

Revelation Chapter 1

An Interpretation

Charles Dailey © 2015

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Introduction:

1. Revelation is the Bible Book of mystery for most of the church today.
2. There are a number of systems for understanding this great book and we will look at those when we get to the prophetic portion of Revelation.
3. The date of writing makes a difference in how we today understand the book. We take the writing to be about A.D. 96, although there are people who argue for a date prior to A.D. 70.

a) Lumby:

The language of Irenaeus is very express, that "the Revelation was seen no long time since, but almost in our own generation, towards the end of the reign of Domitian" (A.D. 96); and Eusebius (church historian) quotes the same writer as saying, "As it is reported, John, at once Apostle and Evangelist, while still continuing in life, was condemned to dwell in the island of Patmos, on account of the testimony which he bore to the Divine Word." To this statement, Eusebius adds that, "after Domitian's death, the Apostle, coming back from his exile in the island, resumed his residence at Ephesus." This is the prevailing opinion of antiquity, and thus it has been inferred that the Apocalypse was written either in Patmos, or after the return to Ephesus, and hence that its date must be fixed after A.D. 96. — Joseph Rawson Lumby in *A Popular Introduction to the New Testament*.

b) Hinds:

Irenaeus was an intimate associate of Polycarp, who died in A.D. 155. He was contemporary with the apostle John for more than thirty years. There is little chance for Polycarp not to have known the true date, or for Irenaeus to have misrepresented his information. The testimony of Irenaeus is of the highest class. John T. Hinds in *A Commentary on The Book of Revelation* published by The Gospel Advocate Company.

- c) Paul wrote the Ephesian letter about A.D. 60. Revelation includes a short letter to the same congregation and it had deteriorated seriously since A.D. 60. If Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, it would have had to be written by A.D. 67 or 68. (Nero

died in 68) The church had certainly gone downhill suddenly in seven years if we accept the early date.

- d) Nearly every book of the New Testament quotes from the Old Testament books. Several of the New Testament writers allude to other writers or their own earlier writings. Peter refers to Paul's writings. Peter refers to his earlier letter. Paul quotes from Luke. John shows that he has read Matthew. Jude shows that he knew about Peter.

If Revelation was written by A. D. 68, it would have been in circulation shortly after that. But it is not quoted or alluded to in any way, even though the Lord himself was the author. This lack of reference is much more consistent with an A.D. 96 date, making it the last of the canonical books.

- e) The expression, "The Lord's day," does not occur in the earlier apostolic-age writings. They always speak of the "First Day of the week" instead. The term used in A. D. 68 was "the First Day of the week," but the writers of the second century from the beginning use "the Lord's Day." This term, then, points to a period near the beginning of the second century as the date of Revelation.
4. A common outcome of holding to an early date of writing of Revelation is that the student sees in Revelation the destruction of Jerusalem and the completion of the prophecies of the book. This would mean that the message through Jesus concerned a city that few of the readers had ever seen or would see. They lived in Asia Minor did not have connections to Jerusalem.

Discussion: What are some of the difficulties in understanding Revelation to be about the literal city of Jerusalem?

5. The oppressor of the Faith is different, depending on the early date or the late one. In the years covered by the Book of Acts, the oppressor is Judaism and the Roman government is neutral. During the years following Paul's release in Rome, the Roman government became an oppressor also.
6. John draws heavily on the Old Testament symbols, but does not directly quote it. Where translators have used capital letters, they see allusions, but not exact quotations because there are none.
7. The war the devil began in Genesis ends with God winning in Revelation.

| Genesis | Revelation |
|---|---|
| Creation of Heaven & Earth | Creation of New Heavens & Earth |
| Man Removed from Paradise | Man regains Paradise |
| Beginning of Sin & Death | End of Sin and Death |
| Man Lost Access to the Tree of Life | Man Regains Access to the Tree of Life. |
| Old Serpent Threatened with Destruction | Old Serpent Cast into the Lake of Fire. |

— Chart by James E. Smith in *Behold* © 2008

(1) The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, (2) who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

- This book is a **Revelation**, not an encoding of secrets for the privileged few. So much of it can be understood.
- We are extending our system of connecting words from the Bible text to the comments of others using the blue lettering.
- **Davis:**

Ultimately this message comes from **God**, but notice the chain of **revelation** involved: **God** the Father gives **the revelation** to **Jesus** the Son, who passes it on to an **angel**, who delivers it **to John**, who communicates it to the churches (“his bond-servants”). **John** plays the role of a **bond-servant** prophet, who brings a **revelation** from **God** to others....

— Christopher Davis in the *College Press NIV Commentary Series*.

- **Davis:**
The book reveals what **God** says and what God does, but **Jesus** is the one through whom God speaks and through whom God carries out his will. **John** emphasizes this mediating role of **Jesus** throughout the book.
- Here **God** is writing about things **which must soon take place**. They **will** happen because **God** is in control of the affairs on earth. The book records a series of events and the starting time begins shortly.
- **Rotherham** translates clearly when he says in verse 1, **"and he shewed them by signs."** **Revelation** is a series of signs that **John saw** and describes to his readers.

(3) Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

- The special **blessing** is for those

"BLESSED IS THE ONE
WHO READS ALOUD
THE WORDS OF
THIS PROPHECY
AND BLESSED ARE
THOSE WHO HEAR..."
REVELATION 13

who **read**. But not everyone is functionally literate, so the **blessing** is extended to those who **hear**. God intends for His **word** to be read aloud in the assembly for all ears. See 1 Thessalonians 5:27.

- Beyond **hearing**, there are things, even in **prophecy**, to be **heeded**. Obedience is the goal, not merely **hearing**.
- **The time** was **near** for the events to begin. The beginning was not centuries in the future.
- The churches no longer had prophets among them, so they were on their own to understand the **signs**. We have a little advantage because many events have already happened.
- Why did God communicate using signs? A reason could be to keep the unfolding flow of history away from the oppressors. They would not be able to understand the symbols, but the believers will be able to see God's big plan for the rest of the ages.

Discussion: How can we elevate the amount of Bible reading in our church assemblies?

(4) John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,

- **John T. Hinds** notes there were **more than seven churches** in **Asia** at the time this was written. He suggests ". . . **the seven** would represent the whole church and the combined instruction be complete and applicable to all congregations for all time."
- Other congregations in the area included Colossae, Hierapolis and Miletus. The Muratorian Fragment (written about AD 170) says, "**John** in the Apocalypse, though he wrote to the **seven churches**, yet speaks to all."
- **Seven** denotes completeness. In modern parlance, "the whole ball of wax, the whole enchilada."
- **Grace** was a common greeting among Gentiles and **peace**, the still-common greeting among Jewish people.
- The present (**is**), past (**was**) and future (**is to come**) nature of God is mentioned as a reminder of God's power to do what He plans.
- **Davis:**
Here in Revelation 1:4 (and again in 3:1) John speaks of "**seven Spirits**" - that is, the **Spirit** of God in his fullness and completeness.

(5) and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of

the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood--



- Jesus is a **witness**, a person who speaks from first-hand knowledge. He is uniquely the person with first-hand knowledge about God.
Jesus is the **firstborn** from **the dead**, the first to come back permanently. This role was predicted for the Messiah in Psalm 89:27. Note its fulfillment in Colossians 1:18:
He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.
- The shortcut to being **ruler** of the world was offered by Satan during the first three temptations in Matthew 4:8, but Jesus refused. Now He rules over all who will acknowledge Him.
- Jesus **loves us**, present tense. It has not stopped. He shed his **blood** once to **release us from our sins**, but the love **continues**.

(6) and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- **Brink:**
And he made us to be a kingdom is further discussion of the good things Jesus did for us. He not only took us out of Satan's kingdom by his blood, (vs. 5) but he made us to be his own **kingdom**. Jesus and John the Baptist both preached that the **kingdom** of God was at hand (Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15). Paul taught that being in the church was to be a part of the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13). In harmony with this, John the apostle teaches that the seven churches of Asia are part of Christ's **kingdom**. This kingdom came into existence on Pentecost, 30 A.D., and will continue until Jesus comes again (I Corinthians 15:24).”

-Loren Brink in *Rethinking Revelation*.

- **To be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father** " It was God's intention that emerging Israel would be a kingdom made up of **priests** (Exodus 19:6), but they didn't want the role. Now the church is that **kingdom** of **priests**. This wonderful role of being a **kingdom** of **priests** caused John to ascribe **glory and the dominion** for eternal rule for Christ.

(7) BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

- The common understanding among commentators is that John brings up the second **coming** of Jesus. This is His coming in judgment. It will be a very public coming in that **every eye will see Him**. Because of their earlier rejection, men **everywhere will mourn**.
- An alternate view is that **coming with the clouds** harks back to Daniel 7:13 where the son of man came with the **clouds** of heaven. The other powers in Daniel 7 had come from the earth. When Jesus used this reference before the High Priest, the judge was so angry that he tore his clothes because he understood the claim of Jesus to be that One.
- Zechariah's prophecy is being fulfilled in Jesus:
"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn." Zechariah 12:10
- Jesus is being exalted in the house of David and in Jerusalem.

(8) "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

- The speaker changes unannounced. Now **God** is speaking directly through his prophet. Now the "A to Z" (English equivalent of Greek) speaks of His present, past and future.
- Using the words **Lord God** together is reminiscent of Ezekiel 6:3. He is more than a Mighty God, He **Almighty**.
- What are a few obscure believers in Asia Minor going to do against the might of Rome? Let the story unfold!



(9) I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

- While **John** was one of the 12, yet here he identifies with his readers as a family member and **partaker in tribulation**. John was not looking for a **great tribulation**. He and his friends were already in one.
- **Elliott:**

The apostle **John** wrote the book of Revelation some twenty-five years after the destruction of Jerusalem. At that time, he was in exile by order of Domitian, the Roman emperor. How did he view his situation?

John clearly said he was already in the **tribulation** and in the **kingdom!** As far as the apostle **John** was concerned, neither **the tribulation** nor the **kingdom** were two thousand years in the future. He was already in the kingdom. He was already in the tribulation. These introductory remarks of **John** certainly have a great bearing on the proper understanding of **tribulation** and **kingdom** in the entire book of Revelation.

- *Nobody Left Behind* by Vaughn Elliott, Page 68

- Looking for a future **kingdom** in Revelation when it was already open and occupied by believers creates an insurmountable hindrance to properly understanding the book.
- The relationship of being **in Jesus** is achieved by being baptized into Christ. Galatians 3:27.
- **Patmos** is pictured in this satellite photo. It looks like a dragon. This writer once landed at an airfield nearby on the Island of Chios (Acts 20:15) and boated to the Turkish mainland. **Patmos** could be seen in the distance.
- **John** wasn't on the island to evangelize it. The Roman government had put him there for punishment, so John was already a partaker **in the tribulation** that is connected with the **kingdom of God**. He handled it with patience.
- John **was on the island** because of the written **Word of God** (only this book was lacking) and the spoken **testimony** about **Jesus** that his Spirit-empowered memory could still recall after 66 years. John 14:26.
- The imprisonment of Paul led to the writing of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Likewise, the banishment of **John** from Ephesus led to the writing of Revelation.



Discussion: How can we use a physical restraining time such as Paul and John experienced to further God's work?

(10) I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind

me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, (11) saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

- Being **in the Spirit**, his main focus was not washing his clothes or fishing for his next meal. He was focused on God. His vocabulary helped. He called it the **Lord's Day** and so the Lord was the main focus of the day. Saints today do well to replace talk about Sunday with talk about the **Lord's Day**.
- Historically, the term **Lord's Day** was the first day of the week. Here are two writer who lived in that time:
 - "If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death--whom some deny, by which mystery we have obtained . . ." — *The Epistle of Ignatius* (30-107 AD) to the Magnesians, Chapter 9, Page 62, Volume 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, *Eerdmans Publishing Company*, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
 - "But every Lord's day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord: In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, saith the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations." — *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (120-190 AD), Chapter 14, Page 381, Volume 7, The Ante-Nicene Fathers.
- In God's communication with Moses in Exodus 19:16-19, the voice was like a **trumpet** also.
- The **book** (scroll) would be mainly signs, visions that John saw. He was to convert mental pictures into words and send the **book** to these **seven churches**. Since there was one book and seven churches (at least), it is probable that the entire **book** was read aloud (and perhaps copied) at each stop. Ephesus and Laodicea had received letters from Paul.
- Note that the listing of the churches follows the natural order for traveling from church to church. See the map.



(12) Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; (13) and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.

- Seeing the **voice** is a figure of speech. He saw the speaker. The picture reminds us of the **lampstand** in the tabernacle of Moses.
- Jesus frequently spoke of himself as the **Son of Man**, tying himself with the prophecy of Daniel 7:13 -14 where the Messiah is in view. It is thrilling to read.
- The garment down to the foot was worn by the **High Priest**. Jewish historian Josephus says, "This vestment reaches down to the feet, and sits close to the body." *Antiquities* 3.7:2. **Girded across His chest** speaks of a **King**. He is in the process of revealing, so he is also a **Prophet**.
- **Barclay:**

Here is a tremendous picture. When we trace the origins of the thought of John, we see that by the very dress of the Risen Lord he is showing him to us in his threefold eternal office of Prophet, Priest and King, the one who brings the truth of God, the one who enables others to enter into the presence of God and the one to whom God has given the power and dominion for ever. — *Daily Bible Studies*

(14) His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. (15) His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

- John is reminded of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9 and chooses a description drawn from that word picture for the **hair**. The description of the **eyes** and **feet** utilizes Daniel 10:6.
- **Davis:**
By describing Jesus' "**head and hair**" as "**white like wool**" and "**white as snow,**" John communicates the fact that Jesus is "Ancient of Days," eternal and preexistent. He is "the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." He is God.
- John was alone, or nearly so. An extremely loud **voice** to him now was not a multitude of people as in Daniel, but the thunder of the sea close at hand. It was the loudest noise in his isolated world. The same figure was used when the Spirit of God returned to the temple in Ezekiel 43:2.

(16) In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

- John was seeing a symbol and not a reality because the Son of Man had **stars in His right hand**.
- The **two-edged sword** symbolized the Word of God and his appearance was as bright as the brightest **sun**.
- **Davis:**

These symbols together speak of an intensely bright light radiating from the Lord. The Greek term for such light is *doxa*, which is usually translated "glory." The term also carries connotations of "honor," for ancient peoples associated radiant light with honor. To illustrate, they placed many-pointed gold or silver crowns on the heads of kings. As the sun reflected off these crowns, it would create a "halo" of glory around the rulers' heads, signifying the honor associated with their position. -

(17) When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, (18) and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

- Like any God-fearing person would, John **fell** down and played corpse.
- It is comforting to be touched by one with greater power and John experienced both the touch and comforting words.
- Back in verse 8, it was God Almighty who was the first and the last. Now it is the Son of Man, showing their identity with each other. Jesus is fully deity, not just man.
- **Albert Barnes:**

This is stated to be one of the reasons why he should not fear - that he was eternal: "I always live - have lived through all the past, and will live through all which is to come - and therefore I can accomplish all my promises, and execute all my purposes."

- **B.W Johnson:**

Not only a victor over **death**, but the very gates of **death and Hades** are under his control. Hence he can deliver from the dead whom he will.

(19) "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. (20) "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

- John was blessed to be literate and to have a command of the Greek language that enabled him to describe what he would **see** and hear. He is to **write** what he did **see**, what he is seeing and what he will be seeing.
- John's unfolding will include **the things which will take place after these things**. His readers would not be able to clearly totally grasp this part of the writing.
- The **mystery** of the **lampstands** and **stars** has been quickly cleared up. They **are** the **churches** and the **angels** of the **churches**. Just as the **lampstand** in the Holy Place of the Temple was the only source of light, so the **churches** are the only source of true light in the world today. And Jesus is among the churches just as he had said, "I will be with you always...."
- Defining the **angels of the seven churches** is a challenge. Just as the word *apostle* is a broad word until it is limited by speaking of an apostle of Christ, so *angel* is broad in meaning until limited by **angel of the church**. Each **church** had some- one who was a leader and literate. They would be the pipe- line of Christ's communication to that congregation. W. E. Vine notes that the word evangelist consists of *eu* (well) and *angelos* (messenger). In English we see it as **evangelist**.

What can I say?

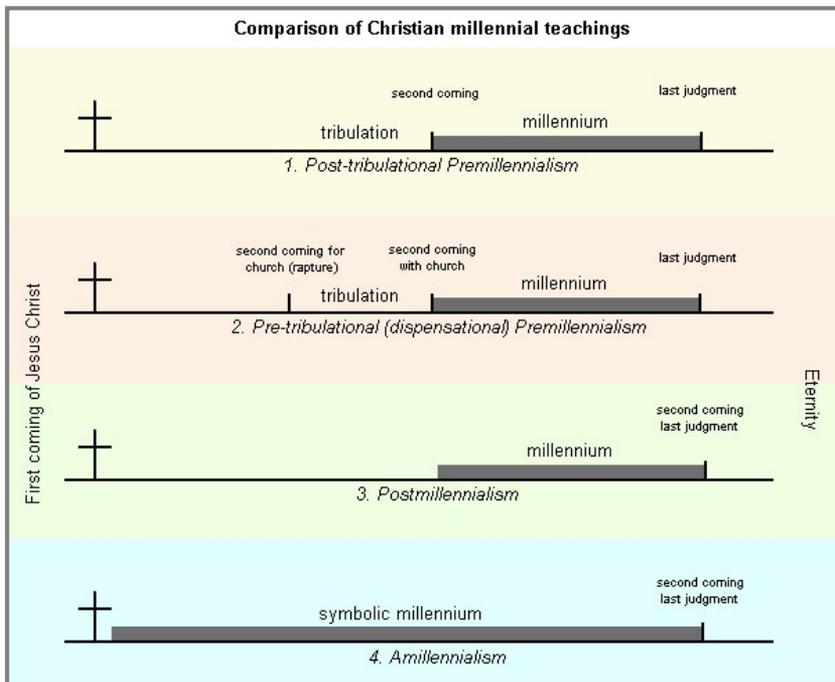
And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it.

1 Peter 3:15 New Living Translation

Questions by Charles Dailey

1. This entire study is based on the idea that the book was written about A.D. 96. (page 1)
 2. The ultimate author is God the Father. (3)
 3. There is no blessing from merely reading the text. (3)
 4. God may have communicated in signs to confuse the enemy. (4)
 5. Are there seven spirits or is this a number showing completeness? (4)
 6. The love of Jesus ended at the cross. (5)
 7. The banishment of John to Patmos led to the writing of the Book of Revelation. (7)
 8. The voice of God was very soft. (8)
 9. When John saw this appearance of Jesus, he was extremely afraid. (10)
 10. The English words *angel* and *evangelist* are related. (11)
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Where is our study headed?



This study will fit with view #4.

Revelation is a book of symbols and we do not take the 1,000 years (millennium) to be literal years. *Amillennialism* mean “no”