

Jesus Christ

the Alpha and Omega

An exposition of
Revelation Chapter 1

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Introduction to Revelation

The word Revelation is derived from the Greek word Apocalypse, which means an unveiling or revealing. The gospels are the unveiling of Jesus during his earthly ministry, but the book of Revelation is an unveiling of Jesus after his ascension. It portrays Jesus Christ in his heavenly state, in which he guides and protects his church on earth.

Revelation reveals events in heaven and on earth in connection with the great controversy between the powers of light and the powers of darkness; between Christ and Satan; between the church of Christ and the synagogue of Satan. It is in this context that the great lines of prophecy in the book Revelation should be interpreted.

Revelation comes from God

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him...

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

Purpose of the book of Revelation

...to show to his servants - things which must shortly take place...

The purpose of the book of Revelation is to inform God's people. Therefore this book needs to be studied, understood and explained to the people.

How was Revelation given?

Four persons were involved in bringing the truth to God's people - God the Father, Christ the Son, the angel of God, and the prophet John.

...And He sent and signified it by his angel to his servant John v1

This is the biblical order by which God reveals his truth to his people.

How was Revelation recorded?

who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. v2

John saw and heard and then he wrote.

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

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

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

A special blessing on the public reader of Revelation

Revelation opens with a blessing on the reader and it closes with a curse upon any who add to or subtract from any part of it.

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it...

This refers to the public reading of the book. At that time and through most of history, letters and news items were publicly read to the people. This was probably because some were illiterate. In the synagogue service at Nazareth for example, Jesus was given the scripture to read publicly (Luke 4:16-17). Today the word of God is still publicly read in church services.

There is also a blessing on the hearers of the book. This is probably to encourage people to listen to its messages. Maybe God foresaw how unpopular the book of Revelation would be.

Thirdly, a blessing is given on those who keep the things that are written in the book. The word *keep* means to continually or habitually observe. This calls for our investigation into what God is commanding us to habitually keep.

Interpreting Revelation

There are a number of laws of biblical interpretation. These are to keep the Bible student from arriving at erroneous conclusions.

Revelation 1 demonstrates two of these principles. The first is the law of repetition and enlargement. The second is the law of the first and the last. See Appendix A.

Time period to which Revelation applies

...for the time is near. v3

This indicates that the book of Revelation applied at least to John's day - the first century AD. Through the years some have claimed that the book of Revelation was written only for John's day, for the seven local churches in Asia Minor, for the time of pagan Rome when fierce persecutions were meted out to the church by the Caesars.

On the other hand there are some who claim that the book only applies to the last days of earth's history and that everything in it should be interpreted in the light of the last days.

However the instructions of Christ himself to John clearly reveal that the messages of Revelation are for the past, the present and the future.

Write the things which you have seen (past), and the things which are (present) and the things which will take place after this (future) Revelation 1:19

In fact a close examination of the book, as will be shown in later chapters, reveals that the book applies to five different periods of time ¹

1. John's day
2. Time between John's day and the present
3. The present (the last days)
4. The close of the great controversy between good and evil
5. The new earth and the joy and triumph of the saints

¹ Ellen G White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (California: Pacific Press Publishing Assn, 1911), 484.

John's day

In John's day there was a special need for the messages. John was the only apostle still living. All the other apostles had been martyred. The church of God was in great peril and there was need for special counsel, guidance and comfort.

The believers' first love was growing cold. The old standard bearers had fallen at their posts and the younger ministers, desiring for something novel introduced new aspects of doctrine that were pleasing but contrary to the fundamentals of the faith. This led to questioning the experiences of the past causing confusion and unbelief.

The eyes of many were turned from Jesus as the author and finisher of the faith, to unimportant trivia. Piety waned and satanic influences seemed to dominate.

At this time John was banished to Patmos. Never was his counsel needed more than now. True believers, now a minority, were facing fierce opposition. It looked as if the enemies of the faith would triumph, but Jesus Christ though in heaven, was in charge, 'I am with you always' he had promised and he converted the seeming disaster of John's exile into a marvelous blessing for the church.

On Patmos John had the opportunity to receive a revelation from God of Christ and his truth for the enlightenment of the churches that was to strengthen the churches to the end of time.²

How often in the history of the church has God turned Patmos experiences into untold blessings for his people.

Revelation's first application was to *the seven churches which were in Asia* v4. Asia refers to western Asia Minor, which was ruled by a proconsul of Rome.

The Godhead introduced

...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, and from Jesus Christ. v4-5

The three members of the Godhead are featured:

1. God the Father *which is and which was and which is to come* - the unchangeable one. *I am the Lord, I change not Malachi 3:6*
2. The Holy Spirit, likened to *seven Spirits*. This refers to the seven qualities of the Holy Spirit as presented by Isaiah the prophet. *And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him (Messiah) the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Isaiah 11:2.*
3. Jesus Christ, who is given three titles:
...the faithful witness, the first born from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. v5

² Ibid, 581

...the faithful witness refers first to Christ's ministry on earth and his earthly witness for his Father - a fulfillment of the messianic prediction:

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

What a faithful witness Jesus Christ was to his heavenly Father. In heaven Jesus is still God's faithful witness. We can safely depend upon his testimony concerning the Father.

...the first born from the dead... The term *firstborn* could mean the *first* or *chief*. Jesus was the chief of those who have risen from the dead. He was not the first from the dead in regard to time, but he was the first in regard to status. At least three New Testament people had risen from the dead before him, namely, Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus and the widow of Nain's son. Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee that all others shall rise:

Because I live you will live also. John 14:19

This fulfilled another messianic prediction.

Also I will make him (Messiah) my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. Psalms 89:27

...the highest of the kings of the earth. Originally, Adam was the prince or ruler of this earth but he lost his position to Lucifer. Jesus won back this world and his rightful position at Calvary.

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 for ever and ever. Amen. Revelation 1:5-6

To him who loved (or loves) us...

Christ's love is eternal. Though He is at the centre of the universe, amid millions of sinless adoring beings, there is no diminution of his love for human kind. As the gospel song says:

*O love of God, how strong and true, eternal, and yet ever new.
Uncomprehended and unbought, beyond all knowledge and all thought.*

...and washed us from our sins in his own blood...

The word *washed* can be translated *loosed*. He has loosed us from the burden of guilt. However, it may include *washing*.

If I do not wash you, you have no part with me. John 13:8

The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:7

Only Jesus' blood can wash away our sin. All other blood defiles. Jesus' sacrifice is the greatest demonstration of his love for us.

*Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.
John 15:13*

So great was Jesus' love for mankind that he also laid down his life for his enemies – for those who hated and crucified him.

The word 'washing' is borrowed from the service of the Old Testament priesthood. Before entering the sanctuary to perform their service, the priests washed in the laver in the courtyard. So it is with Christians; before they are initiated into the spiritual priesthood of believers, they must be washed in the blood of the Lamb.

*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the **washing of regeneration**, and renewing of the Holy Spirit... Titus3:5*

...and has made us kings and priests to His God and (or even) Father...

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

God's original plan for ancient Israel was for them to take the knowledge of the true God to the nations, but they failed. God's final plan for taking the truth to the nations is to choose believers from all nations – the Christian church – and make of them a spiritual kingdom of priests to fulfill his mission.

But you (Christians) are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light... 1 Peter 2:9

Believers, as spiritual priests, are to intercede for men. They also (like priests of old) are to teach men - *go ye and teach all nations*. Like the priests of old, they are to offer sacrifices on behalf of mankind. But their sacrifices are spiritual sacrifices.

*You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up **spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:5*

A doxology of praise

...to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. v6

In the first seven chapters of Revelation there are four doxologies, each one stronger than the preceding one. This particular doxology is two-fold. In 4:9-11 the doxology is three-fold, in 5:13 it is four-fold, and the doxology of 7:12 is seven-fold.

How deserving is Jesus to receive glory and dominion? He has won back the lost kingdom of this world. To accomplish it, he gave up his glory, even at the risk of losing it forever. He gave up his dominion. He left heaven and became a man. He lived a life of poverty. He was a servant and he died, even the death of the cross.

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

Revelation's keynote – the Second Coming

Behold, he is coming...

The first chapter of Revelation emphasises the Second Advent of Christ and the last chapter emphasizes the same.

Behold I come quickly . . . even so come Lord Jesus Revelation 22:12, 22.

Almost every line of prophecy in the book concludes with the Second Advent, eg the seven churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the three angels' messages, the seven last plagues, and so on.

One Bible scholar declares,

In one respect there is agreement, the Revelation aims at assuring the church of the advent of her Lord. It is the book of the Coming One – every school of interpretation will admit this. . . all appear to unite in regard to the Apocalypse as the book of the advent.³

Significance of clouds

... with clouds... v7

This phrase accords with the angelic promise at Jesus' ascension.

*This same Jesus... will so come in **like manner** as you saw him go into heaven... Acts 1:11.*

...a cloud received him out of their sight v9.

Jesus ascended to heaven in a cloud and he returns with clouds. Some claim that the clouds represent trouble - he returns in the midst of trouble. Others claim they represent obscurity. However the term *clouds* comes from Daniel 7:13, a messianic prediction:

*I was watching in the night visions, and, behold one like the Son of man, **coming with the clouds of heaven!** He came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him (the Son) near before him. Daniel 7:13*

It is clear that the clouds transport Christ into the presence of the Father. Who is it that transports the Deity? Does the Deity employ a special mode of transport?

He rode upon a cherub, and flew... Psalms 18:10

³ Edward B Elliott, *Commentary on Revelation* (London: Seely, Jackson & Halliday, 1762), 17.

The chariots of God are...thousands of thousands (of angels); the Lord is among them Psalms 68:17

Multiplied millions of angels accompany Christ at the Second Advent.

...all the holy angels with him... Matthew 25:31.

In the distance they appear like a vast cloud because of their glory.

...and every eye will see him...

This indicates the universal extent of the Second Advent. Some believe that this refers to every spiritual eye, that only God's people behold Christ. But the text says

...And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him... V7

indicating that all on earth are aware of Christ's approach to the earth. But how will every eye see him? Is this not a physical impossibility? Those on the other side of the world could not possibly see him, it is said. Does every eye see the sun? Yes, but not at the same time; so with the population of the world. Every eye sees Christ, but not necessarily at the same time. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that every one on earth will see Jesus **at the same time**, at the Second Advent.

This statement demolishes the secret rapture theory which holds that only the saved are raptured at the Advent, that Christ comes secretly and silently and snatches away the righteous, that the unsaved do not witness the Advent. In fact so involved are the unsaved in the Second Advent that even some of the unsaved dead are affected.

A special resurrection

...every eye will see him, even they who pierced (or crucified) him

How will those that pierced him behold Jesus at the Second Advent, when they have been dead for about 2,000 years? This demands a resurrection. Jesus warned the Jewish leaders who condemned him, that one day they also would behold his return.

But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to him, 'I put you under oath by the living God: tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God'. Jesus said to him, 'It is as you said.' Nevertheless I say to you, 'Hereafter you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.' Matthew 26:63-64

Do other scriptures confirm that there will be a resurrection prior to the Second Advent in which the Jewish leaders could be raised up? Yes - during the time of trouble immediately preceding the Second Advent.

At that time Michael shall stand up (or reign), the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation. even to that same time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:1-2

This resurrection can be referred to as *the partial resurrection*. There will be some of the saved and some of the unsaved involved. Undoubtedly the Roman soldiers who pierced Jesus and the chief priests will at that time be raised from the dead in order to behold his return.

What a dramatic contrast this will be compared with the trial of Jesus. Now the tables will be turned. What a terrifying experience. Those who condemned him so unjustly to the cruelest of deaths, now see him returning as King of kings. The one whom they mocked in his agonies, whom they taunted to come down from the cross if he were really the Messiah, who even at his resurrection spread the lying rumour that his body was stolen by his disciples, is now beheld returning in power and glory, as he predicted at his trial.

Here we see the justice of God displayed. Men may appear to succeed in defying God but finally the warning will be fulfilled, *Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay.*

The world mourns in remorse

...all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him... v7

Why do they all wail? Because they know it is doomsday. How do they know?

1. Because in the final proclamation of the last gospel message to the world in what is called *The Loud Cry of Revelation 18*, the whole world will hear the truth of the Second Advent, but unfortunately the majority will spurn it.
2. Amid the cataclysmic events of the Second Advent there appears a dramatic sign in the eastern heavens. As Jesus predicted:

...the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven... Matthew 24:29-30

The shaking of the powers of heaven is described by the apostle John in Revelation 6.

The sky (atmospheric) receded as a scroll when it is rolled up. Revelation 6:14

At the Second Advent the cloudy atmosphere rolls away, enabling the inhabitants of earth to see into the distant heavens and thus they see Jesus coming with the host of heaven. They initially appear as a small dark cloud in the distance, and this is called *the sign of the Son of man*.

This small cloud must be so unusual, so dramatic, so distinctive that the whole world will know what it means. The very event they rejected and ridiculed when it was proclaimed is now taking place in awful grandeur. Imagine the abject remorse and terrible regret of the inhabitants of the world. No wonder all kindreds of the earth shall wail or howl because of him. How important to heed the warning of Jesus:

Watch therefore for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. Matthew 24:42

Significance of Christ's titles

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. v8

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and denote all embracing, all comprehending, the self-existent one. The term is used three times in Revelation and it applies to God the Father and God the Son.

Almighty is used nine times in Revelation and mostly applies to the Father, illustrating his omnipotence. It also applies to Christ. It is true that Christ is described in scripture as the mighty God. In fact, all the titles and prerogatives of the Father also apply to the Son. He is even addressed as *the everlasting Father* (Isaiah 9:6)

...I heard behind me a loud voice as of a trumpet saying, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega the First and the Last... v10-11

The book of Revelation is based on the Old Testament and the two Hebrew letters Aleph and Tau were also associated with the high priest of the Old Testament temple.

In this first chapter of Revelation Jesus is also presented as a priest in the heavenly temple and therefore Aleph and Tau are connected with him. On the breastplate of the high priest of the Old Testament were two stones called *Urim* and *Thummin*. *Urim* commenced with the letter Aleph and *Thummin* commenced with the letter Tau.

The purpose of these two stones was to reveal the will of God. When it was essential to learn God's will in a matter the high priest consulted the Lord. If God responded in the affirmative a bright light would appear on Aleph. If the answer was No, a cloud would appear on Tau. The Aleph and Tau or Alpha and Omega were the medium by which God revealed his will to man.

Who was God's medium of revelation in the New Testament? Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and man. The reason why Jesus is called the Alpha and Omega is that he is the Revelator.

The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him. John 1:18

No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal him. Matthew 11:27

John, the Author

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. v9

John gives himself three designations –

1. ...*your brother* Though he was a leading apostle, the only one remaining, he still regards himself as a brother to the rest of the believers. No kingly power is revealed here, no my lord bishop or your holiness but brother, in response to the instruction of Jesus: *all ye are brethren*. There is no class distinction with Christ.

2. ... *companion in tribulation* Persecution was afflicting the church and John had many fellow sufferers but he was one with them in their afflictions.
3. ... *kingdom and patience of Jesus*, ie remaining patient in Jesus in the present kingdom of grace. When we abide in Christ enabling power is given to patiently endure. We must endure much tribulation to enter the kingdom of God. Acts 14:22

Isle of Patmos

...on the island that is called Patmos...

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

...for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

John was punished on account of the Word of God. Notice the term *Word of God* is closely connected with the testimony of Jesus Christ. Some manuscripts read *the Word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ* indicating that the word of God and the testimony of Jesus are identical.

Why was John in Patmos for the Word of God?

Background of John's imprisonment

More than half a century had passed since the organisation of the Christian Church. During that time the gospel message had been constantly opposed. Its enemies the Jews had never relaxed their efforts, and had at last succeeded in enlisting the support of the Roman Emperor against the Christians.

In the terrible persecution that followed the apostle John did much to confirm and strengthen the faith of the believers. He bore a testimony which his adversaries could not controvert and which helped his brethren to meet with courage and loyalty the trials that came upon them.

When the faith of the Christians would seem to waver under the fierce opposition they were forced to meet, the old, tried servant of Jesus would tell with power and eloquence the story of the crucified and risen Saviour. He steadfastly maintained his faith and from his lips came ever the same glad message:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life...and we have seen and bear witness and declare to you... 1 John 1:1-3

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

The rulers of the Jews were filled with bitter hatred against John for his unwavering fidelity to the cause of Christ. They declared that their efforts against the Christians

would avail nothing so long as John's testimony kept ringing in the ears of the people. In order that the miracles and teachings of Jesus might be forgotten, the voice of the bold witness must be silenced.

John was accordingly summoned to Rome to be tried for his faith. Here before the authorities, the apostle's doctrines were misstated. False witnesses accused him of teaching seditious heresies. By these accusations his enemies hoped to bring about the disciple's death.

John answered for himself in a clear and convincing manner, and with such simplicity and candor that his words had a powerful effect. His hearers were astonished at his wisdom and eloquence. But the more convincing his testimony, the deeper was the hatred of those who opposed him. The Emperor Domitian was filled with rage. He could neither dispute the reasoning of Christ's faithful advocate nor match the power that attended his utterance of truth; yet he determined he would silence his voice.

John was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil; but the Lord preserved the life of his faithful servant, even as he preserved the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace. As the words were spoken, *thus perish all those who believe that deceiver Jesus Christ of Nazareth*, John declared

*My master patiently submitted to all that Satan and his angels could devise to humiliate and torture him. He gave his life to save the world. I am honoured in being able to suffer for his sake. I am a weak sinful man. Christ was holy, harmless, undefiled. He did no sin, and neither was guile found in his mouth*⁴.

These words had their influence and John was removed from the cauldron by the very men who had cast him in. Again the hand of persecution fell heavily upon the apostle. By the emperor's decree John was banished to the Isle of Patmos, condemned *for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ*. Here, his enemies thought, his influence would no longer be felt and he must finally die of hardship and distress.⁴

John proclaimed Jesus Christ as the God-man. His message collided with Domitian the Roman emperor who proclaimed himself the man-god. Under Domitian emperor worship for the first time became an issue for the Christians. This was particularly so in the province of Asia, where John's letters were directed and where John had resided and laboured.⁵

Patmos visions given on the Sabbath

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day... v10

in the Spirit means that John was in vision.

In the original Greek *the Lord's Day* is rendered *the Lord's*. The word *day* is taken for granted but it is not in the original. This is one of the few verses in the New Testament used as authority for Sunday observance, but in fact the text gives no clue as to which day is the Lord's day.

⁴ White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 568-570.

⁵ Francis D Nicholl (Ed), *Seventh Day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Assn, 1955), Vol 2, 721.

To discover which day is the Lord's Day it is essential that we examine other scriptures. What Lord was John alluding to? Was it the Roman emperor who was proclaimed Lord at that time? No! Was it the sun god who also was addressed as Lord and had Sunday dedicated to him? No, it was Jesus Christ – *One Lord, one faith, one baptism (Ephesians 4:5)*.

Which day is Christ's day? Which day does Jesus Christ declare he is Lord of? At least eight different scriptures give the answer that the seventh-day Sabbath is the Lord's day. Two verses from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament will serve as examples:

...the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. Exodus 20:10

...the Sabbath... the holy day of the Lord... Isaiah 58:13

The Son of Man (Christ) is also Lord of the Sabbath. Mark 2:28

For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Matthew 12:8

Scripture provides no hint that Jesus Christ is Lord of any other day. On the contrary, history clearly reveals that the title of *Lord's day* for Sunday originated with sun worship. This was in opposition to the biblical Lord's Day, which was the seventh day Sabbath of the fourth commandment.

As unbiased scholars have declared:

Our observance of Sunday as the Lord's day is apparently derived from Mithraism. The argument that has sometimes been used against this claim, namely that Sunday was chosen because of the resurrection of that day, is not well supported.⁶

As a solar festival, Sunday was the sacred day of Mithra; and it is interesting to notice that since Mithra was addressed as Dominus (Lord) Sunday must have been the Lord's day long before the Christian times.⁷

Lucien, the Catholic historian, declared –

In the year 325 AD Sylvester, Bishop of Rome, 314-337 AD officially changed the title of the first day, calling it the Lord's day.⁸

A key to understanding Revelation

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

⁶ Gordon J Laing, *Survivals of Roman Religion* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co, 1931), 148

⁷ Arthur E Weigall, *Paganism in Our Christianity* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1928), 145.

⁸ Joseph Bidez & Leon Parmentier (Eds), *Historia Ecclesiastica*, (London: 1898), ?.

Seven churches

...What you see write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia... v11

Why seven churches? Numerous godly scholars in the past have recognised that the names of the seven churches are symbolic of the true church in different periods of the Christian era. The number seven indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages extend to the end of time, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world.

According to Dr LF Froom in his monumental book *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, over 44 scholars have agreed that the seven churches represent the seven periods of the Christian church from the First to the Second Advent of Christ.

A sanctuary scene

Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me... I saw seven golden lampstands. v12

These seven lampstands were originally situated in the Holy Place or first apartment of the Jewish temple. The fact that they are featured in this chapter indicates that we have before us a scene in the heavenly sanctuary. Revelation consists mostly of a series of sanctuary scenes and in order to understand the book correctly it is essential to understand the truth of the heavenly sanctuary. This is one of the main keys in understanding this remarkable book.

Significance of Son of man among the lampstands

...and in the midst of the seven lampstands, one like the Son of man. v13

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

He is among the lampstands. The lampstands represent the seven churches (v20), ie the church of God on earth. Thus Jesus is pictured among his people. *Lo I am with you always... (Matthew 28:20).*

Jesus in Revelation 1

Eight-fold picture of the resurrected Christ

Revelation 1:13-16 is a description of the resurrected, glorified Christ. Eight points are presented. Eight in scripture is a number frequently associated with resurrection and regeneration.

1. **...clothed with a garment down to the feet, and girded about the chest with a golden band.** v13. This represents kingly and priestly dignity and applies to Jesus as king-priest of the order of Melchizedek, the priest-king of ancient Salem. *You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6)*
2. **His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow...** This does not indicate decay or senility but the venerable sign of knowledge, mature judgment and solid wisdom.
3. **...and his eyes like a flame of fire** v14. Christ sees the good and also the evil to which he is opposed and aims to consume.
4. **His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace...** This suggests treading down in destruction all who choose sin (see Appendix A).
5. **...and his voice as the sound of many waters** v15. This conveys Christ's majesty, power and authority as Creator.
6. **He had in his right hand seven stars...** The right hand denotes power, authority and protection. The fact that the stars are in Jesus' right hand implies a close and protective relationship between Christ and his faithful servants.
7. **...out of his mouth went a sharp, two-edged sword...** This represents the power of Christ's word, especially in the execution of judgment.
8. **...his countenance was like the sun shining in its strength** v16. This signifies Christ's holiness and divinity. *Dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto (1 Timothy 6:16)*. This reminds us of Moses' face, which after forty days in God's presence on Mt Sinai shone to such an extent that he was compelled to cover it with a veil so that the people could not see it (Exodus 34:28-35). So Jesus' countenance, in the fullness of his divinity in his glorified state, shines as the sun.

There are ten parallels between Revelation 1:13-17 and Daniel 10:5-12. Daniel 10 brings to view a particular person who reveals to him the coming king of the north. This person is none other than the Son of God.

And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead... v17

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

Significance of First and Last

...But he laid his right hand on me, saying to me, Do not be afraid; I am the First and Last. I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive evermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and Death. v17-18

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

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

I am the First and I am the Last; besides me there is no God. Isaiah 44:6

I am he, I am the First, I am also the Last. Isaiah 48:12

What is the significance of this term? It was used by God expressly to encourage and comfort Israel in the time of Isaiah. The prophet was shown that Babylon would become a threat to Israel. In Isaiah 39:1-2 is recorded the visit of the Babylonians to Jerusalem to enquire about Hezekiah's healing. Overcome by the occasion Hezekiah revealed everything he possessed to the Babylonians, who would later return and invade Judah taking everything away.

Already Hezekiah had experienced a tremendous invasion by the Assyrians from whom he had been miraculously delivered (Isaiah 36-37). In Isaiah 42-45 the prophet declared that though Babylon would conquer the Jews yet God would finally overthrow it (Isaiah 43:14; 44:26-28).

In the midst of this message of deliverance God titles himself *the First and the Last*. The term means that in the great controversies between Babylon and Jerusalem, between Christ and Satan, God would be both first and last on the field of conflict. In other words, he would be completely victorious over his enemies and would destroy them.

This same message is conveyed in the book of Revelation. The great controversy between good and evil - the conflict between the church and her enemies - is the theme throughout the book. This theme should underpin the interpretation of every prophetic outline. Thus in the introduction of Revelation, *the First and the Last* is a most fitting and powerfully appropriate symbol.

Jesus declares himself as victor over the enemies of his people. He is the first on the battlefield - he is fully prepared, he is never taken by surprise, every provision has been made. He is also the last on the battlefield, meaning that the enemy has either been put to flight or destroyed. Jesus is and will be victorious. The saints will triumph. The powers of evil will be overcome. Jesus is the first and the last.

Jesus the source of eternal life

I am he who lives and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore...

The Greek renders this passage

I am... the living one (yet) I became dead and behold I am alive (or I am living) forever.

Here Jesus speaks of himself as the living one. This conveys the notion of *continuously living* indicating that Jesus has eternal life in himself.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. John 1:4

*That was the true Light, which gives light to every man coming into the world.
John 1:9*

*As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in
Himself. John 5:26*

In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Note: This is a figure in which the sentence is inverted/repeated backwards; the main subject is returned to after a digression).

I became dead... and I am alive forevermore. (Greek)

What a world of experience is packed into this verse. It alludes to Christ's agonies in Gethsemane and at Calvary, as well as to his glorious resurrection and his ascension.

How did Jesus gain the keys of death?

...And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. v18

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

...him who had the power (or dominion) of death, that is the devil. Hebrews 2:14

The grave is Satan's arsenal and stronghold.

On this rock will I build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (the church). Matthew 16:18

The gates of Hades represent the arsenal of Satan. He claims the dead as his property because they have transgressed the law. In order for Christ to conquer death and the grave it was essential that he enter the arsenal or stronghold of Satan and seize the keys.

*When a strong man fully armed guards his own palace, his goods are in peace.
But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armour in which he trusted and divides his spoils. Luke 11:21-22.*

Jesus by death, entered Satan's stronghold. He took part of the same (flesh and blood), that through death, he might destroy him that had the power (or dominion) of death, that is the devil. (Hebrews 2:14) In this experience we have a dramatic episode in the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

Satan mustered all his forces, principalities and powers, to keep Jesus imprisoned in the tomb. Not only were Roman guards keeping their watch. There were unseen watchers. The superhuman angelic powers of darkness were present. Had it been possible, the prince of darkness with his hosts would have kept forever sealed the tomb that held the Son of God.⁹

⁹ Ellen G White, *The Desire of Ages* (California: Pacific Publishing Assn, 1898), 530.

Jesus' deity and resurrection

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

Having disarmed principalities and powers (of Satan) He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Margin – in himself) Colossians 2:15

...he disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him. RSV

The devil and all the powers of hell, were conquered and disarmed by the dying Redeemer. The Redeemer conquered by dying.¹⁰

Thus his resurrection and ascension are a public, solemn triumph over the principalities and powers of death. It is striking that the heathen oracles were silenced soon after Christ's ascension.¹¹

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

The Father who dwells in me does the works. John 14:10

Undoubtedly heavenly angels played a part in the miracles of Christ.¹² Jesus chose not to use his own divine power. That would have given him advantages over his fellow human beings, for whom he is the great exemplar. Jesus was totally dependent upon his Father.

In his earthly ministry Jesus' deity or divinity was quiescent, otherwise he could never have experienced life like we do. In his resurrection however Jesus displayed his deity, his creative power, his omnipotence. He was

...declared to be the Son of God with power... by the resurrection from the dead. Romans 1:4

Jesus raised himself from the dead. He raised his humanity from death by his deity or divinity. He declared:

*I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I **have power to take it again.** John 10:17-18*

This means that the divinity of Jesus did not die. It was his humanity that died. He was the God-man. His deity could not die - that is not possible. One of the attributes of deity is immortality or deathlessness.

*Now unto the King eternal, **immortal**, invisible, to the God who alone is wise 1 Timothy 1:17*

¹⁰ Ibid, 779.

¹¹ Nicholl (Ed), *Seventh Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, see Colossians 2:15.

¹² Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary - Critical Experimental and Practical on the Whole Bible*, see Colossians 2:15.

*...which He will manifest in his own time...the King of kings...**who alone has immortality**, dwelling in unapproachable light 1 Timothy 6:14-16*

*For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted **the Son to have life in himself** John 5:26*

*As the Father raises the dead, and gives life to them, even so **the Son gives life to whom he will.** John 5:21*

Just as it is impossible for God to lie, so it is impossible for God to die. If God died, then he is not immortal and therefore not God at all (see Psalms 91:2, Deuteronomy 33:27, Isa 40:28, Romans 1:17). The divinity of Jesus did not die otherwise it would not have been divinity.

On that Sunday morning when the mighty angel descended from heaven and rolled the stone away he conveyed the Father's call for him to come forth.¹³ At that call the deity of Jesus sprang into action and brought his humanity back from death. What a display of power!

Thus Jesus Christ declared with great power that he was the Son of God, or God the Son. He had entered the stronghold of Satan, captured his armour, grasped the keys of hell and death and broken Satan's power forever.

This is a fitting introduction is the opening chapter of Revelation - the prelude to this book which foretells the life and death struggles of believers in Christ. The one in charge, the one who leads the church, its Director, is He who has broken the power of death and the grave. What a comfort to the millions of martyrs who are portrayed as sacrificing their lives for Jesus Christ.

The scope of Revelation

Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. v19

This informs us of the period to which Revelation applies.

There are three tenses: past, present and future. As one commentator declared:

In the Revelation given to him there was unfolded scene after scene of thrilling interest in the experience of the people of God, and the history of the church was foretold to the very close of time. In figures and symbols, subjects of vast importance were presented to John, which he was to recall, that the people of God living in his age and in future ages might have an intelligent understanding of the perils and conflicts before them.

This revelation was given for the guidance and comfort of the church throughout the Christian dispensation...on Patmos the disciple received a message, the influence of which was to continue to strengthen the church till the end of time.¹⁴

¹³ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 143.

¹⁴ Ibid, 780.

The seven stars

The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches. v20

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

Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever. Daniel 12:3

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

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

Appendix A

1. Two laws of interpretation

In Revelation 1 two laws of interpretation are demonstrated in the portrayal of Jesus as deliverer and destroyer (Revelation 1:5-6). This passage is couched in a form known as *epanados*.¹⁵ Eight Old Testament scriptures are employed. The first scripture is from the same book as the eighth scripture. The second scripture is from the same as the second last scripture. The third scripture is from the same as the third last scripture, and the fourth is from the same as the fourth last scripture.

The Epanados of Revelation 1:5-16	
1. Revelation 1:5 Jesus Christ, the faithful witness	Isaiah 55:4 Indeed I have given him (Messiah) as a witness to the people
2. Revelation 1:7 Behold he is coming with clouds	Daniel 7:13 one like the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven
3. Revelation 1:7 and every eye will see him, even they who pierced him	Zechariah 12:10 they will look on me whom they pierced
4. Revelation 1:8 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.	Isaiah 44:6 I am the First and the Last; besides me there is no god.
4. Revelation 1:11 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last	Isaiah 48:12 I am the He, I am the First, I am also the Last
3. Revelation 1:12 I saw seven golden lampstands	Zechariah 4:2 a lamp stand of solid gold...and on the stand seven lamps
2. Revelation 1:13 one like the Son of man v14 His head and hair were white like wool ...his eyes were like a flame of fire v15 His feet were like fine brass...his voice as the sound of many waters v16 His countenance was like the sun	Daniel 7:13 one like the son of man v9 the hair of his head was like pure wool Daniel 10:6 his eyes were like torches of fire and his feet like burnished bronze...the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude ...his face like the appearance of lightning
1. Revelation 1:16 Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword	Isaiah 49:2 He has made my mouth like a sharp sword

¹⁵ White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 581.

2. Feet as brass

...his feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace. Revelation 1:15

This represents treading down in judgment or punishment.

Behold the Lord is coming out of his place; he will come down and tread on the high places of the earth...for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. Micah 1:3-5

God came from Teman (or Edom), the Holy One from mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. His brightness was like the light; he had rays splashing from his hand, and there his power was hidden.. Before him went pestilence, and fever followed at his feet. He stood and measured the earth; he looked and startled the nations... Habakuk 3:3-5

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

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