

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

We are beginning the study of the final book of the Bible. It is, as it were, the climax of all the other books of the Holy Scriptures. So many other foolish vagaries and extravagant fancies have been published that many intelligent students of the Scriptures have turned away from the book of Revelation as a deep mystery that can not be understood. The book is not intended to be a puzzle, or an enigma which no one could solve. The writer expected his message to be understood by those who would spiritually discern its uncoverings.

Its very name signifies it can be understood; though all who approach its study must commit himself to a deeper delving into its truths, than any other book of the sacred volume requires. Here as in all other books, but in a greater degree, it is necessary that men shall have hearing ear and the understanding heart.

This book is called a "Revelation" of Jesus Christ of the things that must shortly come to pass. "The Greek word for the book is "Apocalypse", which means "uncovering". John used the word in the opening verse with the meaning that the covering is rolled off the future so that we may understand. So Revelation is not a sealed book, but the uncovering is done by the means of graphic symbolism. Doubtless, Christ resorted to symbolism to protect the book from destruction at the hands of the wicked institutions portrayed herein. Had such adversaries been called by their actual names they would have either destroyed the book, or declared the book of a later composition, because it named powers, religious and political, by names unknown until later centuries.

Again, symbolism was used that the true followers of Christ might know its mysteries, otherwise hidden to the worldling. Christ used this principle in speaking his parables. Upon one occasion as recorded in (Matthew 13:10-17) his disciples came asking "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" He answered and said unto them, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given."

Why Men Have Blundered

There are several reasons why men have made grave mistakes in their attempts to understand the apocalypse.

First: They have stumbled at the symbolism. Indeed it is pre-eminently a book of symbols. There passed before John's eyes, like a panoramic picture, a great painting of scenes, made to move past the onlooker.

As Daniel by the river Ulai, and Ezekial by the river Chebar, saw series of visions in which were caused to pass before their minds a series of pictures portraying events of the future, so the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos, as the New Testament Prophet, beheld a panorama of the "things shortly to come to pass" as the future was unfolded to John by symbols which fitly represented the things signified, so his visions are filled with symbols.

As in all Old Testament prophecy it is necessary for us to interpret symbols according to the laws of symbolism, so we find the same need in the apocalypse.

These symbols aptly represent events that are to take place in the political and religious arenas of history, particularly as they affect the fortunes of the true church of Christ.

John simply records what he saw. A prophet is a fore-seer. John saw upon the sky, or upon the waters of the sea, or on the sands of Patmos, the exact events he describes symbolically. It is our province to examine the symbols and determine their meaning, by a careful comparison with history.

Second: The apocalypse has been misunderstood because we have failed to study it in the light of history. These events were future history to John when he wrote, but most of them have become history now. It is well to hold this book of prophecy in one hand and the books of history in the other. Who could ever understand Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the man with the head of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron with feet of part iron and part clay without studying the history of the kingdoms of Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece and Rome.

He who would approach the study of Revelation, must be versed in the history of the church, with her attendant perils from political and spiritual adversaries. Such a student will discover to his unending delight that secular history has unwittingly fortified the book of Revelation.

PROLOGUE 1:1-8

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John; 2 who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw. 3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for the time is at hand.

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 that are before his throne; 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; 6 and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so, Amen.

8 I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

vs. 1 What a tender introduction is given by Christ to the church. This prologue runs through the first eight verses. This opening phrase could well read, "*The uncovering* by Jesus Christ, which God gave to show unto his servants." And the things shown were shortly to come to pass. The literal meaning is "to come to pass in quick succession." Christ sent and signified by his servant John or, he sent and sign-i-fied, uncovered the future in signs and symbols. He also signified by his angel. Throughout the apocalypse an angel appears to be employed in the task of unveiling the scenes that follow in successive order.

vs. 2 John bore record of all he saw and heard. A special emphasis is given here of his record because such world shattering events were revealed to him under such startling symbolism.

vs. 3 While the reading of any book of the Bible brings its blessing, it would seem that a special one is pronounced here upon the reader, the hearer and the faithful keeper of the "those things that are written therein." And it is an oft experienced fact that whether we can understand all that is written in this book or not yet it is always true that the book takes a peculiar hold upon the reader and hearer, as if to say, "stay by me, study me, search me." And this

grip the apocalypse lays upon the one who studies its contents is further enhanced by the fact that "the time is at hand."

vs. 4 Now John begins to deliver the record of the visions given him to be in turn, given to the seven churches of Asia. The Asia of John's day did not refer to our Asia as we understand it today, but rather to the Roman province called Asia of which Ephesus was the capitol. All seven churches named in verse 11, were in that province. It would seem that seven, the perfect and sacred Scriptural number was chosen, because the seven were to refer not alone to the seven individual churches within the province, but symbolize the whole church of Christ throughout her history. This becomes patent when we keep in mind that John was to write of "the things which *thou hast seen*, and the *things which are*, and the things which *shall be hereafter*. (Rev. 1:19)

Again he addressed himself to more than the seven individual churches, because we know there were more than seven churches in the province of Asia at this time. The New Testament speaks also of Colosse, Meletus (Acts 20:17) and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13)

Even a casual study of the salutations and benedictions of each church of the seven demonstrates to us that these refer to seven great epochs or periods in the entire history of the church.

The benediction, like that in other New Testament Epistles, shows that Revelation is also classified by John as an epistle. While this epistle is addressed to seven individual churches, yet through them it is addressed to all the churches in every age.

Grace comes from the Holy Spirit, the numbers even indicating fullness, completeness, perfection. In (Rev. 3:1) we read "These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God." Christ, the speaker, has the fullness of the Spirit. Whereas, the apostles had the baptismal degree, others had a less measure conferred by the laying on of the apostle's hands, and those obedient to the gospel have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, as a teacher, comforter, energizer. Christ had the spirit without measure. "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the Words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him." (John 3:34) To give anything by measure indicates a partial, scanty bestowal. The Spirit of God, even in inspired prophets was but a partial and intermittent gift, but in Jesus, the Son of God, the Spirit of God dwelt fully and uninterruptedly. The present tense, "giveth" indicates a continuous communication of the Spirit. If Christ had received

the Spirit "by measure", then his gift of the Spirit could become exhausted. Hence the fullness of the Spirit possessed by Christ, is presented by John as the seven Spirits of God. This benediction comes from the Christ in whom "dwelleth the fullness of the God-head bodily." (Colossians 2:9)

vs. 5 We are loosed from our sins by the shedding of Christ's blood, which is applied to us when we are "baptized into his death," where He shed His blood. And through Christ's resurrection from the dead, life and immortality are brought to light for us all as we arise from baptism to walk in newness of life.

vs. 6 In Christ's church, or kingdom, each obedient baptized believer is a priest. No Christian needs a priest to offer up sacrifice for him, for he can go directly to the throne of grace, "by a new and living way, which He (Christ) hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say the flesh" (Hebrews 10:20) Peter, himself, said, "ye are a chosen generation, a royal *priesthood*, a holy nation, a peculiar people." (I Peter 2:9)

vs. 7 This refers to Christ's second advent when He shall return to judge all nations (Matthew 25:31-46). (Acts 1:9,11). The clouds always accompany Christ's heavenly presence. All shall see Him because He will judge all and Israel which pierced Him in the crucifixion shall see him. While all shall see Him in His return, they particularly are selected out because of what they did to Him in the flesh. John here quotes (Zech. 12:10). Consternation shall reign because it will be the time of judgment.

It cannot be too carefully noted that here, as in many other references to His return. Christ makes his second advent at the time of judgment and not before.

vs. 8 Alpha and Omega—the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, hence also called "the beginning and the end." All begins with Him and He will ring down the curtain on the drama of human history.

This verse closes the introduction and the apocalypse proper begins with verse nine. Verse nine marks the beginning of Part 1, of Division 1, of Revelation.

BEGINNING OF APOCALYPSE

PART I

Text (1:9-20)

APOCALYPSE PROPER BEGINS

9 I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet 11 saying, What thou seest, write in a book and send it to the seven churches: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. 12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks; 13 and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. 14 And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; 15 and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters. 16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. 17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, 18 and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 19 Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter; 20 the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks are seven churches.

vs. 9 John here names himself for the third time and twice again in Revelation he names himself by name (Rev. 21:2) and (Rev. 22:8).

He is an apostle, but walks as a brother not exalting himself above his brethren as men have done in later centuries who claim apostolic succession. He remembered Christ's injunction, "But be not ye called Rabbi for one is your Master, even Christ: and all ye are brethren." (Matthew 23:8).

He was a companion in tribulation because he was a partaker of the suffering of the church of Ephesus and of all the churches throughout the seven periods of history.

He was in the isle called Patmos. Our knowledge of the place of the revelation to John rests upon the testimony of John himself. It is a small island in the southern part of the Aegean Sea. Here he

was in banishment under the reign of Domitian, because of his faithful witness for the Word of God.

vs. 10 He was absent from the saints assembled in Ephesus—a few miles across the sea—but he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day. The expression “The Lord’s Day” does not occur in the earlier writings of the apostles; they always speak of this day as “the first day of the week”, when Christians came together to commune (Acts 20:7) and to hear the preaching (Acts 20:7) and to “lay by in store as the Lord had prospered them (I Cor. 16:2). But we find the writers of the second century used the term “the Lord’s Day.” Epistles of Barnabas, Ignatius and Dionysius, written about this time, call the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day and the name is of common occurrence from that time forward. Incidentally, this term, then, points to a period near the beginning of the second century as the date of the writing of the apocalypse.

How natural to so refer to the day as the Lord’s Day. On the Lord’s day, or the first day of the week, the church was born on Pentecost—a first day of the week, which followed the seventh Sabbath after the one which fell in the Passover week. On this day the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles. On this day they preached the first gospel sermon, on this day began the adding to those being saved. Since the Lord’s Day, or first day of the week was the day of worship under the Christian Dispensation, how fitting that the apocalypse should be given on that day.

vs. 11, 12 As John turned to see the speaker whose voice he had heard, his eyes rested upon a vision of surpassing glory. The first objects that drew his attention were seven golden candlesticks, which (Rev. 1:20) informs us are the seven churches, which in turn represent the seven great epochs in the history of the church.

And standing in the midst of the candlesticks he saw one “like unto the Son of Man”,—not like the Son of Man John had seen in the day of his flesh when Christ walked among men, but more like the glorified Christ he had seen on the Mount of Transfiguration. Every manifestation the glory of Diety is accompanied with brilliant splendor.

Whether the burning bush of Horeb, the glory of Sinai, the Shekinah of the Holy of Holies, the Transfigured Christ on Hermon, the Son of man on Patmos, all indicate that where ever Diety manifests itself there is no darkness at all.

In the great intercessor prayer (17th Chapter of John) Christ

had prayed "that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me" and here is the beginning of the answer to that prayer when John beheld Him in all his heavenly splendor.

vs. 13 Moving amidst the seven golden candlesticks or the church in its sevenfold development, He was keeping his commission promise, "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

He was dressed in the long robe of the High Priest and girt about with the girde of a King. His voice was as the sound of surging waters. Here He is represented in His three-fold office, Prophet, Priest and King.

vs. 14 His white hair portrayed glorious purity. His eyes were as a flame of fire—fiery eyes with which to see everywhere, for all things and all lives are naked and open to Him.

vs. 15, 16 Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. This is a symbol of the Word by which Christ carries on his spiritual warfare and wins all conquests. The Christian soldier is to be armed with "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph. 6:17) and this sword, "the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12)

This was the sword with which Christ should smite the nations (Rev. 19:15).

vs. 17 Though John had been familiar with the lowly Son of man, and had seen His glorious transfiguration, when he beheld the transcendent vision of Patmos, his heart failed him, and he fell at Christ's feet as one dead. But when the hand that held the seven stars was laid upon him it was with the same tender touch of the yesteryears. Then the Lord revealed the purpose of His appearing unto John, "Fear Not." How often in the days of His flesh had he said to His disciples, "Fear not!"

vs. 18 Christ here bears testimony to his own life, death and resurrection. He pronounces his own "Amen" to his declaration.

He said He had the keys of hell, or Hades and of Death. When Peter confessed Him in the coasts of Caesarea Philippi as the Christ the Son of the Living God, Christ had declared, "Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell (Hades) shall not

prevail against it." (Matt. 16:13-18). And on Pentecost, the birthday of the church of Christ, Peter proclaimed in the first gospel sermon the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and as he came to the climax of that message he said, "He seeing this before spoke of the Resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell (Hades), neither did his flesh see corruption." (Acts 2:31)

Christ proved the truth of Peter's confession of Him as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, by coming back from Hades, whose gates could not prevail against his diety. Not only was Christ triumphant over death, but the very gates of death and Hades are under His dominion. Hence, He was able to deliver John who had fallen as one dead, but all who love and obey Him from the bonds of death.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them, who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14-15)

vs. 19 Christ divided up the apocalyptic visions into three parts; viz. the past, the present, and the future. He was to write of the things he had seen during his life time, the things as they were at the time of the Patmos visions, and the things which would fall under the time denoted as "the hereafter."

vs. 20 Christ explains the mystery of the seven Stars and the seven candlesticks. The seven stars He declares are the angels of the seven churches, represented by the seven candlesticks.

The word angel means "a messenger" and is equally applicable to the messenger of God, as well as of man.

This last verse of the first chapter is of special signification in that it throws light upon the *Book as a whole*, giving us a clear understanding of the *principle upon which the Book is to be interpreted*.

In Mark 1:2 referring to John the Baptizer, Mark quotes from Malachi, "Behold I send my messenger before my face, which shall prepare thy way before thee."

It certainly holds the same meaning in this passage, for it is self evident these letters were not sent to the angels of God. The messengers were men filling some office in connection with the churches.

The term could not refer to a diocesan bishop, for such an office

did not exist until the church apostatized from the New Testament pattern. The term can hardly refer to an elder for all the churches of the first century had a plurality of elders. It would seem more likely to refer to the preachers or evangelists of the churches. Particularly does this become so when we recall that each church represents a church epoch or period. This apocalyptic uncovering is entrusted to the preachers throughout the sevenfold history of the church. Christ was holding them in His hand to support and strengthen them throughout the gospel age.

CHAPTER II

LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

INTRODUCTION

The letters to the seven churches of Asia were composed in accordance with an exact literary arrangement. Each one consists of the same parts: a salutation to the church addressed; a description of Christ from some particular aspect with direct relation to the spiritual condition of the church; a message of praise or censure; exhortations in keeping with the special need, a promise to him that overcometh and an admonition "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

The only exception to this symmetry is in the matter of the last part—the admonition. In each of the first three letters it precedes the promise to the overcomer; in the last four letters it follows his promise.

The distinction makes two groups of letters, one of three and the other of four, just as the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven vials are divided into two groups each, of four and three. In this study of the seven letters see chart following page 41.

The Church in Ephesus

Text (2:1-7)

1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: **2** I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and