. Undoubtedly the Roman soldiers that pierced Jesus, and the chief priests, will then be raised from death in order to behold his return. What a contrast this will be, compared with the trial of Jesus. Now the tables will be turned. What a terrifying experience. Those who condemned him so unjustly to the cruelest of deaths, now see him returning as King of kings. The one whom they mocked in his agonies, whom they taunted to come down from the cross if he were really the Messiah, who even at his resurrection spread the lying rumor that his body was stolen by his disciples - they now behold him returning in power and glory, as he predicted at the hour of his trial. Here we see the justice of God displayed. Men may appear to succeed in defying God but finally the warning will be fulfilled, “Vengeance is mine, said the Lord, I will repay.”

WORLD MOURNS IN REMORSE

“All kingdoms of the earth shall wail because of him.”

Why do all kingdoms of the earth wail? Because they know it is doomsday. How do they know?

1. Because 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, but unfortunately the majority will reject it.

2. Amid the cataclysmic events, there appears a dramatic sign in the eastern heavens -

“The powers of heaven shall be shaken and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man and then will all the tribes of the earth mourn and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven.” Matthew 24:29, 30

The shaking of the powers of heaven is described by John -

“The heaven [atmospheric heaven] departed as a scroll when it is rolled together.” Revelation 6:14

At the Second Advent the cloudy atmosphere rolls away, enabling the inhabitants of earth to see into the distant heavens and thus they see Jesus coming with the host of heaven. They appear first, as a small dark cloud in the distance, and this is called, “the sign of the Son of man”. This small cloud must be so unusual, so dramatic that all the world will know what it means. The very event they rejected and ridiculed when it was proclaimed, now in its awful grandeur is taking place. Imagine the remorse and regret of the inhabitants of the world. No wonder, “all kingdoms of the earth shall wail or howl, because of him”. How important to heed the warning of Jesus, “Watch therefore and be you ready for in an hour that you think not, the Son of man cometh” [Matthew 24:34]

THE ALPHA AND OMEGA

“I am Alpha and Omega. The beginning and the end, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty.” Verse 8

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and denote, “all embracing.” “all comprehending”, the self-existent one. The term is used three times in Revelation and it here applies to God, the Father “the Almighty”. “Almighty” is used nine times in Revelation and always applies to the Father, denoting his omnipotence. Some hold that this applies to Christ. It is 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. He is even addressed as “the everlasting Father” [Isaiah 9:6]

JOHN IDENTIFIES HIMSELF

“I John who also am your brother and companion in tribulation in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Verse 9

John gives himself three designations -

1. “Your brother” Though 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” etc., but “brother” in response to the instruction of Jesus, “All you are brethren”. There is no class distinction with Christ.
2. “Your companion in tribulation!” Persecution was afflicting the church and John had many fellow sufferers but he was one with them in their afflictions.
3. “In the kingdom and patience of Jesus” i.e. remaining patient in Jesus in the present kingdom of grace. When we abide in Christ, enabling power is given, to patiently endure. We must “through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God”. [Acts 14:22]

ISLE OF PATMOS

“In the isle called Patmos”

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

“For the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

He was punished on account of the word of God. Notice 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. Why was John in Patmos for the word of God?

BACKGROUND OF JOHN'S IMPRISONMENT

“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 had never relaxed its efforts and at last succeeded in enlisting the power of the Roman Emperor against the Christians.

In the terrible persecution that followed, the apostle John did much to confirm and strengthen the faith of the believers. He bore a testimony which his adversaries could not controvert and which helped his brethren to meet with courage and loyalty the trials that came upon them. When the faith of the Christians would seem to waver under the fierce opposition they were forced to meet, the old, tried servant of Jesus would speak with power and eloquence, the story of the crucified and risen Savior. He steadfastly maintained his faith, and from his lips came ever the same glad 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, of the Word of life that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you’. [1 John 1:1-3]

John lived to be very old. He witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the ruin of the stately temple. The last survivor of the disciples who had been intimately connected with the Savior, his message had great influence in setting forth the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world. No one could doubt his sincerity and through his teachings many were led to turn from unbelief.

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

John was accordingly summoned to Rome to be tried for his faith. Here before the authorities, the apostle's doctrines were misstated. False witnesses accused him of teaching seditious heresies. By these accusations his enemies hoped to bring about the disciple's death. John answered for himself in a clear and convincing manner, and with such simplicity and candor that his words had a powerful effect. His hearers were astonished at his wisdom and eloquence. But the more convincing his testimony, the deeper was the hatred of his opponents, the emperor Domitian was filled with rage. He could neither dispute the reasoning of Christ's faithful advocate or match the power that attended his utterance of truth; yet he determined he would silence his voice.

John was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil; but the Lord preserved the life of his faithful servant, even as he preserved the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace. As the words 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 honored 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’.

These words had their influence and John was removed from the cauldron by the very men who had cast him in. Again the hand of persecution fell heavily upon the apostle. By the emperor's decree 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 no longer be felt and he must finally die of hardship and distress.” (5)

John proclaimed Jesus Christ as the God-man. His message collided with Domitian the Roman emperor who proclaimed himself the man-god. Under Domitian, emperor worship for the first time, became an issue for the Christians. This was particularly so in the province of Asia, where John's letters were directed and where John had resided and labored. (6)

PATMOS VISIONS GIVEN ON THE SABBATH

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” Verse 10.

This means that John was in vision. “The Lord’s day” In the Greek it is rendered “the Lord’s”. The word “day” is taken for granted but it is not in the original. This is one of the few-verses in the New Testament used as authority for Sunday observance, but the text gives no clue as to which day is the Lord’s day. To discover which day, it is essential that we examine other scriptures. What Lord was John alluding to? Was it the Roman emperor who was proclaimed Lord at that time? No! Was it the Sun god who also was addressed as lord and had Sunday dedicated to him? It was Jesus Christ – “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” [Ephesians 4:5] Which day is Christ’s day? Which day does Jesus Christ declare he is Lord of? At least eight different scriptures give the answer. The seventh day Sabbath is the Lord’s day. Two verses from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament serve as samples of this truth.

“The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God” Exod.20:10 “The Sabbath-the holy of the Lord” Isaiah 58:13 “The son of man [Christ] is Lord of the Sabbath” Mark 2:28 “The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day” Matthew 12:8

Never does scripture hint that Jesus Christ is Lord of any other day. On the contrary, history clearly reveals that the title of “Lord’s day” for Sunday originated with Sun worship. This was in opposition to the Bible Lord’s Day which was the Sabbath of the fourth commandment.

“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.” (7)

“As a solar festival, Sunday was the sacred day of Mithra; and it is interesting to notice that since Mithra was addressed as Domirinus, ‘Lord’ Sunday must have been ‘the Lord’s day’ long before the Christian times.” (8)

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” (9)

ANOTHER KEY IN UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK

It has been suggested that just as John was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day in receiving the visions of Revelation, so the believer likewise in rightly understanding Revelation must also possess the spirit of truth on the Lord’s Day. In other words, if we do not recognize the significance of the true Sabbath, we will fail to discern the import of certain issues in the great controversy which is the theme of the book.

MEANING OF ALPHA AND OMEGA

“And heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet saying, I am Alpha and Omega the first and the last.”
Verses 10-11.

What is the significance of “Alpha and Omega”? These first and last letters of the Greek alphabet correspond with the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet which are Aleph and Tau. The book of Revelation is based on the Old Testament and the two Hebrew letters Aleph and Tau were associated with the high priest of the Old Testament temple.

In this first chapter of Revelation Jesus is also presented as a priest in the heavenly temple and the Aleph and Tau are connected with him. On the breastplate of the high priest of the Old Testament were two stones, these were called the Urim and the Thummin. The Urim commenced with the letter Aleph and the Thummin commenced with the letter Tau. The purpose of these two stones was to reveal the will of God.

When it was essential to know God's will, the high priest consulted the Lord. If God responded, a bright light for yes, on Aleph, would appear. If the answer was no, a cloud would appear on the stone named Tau. The Aleph and Tau or Alpha and Omega were the medium by which the Father revealed his will to man.

Where is God's medium of revelation in the New Testament? The answer is, Jesus Christ, the "one mediator between God and man".

This is why he is called "the Alpha and Omega" - he is the Revelator.

"The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." John 1:18.

"Neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever he will reveal him." Matthew 11:27.

REASON FOR SEVEN CHURCHES

"What thou sees, write in a book and send it to the seven churches in Asia." Verse 11.

Why seven churches? It has been understood by numerous godly scholars of yesteryear that the names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian era. The number seven indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages extend to the end of time, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world.

According to Dr. L.F. Froom in his "Prophetic Faith of our Fathers", over 44 scholars of yester year agree that the seven churches represent the Christian church from the First to the Second Advent of Christ.

A SANCTUARY SCENE

"I turned to see the voice that spoke with me and I saw seven golden candlesticks." V12.

These seven candlesticks or lamp stands were situated originally in the holy place of the Jewish temple. The fact that they are featured in this chapter indicates that we have before us a scene in the heavenly sanctuary above. Revelation consists mostly of a series of sanctuary scenes and in order to understand the book aright it is essential to understand the truth of the heavenly sanctuary for this is one of the main keys in understanding this remarkable book.

SIGNIFICANCE OF "SON OF MAN"

"And in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of man." Verse 13.

Though Jesus Christ is God the Son, enthroned in his glorified state, yet he still refers to Himself as "the Son of man". Jesus is still linked with the human family, he is our elder brother, forever limited by human flesh. What a comfort this is to His people amid their conflicts on earth. The one above who represents us is "the man Christ Jesus", possessing the same nature, who met the same temptations and therefore is an understanding and sympathetic high priest.

He is "amid the candlesticks". The candlesticks represent the seven churches, (Verse 20) i.e. the church of God on earth, thus Jesus is pictured amid his people, "Lo I am with you always".

EIGHT-FOLD PICTURE OF RESURRECTED CHRIST

In Verses 13-16 is a description of the glorified Christ. Eight points are presented and eight in scripture is a number frequently associated with resurrection and regeneration.

1. "Clothed with a garment down to the foot and girt about the chest with a golden girdle." Verse 13. This represents kingly and priestly dignity, and applies to Jesus as king-priest of the order of Melchizadek, the priest-king of ancient Salem. "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizadek." (Hebrews 5:6)
2. "His head and his hairs were white like wool, white as snow." Verse 14. This does not indicate decay or senility but the venerable sign of knowledge, mature judgment and solid wisdom.
3. "His eyes were as a flame of fire." Verse 14. He sees the good and the evil to which he is utterly opposed and aims to consume.
4. "And his feet like unto fine brass as if they burned in a furnace." Verse 15. This suggests treading down in destruction all who choose sin. (See appendix)
5. "His voice as the sound of many waters." Verse 15, This denotes his majesty, power and authority as Creator.
6. "Out of his mouth went a sharp, two edged sword." Verse 16. This represents the power of Christ's word especially in the execution of judgment.
7. "His countenance was as the sun shines in his strength." Verse 16. This signifies his holiness and divinity. "Dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto." (1 Timothy 6:16) It is reminiscent of Moses who after forty days in God's presence on Mount Sinai, his face shone so brightly that he was compelled to put a veil over it, that the people might see his face, (Exodus 34:28-35) So Jesus, in the fullness of his divinity in his glorified state, his countenance "was as the sun".
8. "In his right hand seven stars." Verse 16. The right hand denotes power, authority and protection. The fact that the stars are in his right hand denotes a close and protective relationship between Christ and his faithful servants.

There are ten parallels between this passage (Revelation 1:13-17) and that of Daniel 10:5-12. Daniel 10 brings to view, a certain man, who reveals to Daniel the coming king of the north. This man is none other than the Son of God.

"When I saw him I fell at his feet as dead." Verse 17.

This is similar to the experience of Daniel when Christ appeared to him. He lost his natural strength and was then given supernatural power.

SIGNIFICANCE OF "FIRST AND THE LAST"

"He laid his right hand upon me saying to me, Fear not, I am the first and the last, I am he that lives that was dead and behold I am alive forever more. Amen. And have the keys of hell and of death." Revelation 1:17-18.

This expression "the first and the last" is drawn from the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament where it is used three times, the same as it is in Revelation.

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

"I am the first and last and beside me there is no God." Isaiah 44:6

"I am he, I am the first, I also am the last." Isaiah 48:12

What is the significance of this term? It was expressly used by God to encourage and comfort Israel in the time of Isaiah. The prophet was shown that Babylon would become a threat to Israel. In Isaiah 39:1-2 is

recorded the visit of the Babylonians to Jerusalem to enquire of Hezekiah's healing. Overcome by the occasion Hezekiah revealed everything he possessed to the Babylonians. Isaiah warned (Verses 3-7) that the Babylonians would return and invade Judah and take everything away. Already Hezekiah had experienced a tremendous invasion of the Assyrians from whom he had been miraculously delivered. (Isaiah 36-37) In chapters 42-45 the prophet declared that though Babylon would conquer the Jews yet God would finally overthrow Babylon. (Isaiah 43:14; 44:26-28)

In the midst of this message of deliverance, God addresses himself as "the first and the last". The term denotes that in the great controversy between Babylon and Jerusalem, between Christ and Satan, God would be first on the field of conflict and also last on the field of conflict. In other words, he will be completely victorious over his enemies and will destroy them. This same message is brought into the book of Revelation. The great controversy between good and evil is the theme throughout the book; the conflict between the church and her enemies. This should, be paramount in every prophetic outline in regard to its interpretation. Thus in the introduction of Revelation, this is a most fitting and powerfully appropriate symbol. Jesus declares himself as victor over the enemies of the people. He is the first on the battlefield - he is fully prepared, he is never taken by surprise, every provision has been made. And he is the last on the battlefield, meaning that the enemy has either been put to flight or destroyed. Jesus is, and will be victorious - the saints will triumph, the powers of evil will go down, Jesus is "the first and the last".

TWO LAWS OF INTERPRETATION

This passage in Revelation one, brings to view certain laws of bible interpretation. There are a number of these laws, one of them being "the law of repetition and enlargement". Another is the law of "the first and the last".

In the first chapter of Revelation these two laws are displayed in the portrayal of Jesus as deliverer and destroyer. (Revelation 1:5-6) It is couched in a form called an "epanados" (*10*) 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 as the second last scripture. The third scripture is from the same as the third last scripture, and the fourth scripture is from the same as the fourth last scripture.

THE EPANADOS OF REVELATION 1:5-16

1. Revelation 1:5 'Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness.'

Isaiah 55:4 'I have given him (Messiah) as a witness to the people.'

2. Revelation 1:7 'Behold he cometh with clouds.'

Daniel 7:13 'One like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven.'

3. Revelation 1:7 'Every eye shall see him and they also that pierced him.'

Zechariah 12:10 'They shall look upon me whom they have pierced.'

4. Revelation 1:8 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.'

Isaiah 44:6 'I am the first and I am the last and beside me there is no God.'

4. Revelation 1:11 'I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last'

Isaiah 48:12 'I am the first, I also am the last.'

3. Revelation 1:12 'I saw seven golden candlesticks.'

Zechariah 4:2 'A candlestick all of gold and his seven lamps thereon.'

2. Revelation 1:13 'One like the Son of man.'

Revelation 1:14 'His head and hairs were white like wool.' 'his eyes were as a flame of fire.'

Revelation 1:15 'His feet like fine brass.'

'His voice as the sound of many waters.' 'His countenance was as the sun.'

“His voice as the voice of a great multitude.’ ‘his face as the appearance of lightning.

Daniel 7:13 ‘One like the Son of man.’

Daniel 7:9 ‘The hair of his head like pure wool.’

Daniel 10:6 ‘His eyes as lamps fire. ‘his feet like polished brass.’

1. Revelation 1:16 ‘Out of his mouth went a sharp two edged sword.’

Isaiah 49:2 ‘He has made my mouth like a sharp sword.’

JESUS THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL LIFE

“I am he that lives and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore.” Verses 17-18.

The Greek renders it “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 denotes “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 lights every man that comes into the world.” John 1:19.

“As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.” John 5:26.

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.” (*II*) “I became dead and I am alive forever more.” (Greek)

What a world of experience is packed into this verse. It involves the agonies of Gethsemane and Calvary, his glorious resurrection and his ascension.

HOW CHRIST GAINED THE KEYS OF DEATH

“And have the keys of hell and of death.” Verse 18

Keys represent authority and power, and this tells us that Jesus has authority over death and the grave. In what way? The grave in scripture is likened to a prison - the prison house of Satan. Satan is the author of death.

“Him that had the power (or dominion) of death, that is the devil.” Hebrews 2:14.

The grave is a symbol of Satan’s arsenal or stronghold.

“On this rock will I build my church and the GATES OF HELL shall not prevail against it.” (the church) Matthew 16:18.

The gates of hell represent the arsenal of Satan. He 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 arsenal or stronghold of Satan and grasp the keys.

“When a strong man armed keeps his palace, his goods are in peace: but when one stronger than he, shall come upon him, and overcome him, he takes from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divides his spoils.” Luke 11:21-22.

Jesus by death, entered 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) In this experience we have a dramatic episode in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. 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. The angelic powers of darkness were undoubtedly present. Had it been possible, the prince of darkness with his hosts would have kept forever sealed, the tomb that held the Son of God. *(12)*

IN THE RESURRECTION JESUS DISPLAYED HIS DEITY

It was in the tomb, the prison house of Satan, that Jesus displayed his supremacy. On Calvary Jesus displayed the love of God and how marvelous it was. In the tomb, he displays the omnipotence of God.

“Having spoiled principalities and powers (of Satan) he made a show of them openly, 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.” *(13)*

“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.” *(14)*

JESUS’ DEITY WAS DORMANT UNTIL HIS RESURRECTION

In his earthly ministry prior to his resurrection, the creative power of Jesus, his deity, was dormant within him. The miracles he performed were performed by the power of the Father.

“The Father that dwells in me, he doeth the works.” John 14:10.

Undoubtedly heavenly angels played a part in the miracles of Christ. Jesus was not permitted to use his own divine power. That would have given him advantages over his fellowman, before whom he was the great exemplar, Jesus was totally dependent upon his Father.

In his earthly ministry his deity or divinity was quiescent. Otherwise he could never have experienced life like we do upon the earth. 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.

JESUS RAISED HIMSELF FROM DEATH

In his resurrection Jesus raised himself from the dead. He raised his humanity from death by his divinity.

“I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man 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.

DEITY CANNOT DIE

This means that the divinity of Jesus did not die. He was the God Man. His deity could not die because that is impossible. His humanity died. One of the attributes of deity is immortality or deathlessness.

“Now unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God.” I Timothy 1:17.

God is immortal. “Which in his time shall show who is king of kings. Who only (or alone) has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto.” 1 Timothy 6:14-16.

“As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given it to the Son, to have life in himself.” John 5:26.

“As the Father raises up the dead and quickens them; even so the Son quickens (makes alive) whom he will.” John 5:21.

Just as “it is impossible for God to lie”, so it is impossible for God to die. If God died, then he is not immortal and therefore not God at all.

(See Psalm 91:2; Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 40:28; Romans 1:17.) The divinity of Jesus did not die, otherwise it would not have been divinity. On that Sunday morning when the mighty angel flashed from heaven and rolled the stone away, we believe that he flashed a signal to the Son of God. At that signal, the deity of Jesus sprang into action and brought back from death his humanity. What a display of power: Thus Jesus Christ declared with great power that he was the Son of God, or God the Son. He entered the stronghold of Satan, captured his armor, grasped the keys of hell and death and broke forever Satan’s power.

What a fitting introduction in the opening chapter of Revelation, the prelude to the book that foretells the life and death struggles of believers in Christ. The One in charge, the one who leads the church, the Director, is he who has broken the power of death and the grave. What a comfort to the millions of martyrs who are revealed, sacrificing themselves to death for Jesus Christ.

REVELATION CONCERNS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

“Write the things which thou hast seen and the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter.”
Verse 19.

This informs us of the period, to which Revelation applies. There are three tenses. The past, the present and the future.

“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.” (16)

“The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven candlesticks which you saw are the seven churches.” Verse 20.

SEVEN STARS ARE TRUE SERVANTS OF GOD

The word “angels” in the Greek is “messenger”. The stars are the messengers of the churches. What do stars represent? The clue is found in the book of Daniel

“The Lord will come down and tread upon the high places of earth. For the transgression of Jacob is all this and for sins of the house of Israel.” Micah 1:3-5.

“And they that be wise [Margin: teachers] shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.” Daniel 12:3

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

This then is the opening chapter of Revelation. It introduces us to the great lines of prophecy that commence in chapter 2 and continue to the end of the book.

APPENDIX

"FEET AS BRASS" His "feet as fine brass, as if they had burned in a furnace". (Revelation 1:15) This represents treading down in judgment or punishment.

"God came from Town [or Edom] and the Holy One from Mt. Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light, he had horns coming out of his hand and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood and measured the earth: he beheld and drove asunder the nations." Habakkuk 3:3-6

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

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