



AN INTRODUCTION TO

The

REVELATION

INTRODUCTION TO THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

This year we are starting a journey through the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the final book of the Bible. This journey into the Revelation will be a thorough look at God's intention in giving us this book of the Bible. When it comes to the New Testament, the Revelation is the fourth largest book, and it is the only book in the whole of the Bible that bears the name of the One we love.

Looking at this book can seem daunting, overwhelming, and downright confusing, but it does not have to be this way. Throughout Church history God's family has added a fair amount of extrabiblical conversation around this book that has not helped the situation. With all the conjecture, hypotheticals, and misplaced prophecies about Jesus' return, it has left many in the Church disinterested in The Revelation.

As we begin to study this book, I want to make sure that you are not approaching it like a crystal ball, or some earthly almanac simply forecasting the future, although it has much to say about both the past, the present and the future. We must remember that according to its title, it is The Revelation of Jesus Christ. Which means that our desire to read and understand it is about understanding Jesus, and growing both in His love for us, and our love for Him.

My challenge to you in the coming months of 2022 is that you would begin a daily reading of this book to become more acquainted with it and its structure. If you read the Revelation for three chapters a day, six days a week, and four chapters on the 7th day, you can read the Revelation once a week. But if that is too much, make it a goal to read it at least twice a month. If you add two chapters a day, six days a week of the Revelation to whatever else you are reading in the Bible, you will make it through the Revelation once every two weeks.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

The Revelation of Jesus Christ was written by John the Beloved, one of the 12 Apostles, also known as one of the Sons of Thunder (Mk. 3:17). John was one of the three closest Apostles to Jesus (Mt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-30). Although there is lots of discussion about the date of this book, it is best to see that it was written between 90-95 A.D. from the Isle of Patmos. It is important that we understand this commonly agreed upon date of 90-95 A.D. because some people want to date the book closer to 70 A.D. so they can say most of the Revelation has already been fulfilled with the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. But for many reasons this simply is not the case, namely that the earth hasn't seen a fully demonized man, causing the nations of the earth to worship him as God, like we see in Revelation 13.

Patmos, where John was when he received the Revelation, is a small, 13-square-mile island in Greece off the coast of the Aegean Sea and was used in ways similar to our modern-day Alcatraz: a prison of sorts. This island housed two types of criminals in two separate sections. One group, the most heinous of criminals, were locked up in a small area and

overseen by guards, while the other group, who were considered political dissenters, were left to roam the island. However, membership in either group was considered a death sentence. Either you were going to die under lock and key or die roaming the island trying to survive without any help, food, or shelter.

Although John was banished to this island, it is clear that his mind was in the Word of God. In the 404 verses of the Revelation, most commentators count around 250 direct allusions to the other sixty-five books of the Bible, but some as many as four hundred. This is astounding. And although John was 150 miles away from the churches that he had overseen for a couple of decades after Paul's death, it is clear that they were also in his heart. John's life was spent serving Jesus and His family, and imprisonment did not change how he felt.

John was a prisoner on this island, but he was by no means alone. John was cleaving to the Lord Jesus Christ, because though our bodies may be chained, our spirits are free to travel in the grace of God throughout God's great universe. Though imprisoned and separated, John knew the Lord was with him.

INTERPRETING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

When it comes to understanding both the Book of Revelation and the prophetic scriptures in general, we want to make sure that we are not approaching them only for charts, diagrams, and prognostications for the future. The intention of prophetic scripture is to be an eschatological (study of the end times) weight that sits heavy upon our shoulders. This weight allows the future to bear down upon the present, changing the way we live today in light of tomorrow.

It is not uncommon to hear various Christian leaders and laypersons alike speak about the prophetic scriptures as being bizarre, cumbersome, and difficult to understand. While I can empathize with their sentiment, I also do not agree with it. The difficult and bizarre part is what we have done with the prophetic scriptures, not the prophetic scriptures themselves. We must remember that God wrote the Bible with the peasant and uneducated in mind, not just the scholar and fulltime Bible teacher. Not to dismiss the great teachers that God has given to the Church throughout history: many have been an indispensable gift to us, but at the same time, we do not have to only look to them to understand the Bible.

At first glance I can understand the difficulty of making sense of the Revelation, but like anything, if we will spend some time praying, reading, and asking the Spirit (who also inspired the words and now lives in those who are born again) to help us, God will do it. My experience is that after reading the Revelation for a while, the book began to open up to me enough that I was able to start making some sense out of it. It was no longer strangely placed pieces that made no sense to the whole, but I saw it as a God-woven tapestry that told a story about the glory, grandeur, and greatness of God!

The reality is, all the Epistles (letters) of the New Testament are written from an eschatological vantage point. In fact, all the divine tributaries of the Bible, meaning all the books of the Bible, are flowing into one river that is making its way into the divine ocean of the Revelation. John does what no other author in the whole of the Bible is able to do: he takes the truth of the whole counsel of God and weaves it into one grand narrative. But remember, John was in the Spirit when he wrote these words, so we also must have the Spirit in order to understand what God has written.

Look at what Paul says in Ephesians 1:9-10:

"...having made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him (Jesus Christ)."

And then look at what John says in Revelation 11:15,

"Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying "The kingdoms of this world (natural) have become the Kingdom's of our Lord and of His Christ (spiritual), and He shall reign forever and ever."

The truth of what Paul says in Ephesians 1 is seen clearly by John in Revelation 11. It is a promise, and then a fulfillment of that promise.

This begs the question about how we should read the Revelation. Should we see it as symbolic, or literal, or a combination of both? When studying the Revelation, you will be hard-pressed to find theologians who see this book as only literal or only symbolic. I think a safe way to interpret the Revelation is to see it as mostly literal, with some symbolism. For example, the four horsemen of Revelation 6:1-8 are to be seen as symbolic, but the wars, pestilence, and famine that are mentioned, are to be seen as real.

I like to say that the Revelation says what it means and means what it says: which is how I read the whole of the Bible. For instance, when looking at the story of Jonah being swallowed by a fish, we would not want to first see that as an analogy for the resurrection of Jesus, and secondly as a real event. Now Jesus Himself uses Jonah's fish story to prophesy of His own death and resurrection (Matt. 12:40), which means that Jesus uses a real event, also as a symbolic event foreshadowing something that would happen in the future. To sum it up in Jonah's words, "the fish story means what it says, and says what it means." Regarding this point, one commentator said, "it has to be this way, otherwise every verse is simply a cloud floating in the air up for anyone's interpretation." What he means by this is that the Bible must first be grounded on a solid foundation, then, and only then can we examine it further to see if there's symbolism to be found.

Paul tells us in 1st Corinthians 15:44-46 as he speaks on the resurrected body that "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, the first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual."

Paul's point is that we should not approach any parts of the Bible first as symbolic (unless the verse clearly says it's symbolic), but as literal, and after we have done that, we can then look to see if there's symbolism to be found.

When it comes to the symbolism within the Book of Revelation most of it is not as confusing as you'd think at first glance. In fact, much of the symbolism in the Revelation is explained after it is mentioned. I have spent some time diagramming the symbolism in this book and most of the symbols that are given are explained, often in the same chapter they are given. Let me give you some examples:

1) In Revelation chapter 1, and verses 12 and 16 John says this: "When I turned I saw seven golden lamp stands...(and) He had in His right hand seven stars..." Then, just four verses later in Revelation 1:20 Jesus Himself says, "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lamp stands; the seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches and the seven lamp stands which you saw are the seven Churches." Jesus removes all the guess work and simply tells us, "Hey, John, those stars you saw in My hand, they are the angels of the seven Churches, and those lampstands you saw burning, those are the seven Churches, the seven locations I just mentioned previously in Revelation 1:11."

2) Again, in Revelation 4:5, John says, "...seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne..." But in the same verse, John tells us, "...of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." Now, it would be easy at this point to ask, "Does God have one Spirit, or seven Spirits?" Well, the answer is yes, and no. This is where we allow the whole of the Bible to help us interpret what is being said. In the book of Isaiah, in Isaiah 11:1-2 we learn about the seven-fold Spirit of God, or the seven manifestations of God's Spirit. It is one Spirit, with seven different manifestations (I will explain this further a few pages later).

3) Also in Revelation 5:6-8 John says, "... (there) stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes...(and they) fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense..." But in Revelation 5:6-8 it also says, "... which are the seven Spirits sent into all the earth...which are the prayers of the saints..." Again, we see two symbols mentioned (seven horns/seven eyes, and golden bowls full of incense) but we also get two quick explanations, given in the very verses the symbols are given (the seven Spirits of God, and the prayers of the saints).

4) For further study, if you would like to look them up, I have also listed a few other symbols and explanations mentioned:

- a. Revelation 3:1;
- b. Revelation 12:1;
- c. Revelation 13:1, 2, 8, 11;
- d. Revelation 16:13
- e. Revelation 17:1, 3.

Four Primary Views of The Revelation Throughout History

Throughout Church history there have been a myriad of ways people have viewed this book, but four primary views have remained common among the Church. These are four different perspectives that you can use when reading this book or approaching it. I will share each of them with some strengths and weaknesses, as well as which one I ascribe to and why.

1) The Idealist—The idealist views this book as a spiritual metaphor or allegory, and works to emphasize primarily, or in some cases, solely the spiritual elements of the Revelation. The idealist discourages anyone from firmly establishing any of the mysterious visions in the Revelation, asserting that it is impossible to know what they could mean. The idealist would say, “the words of the Revelation are symbolic and spiritual and are not to be taken literally.”

a. I can certainly understand this train of thought, because to take the events or the numbers in the Revelation as literal is terrifying. Because of this, it is easier to make many of them symbolic, figurative, or spiritual. The primary challenge with this type of thinking is that it is not how we approach the rest of the Bible. We do not assume the numbers Jesus gives us in the Gospels or in Acts 2 when 3,000 got saved were spiritual or figurative, but literal.

2) The Historicist—The historicist sees the Revelation and other end-time books as referring to history: completed events and historical people. They have worked to place the Revelation in various time-periods throughout history. This group often sees the seven Churches as seven different time-periods of Church history, and typically places us in the present somewhere in the Laodicean hour, assuming that the Church globally is lukewarm, and disconnected from Jesus.

a. Although there might be similarities between various parts of the prophetic scriptures, especially the Revelation, the challenge with this school of thought is that no two authors agree on any chapter of the Revelation being the same piece of human history. They tend to place parts of the Bible in various parts of history, unfortunately without any scriptural authority. We can do this where the Bible says it expressly, but if the Bible is silent on the matter, we have to be slow to draw these types of conclusions, even though things may seem to line up perfectly.

3) The Preterist—The word preterist means “fulfilled” or “completed”, which helps us to understand that a preterist view sees the prophetic scriptures as either fully fulfilled, or partially fulfilled. Typically, the preterists say the fulfillment of the book of Revelation took place between the 1st and 3rd century, sometimes in 70 A.D. with the destruction of the Temple. The preterist would say most of the Revelation is a historical explanation

and would care mostly about Revelation 20-22 as it relates to judgment and the final states of humanity.

a. No one can be a full preterist, because although some things have been fulfilled, many things have not yet. But one of the main challenges with this school of thought is that much of the Revelation and the prophetic scriptures center on the return of Christ, which has not happened yet. To assume that most of the Revelation has taken place leaves us unconcerned with a future anti-Christ, mounting global trouble, and the wave of deception that is en route and will soon engulf the earth. This leaves us vulnerable to be caught up in it. Out of all the views, I personally feel this is the most dangerous because it leaves us dis-interested in a growing future trouble. Some preterist's have been so turned off by negative pronouncements about the end-times, that they've created a version of eschatology that is overly positive, almost withholding anything negative.

4) The Futurist—The futurist believes that the book of Revelation contains some historical truths about past events, while at the same time giving us a forecast of universal history; where life is headed, for everyone, in every place. The futurist would see that Revelation 5-22 are a prophecy for events that have yet to happen.

a. I am personally a futurist, meaning that I think that the prophetic scriptures do not mainly speak to our past, or even our present, but to our future. In the same way that the prophetic scriptures spoke of Christ's first coming, I see that the prophetic scriptures speak also to His second coming, and the events that surround His return which largely have not happened yet.

b. In my opinion, this is the safest position to take up because it leaves us in the place of Anna and Simeon in Luke 2, who were waiting, looking, and anticipating the first coming of Christ. They took the promises of the Word of God to heart, and it caused them to live life differently, majoring on the promise of His coming. Because they had oriented their lives to look for Him, they were ready to see him when He came. We want to take the promises of God seriously and be found waiting, just like them. A futurist view places us in the tribe of those who are waiting, longing, and looking for His return.

To bring all this full circle, it is amazing to see the striking contrast between the opening chapters in Genesis and the closing chapters of the Revelation. Everything that finds its beginning in Genesis finds its fulfillment and fruition in the Revelation. These two books give us the link from creation, to redemption, to re-creation. What starts in seed form in Genesis ends in fullness in the Revelation.

In the first three chapters of Genesis, we see the creation of the sun, the entrance of sin into the world, the curse pronounced, Satan's seeming triumph, and the exclusion from the tree of life. But in the final three chapters of the Revelation, we see there is no more need for the sun, sin has been banished, there is no more curse, Satan is overthrown, and admission to the tree of life is granted. This is following the principle of first the literal, then the symbolic.

For this reason, we want to read the Revelation as a straightforward letter that John has left us. But in that straightforward letter there is also symbolism that we will need to take time to understand, some of which simply might not make sense until a later date in human history. I encourage you to approach the Revelation as a glorious book that God has given to you, to fill your heart and mind with wonder about the glory of Jesus, and the surety of His plan, regardless of what is happening around us or in the world. Give yourself to Jesus as you give yourself to this amazing book.

WHY STUDY THE REVELATION?

Over the past number of years, I have discovered that it is important to know the why behind the what. Essentially, if we do not understand why we are doing what we are doing, we often stop doing it, no matter what it is. It is one thing to be told what to do, or to be overly motivated by someone else to do something that we do not want to do, but it is something entirely different when we are self-motivated, or when we personally know the why behind what we are doing.

Let me try to explain this through the terms of cycling. There are times when I am riding with friends on a trail, or a route that I am not familiar with, and because I am not the leader, I am just following along. Sometimes that route has steep hills or long climbs, but because I am not familiar with the route and I am just following, I am often not as motivated as the person who is leading the ride. But when I am the leader, on a route that I am familiar with, I ride with a different confidence, a different sense of purpose, because I know what is up ahead. I understand the why behind the what and this causes me to ride differently. There is more personal investment: when I am following my friend, I just want to be done with the hard parts, because I am not taking them over “my hill”.

The same is true with the Revelation: when we know why we are doing what we are doing, I believe we do the “what” differently, with more intentionality and more personal investment. That is why I have assembled ten reasons why you should study the Revelation.

1) It is the Completion of the Bible—Any good movie or book does not just have a good beginning and middle, they also have a great or even terrific ending. Over the years Jennifer and I have watched movies that ended terribly, to the point that you have deep regret for spending the two hours watching it only for it to end that way. Friends, the Revelation is the terrific ending to God’s grand story that started with our parents in Eden. Without the Revelation, the story of how all things come to an end would be incomplete, leaving out some of the most important details of our future.

Looking ahead at the future helps us in the here and now. When we know how the story ends, we can approach the future with confidence, having changed the way we are living now, in light of where we are headed. It is true, things will get much worse before they get better, but when it gets better it will be better than it has ever been, and it will stay that way for eternity, at least for the disciple of Jesus (Revelation 22:13).

2) It is a Defense Against Heresy—Many cult groups major on the book of Revelation as their primary message. But because Church has broadly shied away from reading and understanding the Revelation, people get caught off guard by those that are teaching it. Over the course of my time following Jesus, I have heard this phrase countless times: “Doctrine is divisive.” In my opinion, this is a heretical statement. There is nothing divisive about the doctrines (teachings) of the Bible: in fact, there is nothing more unifying than Bible doctrine. What is divisive is what we do with the doctrines of the Bible, not the doctrines themselves. If we want to be equipped to be free from heresy and deception, then we also must develop a love for the truth (2nd Thessalonians 2:1-12). We can put in safeguards from heresy and deception by not shrinking away from this book, but becoming familiar with it, and loving it, like we love the rest of God’s written word (Matthew 24:4-5).

3) It is a True Interpretation of History—During 2020 and 2021, what might have been in the shadows for some years seemingly came into the light. Many of us who were accustomed to receiving truth from various news sites found that they became strangely confusing. Watching the news and reading the news from online sources left many of us scared, confused, and without peace. It was and still is complicated to find true sources, trustworthy anchors, and people free from their own biases. But this is where the Bible is vastly different than a news source. The Bible is the only body of writing that exists that has not come from man, but from God: a God who is to be trusted, followed, and worshipped as the only truthful Person.

Future events cast a shadow ahead of them, and a good student of the Revelation is forewarned about times past, and those times that are still ahead of us. As the old saying goes, “To be forewarned is to be forearmed.” The Bible, and the book of Revelation expressly, is a truthful presentation of the future, unlike today’s media.

4) It is a Ground for Hope—It is easy to look around at the state of society in the globe and become greatly discouraged. With the advent of technology, the increased visibility of global poverty, war, and natural disasters can leave us discouraged about how life is going and where it is headed. But when we look at the Revelation, we see the surety of God’s plan, and the fact that God is seated on His throne, ruling, and reigning over all things. Through the Revelation we see that God’s throne is firmly set in heaven, that good will conquer evil and the saints will one day rule on the earth with Him.

The Revelation lets us know that the days of humanism, new ageism, and the overt worship of demons are numbered. Those that hate God will eventually be wiped off the

planet, and those that love Jesus and love His appearing will be with Him forever. The hope we find in this world is fleeting, but the hope we have in Christ, specifically in His return, is an eternal hope, a hope laid up for us in heaven (Psalm 29:10; Colossians 1:3-8,23; Revelation 4:2, 6).

5) It is a Motive for Evangelism—The appointment of death, as much as we do not enjoy talking about it, is an appointment awaiting everyone. There is no getting around death and its certainty for every person. Here in the Revelation, there is no clearer separation in the whole of the Bible than between the eternal states of those that go on to be with Christ and those that are separated from Him eternally. Here in the Revelation, we see a new heaven and a new earth or the lake of fire, eternal joy or eternal separation.

The day of judgment must come, but until then, according to the Word of God, anyone who is thirsty may and come drink freely. Just as Paul encouraged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist, we also must take into our hearts the lost state of humanity as we preach, teach, and instruct others from this book (Isaiah 55:1; 2nd Timothy 4:5; Revelation 22:17).

Understanding the book of Revelation gives us the proper urgency needed to reach those that are far from Christ.

6) It is a Stimulus for Worship—It is common among the American church family to have pretty heated discussions about the volume of worship in our weekly gatherings. It is something I have personally experienced in nearly every ministry that I have been a part of. Now, I do not want to diminish genuine concerns for music that is too loud, to the point where it is causing damage to someone's ears. But when it comes to the books of the Bible, I do not think there is a louder book than the Revelation.

It is book full of worship, shouting, singing, instruments, and innumerable voices: one hundred million and then thousands of thousands more. In the Revelation alone there are around eleven major songs of worship that exalt the Father, in the name of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a book that places Jesus on full display, in all His glory, and that display elicits worship from those that see Him, like the angels and those that love Him, like you and me (Revelation 4:5; 5:8-14; 14:2; 19:6).

7) It is a Cure to Worldliness—Years ago, my wise and studied grandfather, William Mentor used to tell me, "Don't become so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good." Although William's intentions and experiences were true, as he was in community with plenty of overly "spiritual" people that could not hold a job or relate with society, the phrase itself does not stand on solid Biblical ground.

One of the great benefits of reading the Revelation is that it helps us to think more about our resurrected bodies in the age to come than our present mortal bodies in this age! It helps us to think about our eternal home in God's eternal city, more than our ideal home in this age. The heavenly perspective that this book gives us helps us make wise decisions with our money, with our time, and with our energy. The Revelation inspired by the Holy

Spirit has power to shift our thinking from worldliness to heavenly things, which in turn empowers us to live our life differently here in this age (Hebrews 11:8-10).

8) It is Motivating for Godliness—According the Gospel of Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' desire is for us to be holy in this life and happy in the life to come. But for many of us, even in the Church, we desire to be happy in this life, and holy in the life to come. What we find in the Revelation is motivation for this very thing: to be holy in this life. In this book we find a reward given by Jesus Himself that empowers us to survive our present troubles and overcome both internal and external temptation.

The book of Revelation shakes us out of complacency and indifference towards God and His purposes and reminds us that God is three times holy. In the Revelation we find reason to forsake life in this present evil age, and live godly lives through and towards Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:4; Revelation 4:8).

9) It Helps Us Prepare for Persecution—Many throughout history have referred to this book as a manual for martyrdom, and I believe this is a correct reference. Though it is not the only theme, or the central theme, martyrdom is a clear theme in this book. The message comes across loud and clear to those who are presently suffering, that they would continue in the faith and overcome.

Jesus predicted a day coming when the whole world will hate (yes, hate) those that follow Christ. Hearing those words from Jesus and understanding the implications of that kind of sentiment across the globe helps us to prepare for an unforeseen future. These are not conjectures, or shocking hypotheticals, they are true words from Jesus' mouth. Though hardship to this degree might not be here now for you, it is surely coming, so let us prepare ourselves in advance (Matthew 24:1-14; Luke 9:23; 2nd Timothy 3:12).

10) It Gives Us an Understanding of Christ—Jesus is just like a diamond, having many facets. Among God's family, if we are not careful, we can end up staring at one facet of the diamond to the detriment of the whole diamond. Here in the Revelation, we see a clear and complete picture of Christ Jesus, including not just one facet of Him, but a multitude of facets. Without the Revelation our picture of Christ is unclear and incomplete.

If the Gospels present Jesus in His role as Prophet, and the Epistles present Him in His role as Priest, then the Revelation clarifies His role as Bridegroom, King, and Judge. Within this glorious book we get to see the Christ the world has yet to see, but one day will. Seeing Christ rightly, seeing Christ clearly, and seeing Christ fully are the primary ways that we grow to love (obey, trust, and follow) with this multifaceted King (Revelation 19:11)!

INTRODUCTION TO PATMOS

Around 65 A.D., severe persecution of Christians broke out in the Roman Empire under Nero, a very wicked man. Shortly after that, Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., under Vespasian, and

Peter, Paul and Timothy were murdered. But in John's Day, under the rule of Domitian, things got even worse. Because of Domitian's great insecurities, he groped for even more power, calling himself a lord and a god, and forced everyone in the empire to worship him by offering incense to him annually. Because a large percentage of society were polytheists, they didn't mind burning incense to Domitian, but for John, a devoted disciple of Jesus, this was unthinkable.

John would have had no problem giving respect to the ruler of the land, but it was clear to him: worship belonged only to the One true living God. As powerful as Domitian was, John knew that one day he and every other person would have to bow their knees to the Lord Jesus Christ. However, because of John's refusal to worship Domitian, he was banished to the Isle of Patmos as a political prisoner, sent to die off the coast of the Aegean Sea. Patmos was about ten miles off the coast of Turkey, or Asia Minor, where all of the seven churches listed in Revelation 2 and 3 are located.

It is here, in John's old age and weathered body, that God visits him and shares one of the most profound experiences in the grace of God that's contained in the whole of the Bible. Though separated from the Church and those he loved, John is never separated from the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and His loving Father.

REVELATION CHAPTER 1

From the outset, the Revelation gives us the major theme of the book: God. John starts by saying, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants... (Rev. 1:1)" The word Revelation that's used here is the Greek word "apocalypso" and it simply means "to unveil something that was previously veiled" or "the completion". This word could not have been used at Jesus' first coming but is now fitting regarding His second coming. At His first coming Jesus was veiled, but upon His second coming He will be totally unveiled (Matt. 24:30; Jn. 1:10-11).

The Revelation, which is holy to God (it's the unveiling of His Son to the nations) isn't so much about the end of the world, the antichrist, or even martyrdom, but about the glorious appearing and complete revelation of God's Son, Jesus Christ. To emphasize this point, here's a small glimpse into the Christology found within the Revelation:

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| 1. | He is Jesus Christ | 1:1,2, 5, 9, 9 |
| 2. | The faithful witness | 1:5 |
| 3. | The first born from the dead | 1:5 |
| 4. | The Ruler of the kings of the earth | 1:5 |
| 5. | Alpha and Omega | 1:8; 21:6; 22:13 |
| 6. | The Beginning and The End | 1:8; 21:6; 22:13 |
| 7. | The Lord | 1:8, 10 |
| 8. | The One who is, who was and is to come | 1:8 |
| 9. | The first and the last | 1:11, 17; 22:13 |

10.	The Son of Man	1:13; 14:14
11.	He who lives, was dead and is alive forever	1:18; 2:8
12.	The Amen	1:18; 3:14
13.	He who has the keys of death and of hades	1:18
14.	He who has the Seven Stars in His right hand	1:20
15.	He that walks in the midst of the 7 lampstands	2:1
16.	The Son of God	2:18
17.	He that is Holy	3:7
18.	He that is true	3:7
19.	He that has the key of David	3:7
20.	The faithful and true witness	3:7
21.	The beginning of the creation of God	3:7
22.	The Lion of the tribe of Judah	5:5 (used only 1 time)
23.	The root of David	5:5
24.	The slain Lamb	5:6, 8, 11, 12, 13; 6:1 (28 x's in total)
25.	Jesus	14:12; 19:10; 22:16
26.	The Lord Almighty	15:3
27.	King of the saints	15:3
28.	Lord of lords	17:14; 19:16
29.	Faithful and true	19:11
30.	The Word of God	19:13
31.	Christ	20:4, 6; 11:15; 12:10
32.	The Lamb and the Temple	21:22
33.	The Light	21:23
34.	The root and offspring of David	22:16
35.	Bright and morning star	22:16
36.	Lord Jesus	22:20
37.	Our Lord Jesus Christ	22:21

Wow! I think it's safe to say that there is not another book in the Bible that gives this much description to the glory and nature of God. This alone helps us to see that this book is not Jesus' idea, and it is not written primarily to non-believers to try and motivate or scare them into a relationship with God. According to the opening verse, this book is God's idea, and it is addressed expressly to God's servants, the followers of Jesus and it's about Christ. Through the Revelation we are equipped to overcome, as we behold the only Qualified One to bring about the end of all things.

John continues by saying, "...things that must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the Word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to things that He saw (Rev. 1:1-2)." Quite the opening statement that John is giving us! This Revelation has been sent from God the Father, about God the Son, given to the saints of God, and it was sent and signified by God's angel to verify its authenticity. Talk about an intentional letter from God, with a specific purpose! What John means by, "...it must shortly take place.." is that this prophecy is overhanging human history.

It is best understood in the context of how Biblical prophets behaved; meaning, their prophecies were not given with chronology in mind. To them, all their prophecies were imminent, or impending, and they often did not know exactly how imminent.

Corrie Ten Boom's experience in the German concentration camp gives us context for how that can appear. The prisoners' assumption was that Hitler was the antichrist, and they were experiencing events that could have been those foretold in the Word of God. History tells us that this was not the case, but for them, in that moment, it felt as if it was. The reason why I mention this is that many people use this word "imminent" to mean it could happen at any moment: that right this moment Jesus could return. But this isn't how John is using this phrase, the word itself means "hanging over" or "surely coming". John wants to communicate that we should be living as though the Day of the Lord could take place within our lifetime, which it could (Rom. 13:11-12; 2nd Pet. 3:3-4). It is like snow on a metal roof: it is not a matter of if it will come down, but when. It is overhanging the ground below, and though it may be slow in its descent, at some point, suddenly it will come off the roof.

The book of Revelation places properly an eschatological weight on our shoulders that brings about urgency as we consider the two-fold nature of Jesus' return: glory/blessing and pressure/trouble. It's never either or, but always both/and.

GROWING IN OUR OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST

John now comes to one of the great sacred charges within the Revelation as he says, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near." (Rev. 1:3) What John has just given us seems to be overlooked by many within the Church when it comes to the Revelation as a whole. John is letting us know that there is a unique and dynamic blessing connected to this book that does not exist for any of the other 65 books in the Bible. Our approach to success and a successful life in this age will dictate how we approach this book and the truth contained within it.

The bold proclamation of this book contains truths that will eventually lead those who say it to be excommunicated from society, and even from among God's family (2nd Tim. 4). So if growth, increase, and material prosperity is our idea of success, this book will become a stumbling block to us. The reason it will be a stumbling block is because we will shy away from its contents with a false assumption about bigger, better, and more, all the while neglecting not only the Bible, but God Himself.

Jesus in His omniscience connected a blessing/reward to this book because He knew that we would need it, both throughout Church history and in the days ahead, in order to keep what's in it inside of God's family and among the culture at large. This will be no easy task; it will require the Holy Spirit's grace in our lives to be able to hold out the word of life among those who are being saved, and those who are perishing.

This blessing that John mentions is connected to three primary things. Firstly, you simply can't obey what you don't know. These words must be read. God's invitation to us through John is to grow in our knowledge of God through encountering Jesus within the Revelation. We see in Ezekiel 3, and Revelation 10 that both Ezekiel and John devoured God's scroll, allowing the contents to shape not only their message, but also their lives. This must also become true of us. Secondly, when it comes to the Word of God, hearing is always connected to obeying. To hear and not obey His Word means that you never heard in the Biblical sense. In God's economy, to hear His word is to do/obey His word (Matt. 7:23,26; Jam. 1:22).

Lastly, we learn that it is not enough to read and to obey God's Word; we must also rehearse it, repeat it, and hold fast to it, even among society. Our reading and obeying God's Word must translate to sharing His words with those that God has placed around us. In an increasingly hostile culture, God requires those that love Him to speak those things that He has given us.

The early Church took up the Old Testament practice of reading the scriptures aloud in the assembly because they were not meant to impart private information, but to provoke public worship from God's family. For this reason, silly as it may seem, I read the Bible out loud every day. I have done this for nearly twenty years. I do not do this with books, or magazines, or other publications, but when it comes to the Word of God, I want the blessing that comes to those who hear God's Words, so I read it out loud.

PROOF OF AUTHORSHIP AND GREETING

“John, to the seven Churches which are in Asia [Minor, now modern-day Turkey]: 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... (Rev. 1:4).”

When it comes to discussing who authored the Book of Revelation, there is little debate as to who this John is. From context we know that this is John the Beloved, the John who laid his head on Jesus' chest at the Last Supper and referred to himself as the one whom Jesus loved, the same John who wrote 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John (Jn. 13:23-26). The only identification he gives in his introduction is “John,” meaning he is known well enough to them that he has no need to give any other identifying markers, which he also does several other times throughout this letter (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 21:1; 22:8).

As you can see, John makes sure to include grace and peace in his opening remarks to his readers. This is a grace and peace that only an eternal God can offer those ministries and disciples of Jesus, who are struggling and suffering under great distress at the time of this letter. The grace of God is His unmerited favor and power that is available to us at any time and in any place. His peace is God's shalom, completeness, rest, and wholeness, which comes only from Him, not from this earthly life.

Our outlook of the future is based entirely on Who we see right now. If we see God clearly and rightly, we will find a God who is offering us grace and peace today, and this will properly equip us to walk through the hardships that come throughout our lives and at the end of this age. This is what we call Trinitarian peace and grace because it is from “...Him who is (God the Father), and who was (Jesus)...and from the seven Spirits (the Holy Spirit) ...” This does not mean that there are seven Holy Spirits, but instead refers to the seven-fold Spirit of God: one Holy Spirit with seven distinct qualities or characteristics.

We can see the seven-fold nature of God's Spirit in Isaiah 11:2 where the prophet says, “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.” Both the prophet Isaiah and John are not presenting us with seven Holy Spirits, but seven activities, or characteristics of the Holy Spirit. Seven is also the number of fullness, or completeness, and we can rest assured that John is using this to let us know that God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is the fullness of God's power and grace. It is a hardy greeting to God's family that God the Father, God the Son, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit are offering them through a pressing season of intense persecution under the rule of Domitian. It is also a greeting that the Church has needed throughout Church history, and it is a reminder that the Church in the years ahead will also need.

A SIX-FOLD REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Now that John has given us his Trinitarian greeting, offering God's family grace and peace in our time of need, we are able to clearly see why he is able to give this type of greeting. John says, "...and from Jesus Christ, the Faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." Here we get a glimpse into what I've described as the six-fold nature of Jesus. Firstly, he calls Jesus the "faithful witness." As the second Adam, Jesus is the first human who is in complete agreement with the Father (1st Cor. 15:45-49). Jesus is more committed to doing God's will than even preserving His own life. While Jesus was seated underneath Pilate, Jesus held true to who God said He was, even though it would cost Him His life (Lk. 23:4).

The Greek word used for "witness" is the word "martur," from which we get the word 'martyr.' This word also appears in Acts 1:8, speaking of the power of God's Spirit coming upon the disciples in the upper room and making them "witnesses" or "martyrs." It is also the same word used in Revelation 20:4 speaking about the martyrs of Jesus who are beheaded for their allegiance to Christ. The word witness became synonymous with being a martyr or giving up your life for the sake of Christ and His kingdom. Nothing exemplifies Christ more than this truth: He is the faithful witness, unwilling to deviate from the truth of who God has said He is. He is unswerving.

Secondly, Jesus is "the firstborn from the dead." It is not that Jesus is the first person ever born, but that He is the first person who has ever conquered death, hell, and the grave. Jesus gains this title because after His death on the cross, He returned to life after three days, and is now alive forevermore (1st Cor. 15:23; Col. 1:18). Jesus is not just first in chronology, but also in sovereignty: being the first to conquer death, He has obtained rulership and preeminence. Until the first resurrection, the resurrection of the dead, no followers of Jesus from history past have a resurrected body except Jesus, until He appears in the sky (Dan. 12:2-3; 1st Cor. 15:51-52; 1st Thess. 4:13-17). He truly is first in every single way.

Thirdly, He is referred to as "the Ruler over the kings of the earth." Throughout the Roman Empire, many leaders or emperors referred to themselves as deities. Julius Caesar, Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian, and Titus had been declared divine after their death. During John's life, Emperor Domitian also demanded that his people refer to him as their lord and god and offer tribute. This is the point that the Revelation is getting at, both here and in so many other chapters: the actions of earthly rulers and principalities do not change the nature of God. In Psalm 2 we see a picture of Jesus as the One who rules over all things, not by the appointment of man, but by the appointment of His Father (Psalm 2:4-6).

Although Jesus is not fully exercising His Rulership over all things today, it will not go on like this forever (Heb. 12:25-27). There is coming a day when Jesus will openly and publicly demonstrate His God-given authority over everything. John is wanting the Churches to know that although it may be difficult to see in the present age, there is Someone greater and more powerful than the earthly rulers: the eternal Ruler.

Fourthly, John calls Jesus “the One who loved us.” No apostle among the Twelve was more acquainted with the love of God than John the Beloved. It was this John, the human author of the Revelation, who reminds us that our love for God is always a response to Jesus’ great love towards us (1st Jn. 4:19). The love of God was made known to us through Jesus’ life. We see the evidence of His passion to have a people that love Him in the same way that He loves them through the way that He lived, both then and now (Col. 1:15). Jesus is a Man who never gave up on humanity, though humanity, me included, often gives up on Him!

Fifthly, Jesus is “He who washed us in His own blood.” John, though imprisoned on Patmos, is clear that he is free from captivity, and his earthly imprisonment does not impede his nearness to Jesus. Jesus is the One who frees us from our chains of sin and bondage, demonstrating the Father to us. He has made us clean through His shed blood, not ours. This is a redemption that He alone has purchased and executed (Col. 1:20, 21-22).

Lastly, Jesus has “made us kings (a kingdom) and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Many interpret this to mean that you and I, the family of God, are kings and priests, but I do not think this is the appropriate rendering of either this verse or Revelation 5:10 where this idea appears again. It is better to read this as saying, “a kingdom of priests” or a “kingdom of priestly people,” just like Peter refers to the body of Christ in 1st Peter 2:1-10. We should see John saying that through Christ, all of Jesus’ followers have been restored to a position of privilege with God the Father: spiritually in this age, but physically with Him in the age to come (Col. 1:13; Rev. 5:10).

Jesus has promised that those who overcome in this age will rule and reign with Him on this physical, re-created earth, sharing in the vast expanse of His Father’s kingdom upon His return (Rev. 2:25-27; 20:4-6). This rulership is not given only because Jesus is the Son of God, but also because of what He has done. Yes, He is the faithful witness, but He is also the One that made us into something that we were not. Yes, He is the One who has loved us, but He is also the One who has washed us in His own blood, making us clean. There truly is nobody like Him!

JESUS’ VISIBLE APPEARING AND SOVEREIGNTY

John continues by saying, “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, says the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” Every December we celebrate the first advent of Jesus, or Jesus’ birth: His first coming. According to the Bible, this first coming was something that took place in the cover of night, through a lowly manger birth. In near-obscurity, God entered the human story. If God had not hijacked the stars and sent angels to announce His Son’s arrival, nobody would have known about it: it was that understated.

But upon His second coming, things will be vastly different. It will not be on a dark night, but on a bright day: a day so bright it will outshine the sun and cause the stars in the heavens to pale in

comparison (Matt. 24:27, 29; Acts 9:3; 26:13; 2nd Thess.2:8; Rev. 1:16-17; 21:23). Jesus' appearing in the sky will also not be confined to a geographic location like His first coming. We do not know the specifics of how He will appear, but what we do know is that He is going to appear and move slow enough and long enough that every eye/tribe will see Him and have a deep heart response to Him (every tribe will mourn because of Him). This helps us understand that it will not be a sudden thing that you could miss if you blinked at the wrong moment. This is what the scripture means when it says, "...every tribe will mourn because of Him."

JOHN: AN END-TIME FATHER

We learn from the Bible that Domitian has banished John to Patmos, but history also tells us that, before John was sent to this island, they tried to kill him by dipping him in boiling oil. This attempt was unsuccessful, but one could only imagine what state one's body would be in after an event like this. The powerful message inside of this is that one of God's greatest workers, a man like John, has not been removed or protected from difficulty, but is instead leading the way through suffering. John further elaborates on his crushed state on this island in Revelation 1:9 when he says, "I, John both your brother and companion in the tribulation and Kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos, for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." John, who has been leading the Church for more than twenty years after Paul's death (around 67 A.D.), could have labeled or addressed himself any way he wanted.

He could refer to himself as apostle, bishop, elder or overseer, but instead of these titles, he simply calls himself, "...your brother and companion in the tribulation..." John is making clear to the churches and other followers of Jesus that he is with them in their struggle. He is their brother, and he, too, suffers on behalf of Jesus. He gives no title, just a recognition of family. John joins them as a partner in a common experience. John was not alone, and neither were they. The great apostolic leader of their day was suffering alongside them.

The tribulation John endured was severe, and he was not spared from it. Like Daniel, he both experienced it and perceived more difficulty still yet to come. The Greek word that John uses here for tribulation is "Thlipsis" and it speaks of the greatest pressure and difficulty: literally translated "pressure without escape." This refers to the practice of torturing people under the weight of a massive rock that would hang suspended from a rope. Slowly, they would lower the rope as they asked questions. Ultimately, the interrogators would cut the rope, leaving the heavy weight of the rock on top of one's body and crushing them to death.

This word that used here is the only word for tribulation used in the whole of the New Testament. This means that when Jesus speaks of the "Great Tribulation" in Matthew 24, He is not talking about a new trouble, but referring to a large quantity of trouble in an abbreviated period of time: the same trouble that the church has faced for the past 2,000 years. The Great Tribulation is the same breed of trouble that has always been around; only exponential and compressed into a relative moment (three and a half years).

John readers would have interpreted the news that he was on Patmos as a notice of his impending death. They would have understood his rock-on-a-rope imagery that signified his deep suffering and prepared for his demise, because nobody escaped Patmos alive. But death among God's family at this point was common, much like it is today in many places of the world.

By the time John wrote this letter, all the other apostles had become martyrs. History tells us Andrew died on a x-shaped cross in Patras. Bartholomew (Nathanael) was flayed alive. James, the brother of John, was beheaded by Herod Agrippa in Jerusalem. James, the son of Cleopas and Mary, was thrown from the temple and stoned. Jude (Thaddeus) was shot through with arrows and killed. Matthew was slain by the sword in Parthia. Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. Phillip was hung on a pillar. Simon (the Zealot) was crucified in Persia. Thomas was slain with the spear in India. Matthias was stoned and beheaded. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ was said to have been beheaded in Rome. I was personally shocked to learn about the death of the apostles. It helps us to remember that these were not prosperity Gospel preachers living "high on the hog," these were faithful servants who gave up their lives for Christ and His kingdom, just like their Savior did for theirs.

This is also why I have labeled John an end-time father, along with Daniel and others throughout Biblical history. These men and women give us clarity, definition, and courage to face adversity for the cause of Christ. These people have breathed and will continue to breathe life into the Church to also "run towards the gunshots," not away from them.

JOHN'S COMMISSIONING TO WRITE THE REVELATION

It was here, in his withered state and old age, banished to Patmos as a death sentence, that God visited John in ways that surpass many other Biblical accounts. John says in Revelation 1:10-11, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see write in a book and send it to the seven Churches which are in Asia: To Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

Many interpret this as John saying, "I was in Church on Sunday when I heard this loud voice behind me," but when John says, "I was in the Spirit..." he lets his readers know that he is writing under divine inspiration. John is not fabricating this ecstatic experience; it is real, and God Himself has initiated it (2nd Cor. 12). John will say this again three other times, reminding his readers that God Himself has initiated this experience, not him (or the pizza he ate last night). Regarding this phrase, "on the Lord's Day," there are generally two schools of thought. The first believes that John is talking about the Day of the Lord. Many people have special days throughout the year, and Jesus is no different. Most of this book contains information regarding Jesus' Day, the Day of the Lord (Rev. 5-22).

The other thought is to consider Domitian who ruled during this time around 81-96 A.D. and demanded to be addressed by the title of Lord and God. Domitian was demanding universal

worship of himself at the penalty of death. Once a year, incense was to be thrown on the altar before an image of Domitian along with the proclamation, "He is the Lord;" therefore it was called "The Lord's Day." David Pawson, in his book *Come With Me Through the Revelation*, points out that "the word Lord is in the form of an adjective, meaning Lordly or Lordly day."

JESUS REVEALS TRUTHS ABOUT HIS MAJESTY AND MINISTRY IN WHAT HE WEARS, SAYS, AND DOES

The tenor of the book takes an interesting turn here, where we make the shift from solely listening to what is being said to looking at Who is saying it. Jesus' words are important here, but so also is what He wears and how He appears to John. All of this is very intentional, not haphazard. John says in Revelation 1:12-13, ""Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lamp stands, and in the midst of the seven lamp stands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band." When John turns to see what he heard, he sees Jesus standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands. What John sees is different than what he heard (Rev. 5:5-6; 17:1-3).

Those lampstands, as we have discussed previously, represent the Seven Churches in Asia Minor, or what is now known as modern day Turkey (Rev. 1:20). But the word that John chooses to use when speaking about the golden lampstands is important as well. The word that John uses for "gold" is the Greek word "chrysolos," which speaks of gold in its finest form or purest state. What an encouragement this must have been for John, who is aging, imprisoned, tortured, and separated from the Churches he has loved so dearly. In John's Day there were no wax-burning candles, only oil. These lampstands most likely held fragile clay lamps filled with oil that would be able to fit in the palm of your hand (Matt. 5:15; 25).

This tells us so much about how Jesus feels regarding His Church, the assembled body of His family. If we are going to engage with Jesus today, it must happen within the assembly of God: His congregation, His family, His body. Some falsely assume that they do not need to be a part of God's family, and that they can experience Him to fullness in the woods, or at the beach, or in the mall, or doing a hobby. Those things are not bad in and of themselves, but alone, they are not, nor ever will be His assembly. According to Jesus, it is primarily within His family that He is correcting, strengthening, leading, directing, empowering, delivering, and overseeing. Jesus is planted in the midst of His assembly, and if we want to be with Him where He is, that is where we will be also.

In our day, when many are frustrated with the Church, and feel great freedoms to speak sharply against it, we must consider the fact that Jesus purchased this bride with His own blood, and has not given up on her, regardless of how far she strays. Yes, she has challenges, she has sinned, and she needs to change and mature, but that should not empower us to speak against her critically in condemnation, working to dismantle what God Himself is trying to build. Even though the Church is fractured, broken, and deficient, He is standing in the midst of her; He has not abandoned her; and He speaks of her as the purest gold. Friends, Jesus is not ashamed of His Church, and neither should we be.

It is no coincidence that, after John receives a commission to write what he has seen and send it to the seven Churches, he sees Jesus clothed with a garment down to His feet (signifying His priesthood) and a golden band wrapped around His chest (signifying His prophetic mantle). The way that Jesus dresses gives us confidence that God has not done away with the Old Testament. What we see is that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. They are One and the same. Jesus is both the eternally great High Priest (tender/lamb-like) and a Prophet (truthful/lion-like). He is the greater Moses (Exodus 28:4; 39:29; Zechariah 3:4; Deuteronomy 18:15,18-19; Acts 3:22-23; Hebrews 3:1; 4:15-16; 5:5-6; 7:24). Because of those truths, He is to be trusted, because He is both tender and truthful, fully God and fully Man!

John also sees that "...His head and hair were while like wool, as white as snow..." Jesus bears the same image as His Father, the Ancient of Days. Jesus is also uncreated, eternal, preexistent, and preeminent (Dan. 7:9; Heb. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-16). John sees further that "... His eyes (are) like a flame of fire..." Jesus' eyes declare what is happening inside His heart. His eyes give us insight into the way He feels. For some, His eyes of fire will be positive as they encounter God's heart for weak yet sincere followers and feel His tenderness and mercy. But for others, it will be negative to see His eyes as they encounter His commitment to purity, truth and righteousness and feel their own sinfulness exposed. The Greek idea paints the picture of looking into a fire and being memorized. His eyes are captivating (Jn. 5:35, Son. 8:6). To this verse David Pawson rightly says, "No wonder they blindfolded Him when the religious leaders struck Him. Who could mock Him while looking into those eyes?"

The Bible continues by saying, "His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of mighty waters..." Brass in most places throughout the Scriptures speaks of God's judgment (Ex. 30:17-21; 38:8), and His feet being like brass speaks to the slow-moving judgement of God as it builds—though when it comes, it comes swiftly. The idea we are to get from this imagery is that His mind is not made up yet. His feet like brass are still being refined. What this means for these errant Churches that He is going to openly address is that there is still time to repent, as He Himself will say to them.

Jesus' voice like the sound of mighty waters was most likely inspired by John listening to the crashing of the Aegean Sea on the coast, with its insistent day-and-night waves breaking onto the beach and the rocks. The ocean in its thundering is relentless: it drowns out all the other sounds, and the same thing is true with Jesus' voice. Nobody talks over this Man. Though His words are not always heard today, they will one day be heard and obeyed by everyone (Ezek. 1:24).

John also sees that there are "...seven stars in His right hand..." Throughout the whole of the Bible, God's right hand speaks of His power, willingness, and ability to deliver His people. Holding seven stars in His right hand tells us that He is committed and able to keep His messengers (John 10:28-29). He holds them dearly in love, but also holds them accountable.

The Greek word that is used for "stars" is the word "angelos," and it is where we get the word "angel" or messenger. This is what Malachi's name means in the Old Testament. Throughout the Bible it is used both ways: to speak of heavenly beings and earthly messengers. What precisely it refers to is unclear, but in my opinion, it is best to see that these are human messengers, overseers, bishops, or elders. This opinion is built on a two main points: firstly, it is not uncommon for people in the Bible to be referred to as stars (Gen. 15:5; 22:17; Dan. 12:3; Matt. 13:43; 1st Cor. 15:39-42).

Secondly, we do not have other Biblical accounts that speak about angels overseeing churches or ministries. All the references are to human leaders. We certainly do not have any instances where messages are given to angels to be preached or taught to God's family in a consistent way, like we see with the seven Churches in Revelation 2-3. The principle that is being demonstrated here holds true throughout the whole of the Bible; God does not bypass the leaders He has set in place to reach His people. Jesus is committed to a human partnership within His family, and therefore He is going to address the human overseers of these Churches in hopes that He might reach the Church as a whole. Again, what a powerful statement for the leaders that Jesus is presently addressing, and the truth it holds for the rest of us: God is holding His overseers in His powerful right hand!

John sees that, "...out of His mouth goes a sharp two-edged sword..." This is the only weapon that Jesus has ever needed, the words of His mouth. When the Bible says that life and death is in the power of the tongue, it is being serious (Prov. 18:21). Jesus' words convict the righteous and slay the wicked, as He strips away every excuse from those that want to contend with Him (Lk. 2:34-35; 2nd Thess. 2:8; Heb. 4:12-13; Rev. 19:19-21). The Greek word that is used here for 'sharp' is the word 'oxus' and it speaks of sour wine, sour vinegar, or a medical solution that was used as an anesthetic before a medical procedure (Mk. 15:36). In John's day, life in this age had crept into the church, and Jesus was coming to perform a radical operation with the intent to heal, not hurt. Remember: He is the Great Physician who does not make incisions to harm us, but rather to cut away the deadly cancer within. In this case that cancer is sin, and it must be removed if we are to dwell with Him.

The Revelation continues with a glorious description of Jesus as it says, "... (and) His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last.'" This is such a glorious picture of the resurrected Christ! The language in the Greek is speaking of explosive light, "dunamis" (Song. 5:10; Acts 26:13; 1st Tim. 6:16; Rev. 21:22-23). Jesus, as a Man in His resurrection, is shining like the sun in all its strength.

Remember, this is the same John who went up the mount of transfiguration and saw Jesus transformed before him. It is also the same John who laid his head on Jesus' breast during the last supper. John is intimately well acquainted with Christ. But in response to this blinding light, John collapses hard ("pipto") like a limp corpse ("nekros"). This is not an unusual experience in the grace of God for those that see God or see an angel: John joins a long line of saints before him that had nearly the same reaction (Genesis 17:3; Joshua 5:14,15; Ezekiel 1:28;3:23; Daniel

8:17, 10:25; Matthew 17:6; Acts 9:23, 26:13; Revelation 4:10, 5:13-14, 19:10). But here, as John has collapsed in the corpse-like state, Jesus reaches out His powerful right hand and touches John, assuring him that though He is bright and glorious, He is approachable, the same friend who walked with Him in His years of ministry. This is the glory of God displayed in an approachable Man. Jesus, in His resurrection and ascension, is still touching people with His mighty right hand!

Lastly, John hears from Jesus, "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death." Amid martyrdom, hearing that Jesus had power over death would have been a great reminder about life after death in this age. Jesus is celebrating His resurrection and the authority that He obtained through it with John. Like a great citizen who receives the "key to the city" and large gates, Jesus is now the sole overseer of death and the place of the unrighteous dead, Hades/hell (Matt. 10:28, Lu. 12:5). This gives us great confidence to embrace whatever may come our way, knowing the Jesus is the One who decides the fate of our lives after death!

The Things You Have Seen, The Things That Are, And the Things Yet to Come

The second to final verse included in Revelation 1 says, "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this." This verse holds a truth that pertains to the whole of the Revelation. John is instructed to urgently record what God has given him and to send it to the seven Churches. The reality is, judgment is building, not only against five of these ministries, but also against the nations of the earth. The sooner they hear the message, the sooner they can repent and avoid the terrible judgments of God. The whole of the Revelation may be contained within this verse:

- 1) Revelation 1 –The things which you have seen (namely Christ and His glory)
- 2) Revelation 2-4 –The things which are (namely the seven Churches and God's throne)
- 3) Revelation 5-22—The things which will take place after this (namely the judgments of God, and the eternal states of believers and unbelievers)

This is a beautiful framework for looking at the Revelation. To close out the Revelation, Jesus says to John in Revelation 1:20, "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 golden lampstands which you saw are the seven Churches." It is common for God's people to further confuse things that are mentioned plainly in the Bible. But here, if we will listen, Jesus clears up any confusion about what John was looking at, telling him that the stars are the messengers of the seven Churches, and the lampstands are the seven Churches.

The point we are to take away from this is that Jesus is holding the overseers of these Churches in His powerful right hand, not with a desire to crush them, but to have compassion on them. He is for them, though he holds some things against them. Because He cares deeply, He speaks clearly. He makes His heart known because He is a just Judge, not an unjust judge.

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

A. Revelation 2-3 cover Jesus' address to seven physical, historical, literal Churches, which were then located in Anatolia (Asia minor) but now in modern day Turkey. Today Turkey (77.7 million people) has around 120,000 believers of which only 4,000 are protestant's.

B. It's clear to see that in our day, Turkey, and much of the middle east is a difficult place to take the Gospel, but this was also true in John's day. These were hostile areas, where many people laid their life down for the name of Jesus.

C. These letters are laid out in a very specific way with the 1st and the 7th Churches being in the worst shape. The 2nd and 6th Churches are in the best shape and the 3rd, 4th and 5th Churches are struggling and in danger of receiving Jesus' judgment (in their day).

1.	Ephesus (Efes)	Bad Shape
2.	Smyrna (Izmir)	Great Shape
3.	Pergamum (Bergama)	Struggling
4.	Thyatira (Akhisar)	Struggling
5.	Sardis (Sart)	Struggling
6.	Philadelphia (Alesehir)	Great Shape
7.	Laodicea (Denizil)	Bad Shape

D. Some have stated that these 7 Churches represent various time periods throughout history;

1. Ephesus—The first century
2. Smyrna—The persecution period of the 2nd and 3rd centuries
3. Pergamum—The Church of Constantine
4. Thyatira—The middle ages
5. Sardis—The reformation
6. Philadelphia—The Church of the modern missionary movement in the 18th century
7. Laodicea—The Church of the 20th-21st century

E. Although some of these Churches might have fit within various time periods of Church history, in my opinion this approach is a dangerous way to interpret the Bible. I believe there are three primary ways to view these Churches;

1. Past—Literal, historical Churches in specific geographic locations
2. Present—The Church era
3. Future—The Church at the end of this age

F. These seven churches were located on a circular route with Ephesus being the entry point to the other Churches. They were distribution churches where after receiving the message they would have shared it with the others (They were around 50 kilometers/30 miles apart / day's journey).

1. Colossians 4:16 "Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of Laodicea, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."

G. Each of the seven letters, spoken by Jesus have a consistent structure that run throughout all of them;

1. The Address

a. "To the angel of the Church in _____"

2. The Attribute

a. "These things says He who _____"

1. Within each of the Seven Letters Jesus reveals specific aspects of Himself that He previously revealed to John in Revelation 1. He applies these various descriptions to each ministry uniquely like a surgeon who is working with seven very different patients.

i. In Revelation 1 alone there are 24 unique descriptions of Jesus; (Jesus, Christ, Witness, Firstborn, Ruler, He who loved us, He who is coming, Who's voice is like a trumpet, Who's voice is like the sound of many waters, Alpha, Omega, First, Last, the One in the midst, Son of Man, clothed in a Garment down to His feet, Who's head and hair are white like wool as white as snow, Who's eyes are like a flame of fire, Who's feet are like fine brass, Who has seven stars in His Right hand, mouth like a sword, Who's countenance is like the sun, He who lives, He who has the keys of the kingdom and the keys of hades and of death).

3. The Approval
 - a. "I know your works."
4. The Accusation
 - a. "Yet I have this against you."
5. The Advice
 - a. "Or else I will come to you quickly..." "Repent, and do your first works" (1st Peter

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