

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Graham Jones – The Church at Gun Hill

The Revelation of Jesus Christ :: Revelation Chapter 1 vv 1-8

Introduction

The book of The Revelation was written, as far as the human agent is concerned, by John the apostle. I do not believe that this John is anyone different from the John who wrote the Gospel and thus am satisfied that this book was written by John, the apostle of Jesus. If it is different in style, and you would only know that if you were able to read the Greek text, it is different in style for a good reason or for a specific purpose. A lot of people criticise the book of Revelation because of its ungrammatical style. There might be some ungrammatical phrases in the book, but they are for a purpose - a Divine purpose, that the inexpressible might be expressed in the best way possible, even though it cuts across the rules of grammar. I am convinced that this is the same John who wrote the Gospel.

He was old; he was living in exile (v9) on the small island called Patmos. Most probably it was during the reign of the Emperor Domitian, who was, as far as Christians were concerned, a vile emperor. He was one who took seriously the claims of Roman emperors to divinity and, therefore, claimed the right to be worshipped as a god. In fact, he claimed the double title of ***Dominus ac Deus noster*** – “the Lord and our God”. Those who refused to worship were often exiled to remote places often to work in mines or quarries. That puts the writing of this book late, for the reign of Domitian was at the end of the first century from 81 to 96 AD. John received this mighty revelation on the island of Patmos while he was in exile. You see, it does not matter where you are, what you are suffering or what you are going through, there is no need ever to be out of touch with God. There is no need ever to be in a situation where you are not walking in the Spirit or where you are not walking in victory. John, although he was in exile, was walking in victory. He was walking in the Spirit. He was walking in the place where he might receive revelation from God and what a mighty revelation he did receive!

Some connect the revelation that John received on the island of Patmos – and bear in mind that the Revelation does focus on the second-coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and all that will immediately precede and follow that – with John chapter 21 v 22 where the Lord is speaking to Peter. Peter had asked a question concerning John, “*Lord, and what shall this man do?*” And Jesus replied, “*If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you? Follow Me!*” The narrative continues, “*Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you?*” It does seem that John was the longest living of the apostles and he did tarry until this revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ was given to him, not to keep to himself, but to pass on to the church. There is a wonderful connection here. First, we have the idea of Peter proclaiming the Word at the beginning, clearly standing out as a leader of the early church, proclaiming the Gospel in Jerusalem. After that, the Gospel is preached by Paul to the Gentiles and we know from Scripture that the times of the Gentiles will continue until the Second Coming of the Lord. Then, right at the end of the Bible, we have John signifying the things that are to happen at the time of the Lord’s return. And, in a manner of

speaking, he is a type of the remnant of the church that tarry until Jesus comes again. And maybe there is something that we can dig out of that saying of Jesus at the end of John's Gospel, or upon which we can meditate. Jesus did not say that John would not die, but, "If I will that he tarry until I come, what is that to you?" It does seem, in a figure, that he did tarry until that time, for he saw it in revelation; he saw it in what was signified to him. He saw what Christians in the future will see.

A key to beginning to understand the book of The Revelation can be found in verse 19 of chapter 1. John is instructed to "*Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.*" There is a clear, threefold division: write what you have seen; write the things that are: write the things that shall be hereafter. In Greek, the words translated as 'hereafter' are *μετα ταυτα (meta tauta)*, which means "after these things". This is important, for this phrase appears again later on. In verse 11, John is instructed by the Lord, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia!" Now that might apply to the whole revelation that he is going to receive. In verse 19 he is told to write the things which he has seen. What he had seen up to that point was a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ walking in the midst of seven golden lamp-stands which are the seven churches to which he is writing. They are things relating to events so far. In other words, it takes into account events in chapter 1. Then He tells John to write the things which are. 'The things which are' must relate to what is revealed in chapters 2 and 3. The things that he wrote to the seven churches and the details that were communicated to them were about present conditions in the churches with words of commendation or rebuke from the Lord. There are warnings where necessary but promises to those who overcome. Lastly, in chapter 4, we read this: "*After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven.*" "After this" is none other than the phrase we have already met - *μετα ταυτα (meta tauta)*. He was instructed in verse 19 to write the things which shall be hereafter, or, after these things - *μετα ταυτα (meta tauta)*. So the things which shall be hereafter are the things which are related after the end of chapter 3 and beginning in verse 1 of chapter 4.

The things which are describe the events of the present church age, pictured and exemplified in chapters 2 and 3 in the contents of the letters to the seven churches in Asia, for what is written to the churches is also a prophetic record of successive, and sometimes continuing, aspects of what for us is now mostly church history and continues up to the rapture of the church. The seven churches are representative of the whole church in place and time. Thus what is recorded in chapters 2 and 3 applies to the complete church (seven is the number of completeness), from the time of John until the saints are caught up to be with the Lord at His coming. These are the things that ARE. In chapter 4 something happens. John experiences what the saints will have experienced – the rapture. A door is opened in heaven and John is invited up to see things from what will then be the church's perspective. A voice cries out, "*Come up hither, and I will show you things which must be hereafter.*" or, "*after these things*" - *μετα ταυτα (meta tauta)*. So the things which occur from chapter 4 onwards are things which happen after the church has been raptured. I believe that to be very important for a correct understanding of the book of The Revelation. In other words, what you are going to read in chapters 4 onwards are not events which are or will be happening while the Church is still on earth. There are, of course, many interpretations which relate what is written after chapter 4 to what has happened in church history. But this cannot be so. If we look at verse 19 we can get a clearer understanding of the proper

context and an appreciation of the dividing line between the end of chapter 3 and what follows from chapter 4.

Why Read the Book of The Revelation?

Let us now ask a question! Why should we read the book of The Revelation? It is a book which is almost excluded from the set readings of the Church of England. Some people do not want to read it because they think it is too complicated. Others do not want to do so for fear of misinterpretation. Why indeed should we read it? First, let us notice this, that it is The Revelation. It is not, as many wrongly say, "Revelations". It is one, unified revelation – The Revelation. And it is The Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is the revelation which He reveals and, moreover, it is the revelation which is about Jesus Christ. It comes from Him, and as in all the scriptures, it focuses on Jesus. It is the Revelation of Jesus Christ and that is the correct title of the book – not the Revelation of John. That is the very reason why we must read it, because it is from Jesus and is about Jesus. It is a Revelation. The Greek name is 'Αποκαλυψις (Apokalupsis). You are familiar, no doubt, with the anglicised form of that, The Apocalypse. 'Apocalypse' means an uncovering, or the taking away of a veil. When you take a covering off something, you can see what is underneath it. When a bride is unveiled, you can see her face. That was unfortunate for poor old Jacob when his wife was unveiled on the morning following their wedding to reveal that she was Leah not Rachel whom he loved. The Revelation is an unveiling and yet people say that they will not read it because it is a mystery. No, it is a revelation, an uncovering, an unveiling, from the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we should read it and pray for the understanding that we might receive in our own hearts the revelation that Jesus wants us to receive. Then, as we read on, we find that it is the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him, to show unto His servants things which shortly must come to pass. God gave to Jesus the revelation to give to His servants (remember that Jesus says, "Everything I hear from the Father, I speak.") The word 'bond-slaves', δουλοι (douloi) in Greek, is the word translated 'servants' here and it is to show them what shortly must come to pass. If you are serving Him in that attitude of a bond-slave, it will be of great concern to you to learn and to know what this mighty revelation is. If you are caught up with your own affairs, and your own earthly welfare, then you will not be interested in the revelation which is from heaven. God gave it to Jesus to show to His servants, to His bond-slaves, to those that were bound to Him – not to anybody. And that revelation came from Jesus, sent by an angel, communicated to a man that it might be given to the Church. That is a marvellous truth too, that God always works through men and women. The revelation eventually came through John and given to the Church.

Then there is this aspect too, that the word used there is quite emphatic in the Greek: He gave the revelation to Jesus Christ to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass. The word 'must' is quite emphatic. There is no way in which these things will not be fulfilled. There is no way in which Satan, the enemy, or anybody else is going to alter the course of events. The things which are written are sure and true and it behoves us to know what these things are, so that we may watch, that we may be prepared, and that we may rejoice at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The revelation that was given to Jesus Christ was signified by His angel to His servant John. To signify means quite literally 'to convey by signs'. So when we read the book of Revelation, we find that it is a book which has a message which is communicated by signs and symbols, but we shall not want for understanding of those symbols if we compare Scripture with Scripture and seek the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit. John confirms that what he has written is the Word of God. Now that is important to acknowledge. When we talk about the Divine inspiration of the Scripture, we might be aware of some Christians Reformers of the past, like Martin Luther or Zwingli, who would have nothing to do with the book of Revelation. They did not believe it was part of inspired Scripture, probably because they did not understand it. But here we have a confirmation in the Word itself that it

is part of the inspired Word of God. John bore record of the Word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ and of all things that he saw. And all that he saw, he confirmed to be the Word of God and the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, Jesus is central; Jesus is the goal; Jesus is the real key to understanding the book. It declares in Revelation 19 v 10, *“The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”* If you want to understand the meaning of prophecy, the spirit of prophecy, then you have to know and understand the testimony, the witness, of Jesus. If you do not understand that witness and testimony then you will not get the spirit of prophecy. You will not get the meaning of prophecy. We find this in the story of the Ethiopian whom Philip met. He was reading prophecy in the book of Isaiah. He could not understand a word of it until Philip came along and beginning at the Scripture, preached unto him Jesus. There was the key which unlocked the prophetic word, Jesus. Philip gave Him the testimony of Jesus, what Jesus, the faithful witness, had done. When Jesus Himself was on the Emmaus road with two of the disciples just after His resurrection, He opened the Scriptures to them. It had been a closed book; they had read it with a veil over their eyes, but when Jesus opened the Scripture, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He showed to them, out of those Scriptures, the things concerning Himself. He was the key. He opened their understanding. No wonder they could say, “Did not our heart burn within us by the way while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?” You see, their hearts were burning because the Scriptures were being opened and they were getting to understand the prophetic word of God. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. We must read the book of Revelation because it was given by God to Jesus for that express purpose, to show us those things which must shortly come to pass. If we will bear witness to the fact that it is the Word of God, and that the testimony of Jesus is the key, then our hearts too will burn within us. In verse 3 you will find a wonderful promise. You find it in no other book in Scripture. “Blessed is He that reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy.” Now you know the Lord is not just content with our reading and hearing. Like the man who built his house upon the rock, we must hear the sayings of Jesus and do them. In his epistle James speaks of the one who is both a hearer or the Word and a doer of the Word also. So as we hear the words of this prophecy, there must be a keeping of those things that are written therein as we apply it to our lives now. It must influence our lives. *“Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein, for the time is at hand.”* There is a blessing in reading this book and yet some Christians say that they do not want to read it, that they do not know where to start. Well, try starting at the beginning. Read it! Meditate upon it and you will be blessed! The time is near.

Never put anything which God speaks about at a remote distance from you. Never say, “Oh, it’s far off; it’ll never come in my lifetime.” Always regard the things of God as being near at hand. As we do so, then they will be effectually working in our hearts and lives. In Ezekiel, God’s people had that idea – putting things off and saying that nothing ever happened to them:

“Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he sees is for many days to come, and he prophesies of the times that are far off. Therefore, say unto them, Thus says the Lord God; There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, says the Lord God.”

Ezekiel 12 v 27

Let us have the same attitude. The time is at hand. That is why we must read the book of Revelation.

To The Seven Churches in Asia :: The Greeting

Now we can look at the greeting, here, at the start of the book. Remember, John is just the human agent. He does not elevate himself. He does not say John the Apostle, called of God to do this and that – just John. A little later he refers to himself as John, *“your brother,*

and companion in tribulation..." (v9) He is just John, brother John, but the word is Divinely inspired. He emphasises this in verse 4. He says, "*John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come.*"

Where is the greeting from? This word is from God. This word is from the Almighty God. This word is from the Triune God – the three in one and one in three. Here it is drawn out for us. He is writing to the seven churches which are in Asia – to seven assemblies in what is now the western part of Turkey. There were quite a number of churches in that area such as Colosse and Troas and others, but they are not mentioned. The seven churches are named in verse 11: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

Why were those seven chosen and none of the others? Why are the seven from Asia and not from other parts of the world such as Europe? I believe that these seven, fairly close to each other, represent the whole church of Jesus Christ in time and place. Seven in the Bible is a number which signifies completion and of wholeness, for example, as in the seven days of creation. Seven comes up again and again in the book of Revelation, always as a number of what is complete. And these seven churches are chosen because the situations which were actually going on in those churches are situations which were going to develop in the Church throughout its history. They are situations which can be found in the Church and which need to be dealt with. They represent the whole church, not only as to place but as to time as well. As we read the letters in chapters 2 and 3, we shall see how this is brought out. We shall see how, in those churches, the time element takes us right up to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, the tribulation is also mentioned in connection with the apostate church, which will carry on into the Great Tribulation. It is for the whole church in its earthly witness. That is why, later on, they are represented by the seven lamp-stands that shine. And they are in Asia. God is so wonderful and so marvellous that all these things just interlock and fit together perfectly to such an extent that some people might be tempted to say, "What a coincidence!" It is no coincidence at all. You see, the names of each of these places where the churches are, have a special meaning and significance, which we shall explore when we come to chapters 2 and 3. Each church has a name which means something appropriate for what was happening in that church at the time and appropriate for that age of Church history which it represents. Marvellous! These places and these churches actually existed. The marvellous thing is that these churches are in Asia and Asia means "mire", "muck". What has the Lord lifted us out of? "*He has lifted us up out of the miry clay, and set our feet upon a rock.*" Why have these seven churches been chosen? It is because there is such a tremendous amount of information, such a clear illustration, in just a few words. You can investigate it and dig again and again and find so much of tremendous importance. How can we say that it is to the whole church? The scripture says that it is to the whole church. It is not just a question of interpreting the number seven in that way. It says seven times in chapters 2 and 3, "*He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*" "He that has an ear..." - it is not just for those seven little churches or assemblies in those little places, which do not even exist any more. It is for everybody. He that has an ear to hear, let him hear! What is this message that comes to the Church from God – the triune God? "Grace be unto you and peace." That is wonderful. It is tremendous to be found at the beginning of the book of Revelation, because we shall be reading some horrifying things as we read of the judgments and the wrath of God poured out. But to His Church he says, "*Grace and peace be unto you*". We shall not need to fear the outpouring of the wrath of God, because we have fled from it to find refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ. And there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Grace and peace. Remember, grace is that undeserved love and favour of God. When we were sinking in the mucky, miry clay and all the filth and degradation of sin, God declares, "I still love you." And He picked us up and set our feet upon the Rock. We have peace with God. We are reconciled to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. There is now nothing to condemn us. Grace is the source; peace is the result. In every one of Paul's

epistles that bear his name, he begins somewhere in the initial verses, with those two words - grace and peace. In his epistles to Timothy and Titus he adds the words, 'and mercy'. He is writing to an individual, but to the churches he says, "Grace and peace."

The greeting is from the triune God, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is from the one Who is, Who was and Who is to come, from Him who is always the same, who changes not. In Exodus, He revealed Himself to Moses as "I AM THAT I AM." He is the Unchanging, the eternally existing One, the great I AM. The Jewish rabbis explained that "I am that I am" in this way: they said that God is the one who said, "I was, I still am, and in the future, I will be." Who is He? The One Who is, Who was and Who is to come. God never changes. He is ever the same and that is what this title conveys to us. He is therefore utterly dependable. What he has promised, He will perform.

But this greeting is also from God the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, from the seven spirits which are before His throne. It says in Ephesians 4 v 4 that there is "one body and one Spirit..." Why are there seven here? Do bear in mind that this message that John received was "signified" to him by the angel. That means that it was conveyed by signs and symbolic forms. In relation to the one body, which is Jesus Christ, there is one Spirit, but, as a symbolic expression, the seven represent completeness and perfection. As to the earthly ministry and execution of the will of God, the Spirit of God is perfect and complete in all His operations. In Revelation 5 v 6 we get a complementary idea. John saw a lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. Seven eyes represent the perfect vision and knowledge of God of all that goes on as the Holy Spirit moves in this world. We come across this also in the book of Zechariah in chapter 4 v 10:

"...for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth."

The Lord, by His Spirit, is watching, observing everything totally and completely. Remember, the sevenfold idea of the Spirit of God is also connected with the sevenfold manifestation of the church signified by the seven lamp-stands.

The greeting is also from the Lord Jesus Christ. So it is from the one who is, was and is to come – God the Father; from the seven spirits which are before His throne – God the Holy Spirit; and from Jesus Christ – God the Son. This is our God. And concerning Jesus Christ, we have a three-fold description. He is the faithful witness. From Bethlehem to Calvary, He was the faithful witness. In Him there was no blemish and in Him there was no half-truth, for He was the faithful witness. In fact, He confessed that it was for this purpose that He came into the world to bear witness to the truth (John 18 v 37). There has never been a faithful witness apart from Jesus Christ. But He is also the firstborn, first-begotten out of or, from among the dead. We read in the Scriptures of people who were raised from the dead, such as Lazarus, Jairus's daughter and the widow of Nain's son, but eventually they all died. Jesus was the only one who rose from among the dead never to die again. He is alive for evermore. In Ephesians 4 v 8 it declares that "*when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive...*" He is the first-begotten out of the dead; He is the one who destroyed death; He is the one in whom we too will know that victory over death. God's promise to us in 1 John 3 v 2 is that "*when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is*" and in Philippians 3 v 21 that the Lord Jesus Christ "*shall change our vile body (the body of our humiliation), that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body (the body of His glory).*" We shall have a glorified body like His. Why? It is because He is the first-begotten from among the dead. Further, He is the Prince, or more accurately, the Ruler of the kings of the earth. This is the faithful witness. He "*made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the*

cross.” (Philippians 2 vv 7 & 8). He was the faithful servant and witness. Therefore, God raised Him from the dead to die no more – the first-begotten out of the dead. And so it carries on to say in Philippians 2 vv 9 & 10:

“Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...”

He is the Ruler of the kings of the earth. That is also a promise given in Psalms 89 v 27:

“Also I will make Him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.”

Toward the end of the book of Revelation in chapter 19 v 16 we see Jesus coming in judgment and bearing this title on His vesture – “King of kings and Lord of lords.” He is highly exalted. This is our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace are at the heart of His greeting to the churches.

Our Response

In the light of all that, what must our response be but “*Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*” How else can we respond? He loved us when we were unlovely. It is the grace of God. He washed (λουσαντι) us from our sins. Some manuscripts say that he loosed (λυσαντι) us from our sins – there is one letter different in Greek from ‘wash’ and ‘loose, free’. We can rejoice in both ideas that we are washed (cf. 1 Corinthians 6 v 11) from our sins and are also loosed or freed from our sins (cf. Romans 6 vv 7,18,22). However, I believe the Received Text (Textus Receptus) from which the Authorised Version is translated, is the correct version, for the testimony of Scripture is that it is the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all sin and unrighteousness.

“But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1 vv 7)

There is a washing in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we are washed, because we are cleansed, because we are loosed and freed from our sin, we have peace with God. There is grace and peace. But God has done more than that. Because God exalted Jesus, He has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2 v 6). And Jesus has now made us kings and priests unto God and His Father as it shows to us in verse 6.

Our full response, therefore is that unto Him should be the glory and dominion or might unto the ages of the ages – in other words, for ever and ever. It will never cease. As we go through these chapters in Revelation we shall discover an increase in the praise to the Lord. Here it is ‘glory and dominion’. In chapter 4 v 11, there are three: glory, honour and power. In chapter 5 v 13, there are four: blessing and honour and glory and power. Then in chapter 7 v 12, there are seven: blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might. The further we go the greater the praise and enthusiasm and the more we want to say about the greatness of our Lord. Seven, of course, represents the perfect ascription of praise to Him.

The Second Coming

Well, that is the greeting, and that is the response and then we finish with the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is marvellous how that ascription of praise brings into view the Second Coming. For He says, “*Behold, He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all tribes of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen.*”

The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is that central event around which the book of Revelation is written. That event is not the rapture of the Church, when the Church will be caught up to meet Him in the air. That is not the Second Coming of Jesus to the earth, but the 'snatching' away of the church to be with the Lord and it is signified in a symbolic form in chapter 4 verse 1 as John is taken up to heaven. It is dealt with more particularly in First Thessalonians 4 vv 13ff. The Second Coming is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, in glory and power, to the earth with His saints. Now if He comes with His saints, they must have been taken to be with Him beforehand. Jude v 14 states, "*Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints...*" We shall already be with Him when He comes to the earth. So verse 7 then is about the Lord coming to the earth with His saints when every eye shall see Him. At the rapture, every eye will not see Him. At the Second Coming every eye will behold the appearing in glory of our Lord Jesus, but will they be rejoicing? Will they be excited and glad? No. What we read here is, that when He comes in glory and power with His saints, they will wail because of Him. Why is that? It is because He will be coming in judgment. From chapter 4 onward that is what the book of Revelation is about – the outpouring of wrath in judgment. Those who pierced Him are included. Who pierced Him? Well, it was Roman nails that pierced his hands and feet; it was a Roman spear which pierced His side. But it was, in fact, both Gentiles and Jews. The book of Zechariah, chapter 12 v 10 says, "*...and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced...*" Who are 'they'? It is the Jewish people, the people of Israel. Why them? It is because they accepted the responsibility. "His blood be on us, and on our children." (Matthew 27 v 25) You see, both Jews and Gentiles were brought together in the crucifixion of Jesus. That is why all the tribes of the earth will wail because of Him. However, if that phrase 'tribes of the earth' represents a Hebrew idea, than it should more likely be translated 'all the tribes of the land' – in other words all the tribes of Israel and they shall mourn because of Him. Nevertheless it will not be just the Jews in a state of anguish and regret. The Bible states here that every eye shall see Him and everyone will wail because of Him and the great shall call upon the rocks and mountains to fall on them and to hide them from the wrath of Him that sits upon the throne. And in just a short finish to this section we have the confirmation that both Jew and Gentile are included in this. It concludes with, "Even so. Amen." – just two words in Greek: **Ναι, Ἀμην** (Nai, Amen). Actually, both words mean the same thing, except one is Greek, 'Nai', and the other is Hebrew, 'Amen'. 'Nai' is the Greek, or Gentile affirmation, 'even so'; 'Amen', is the Hebrew affirmation for the Jewish people, 'even so'. 'so will it be' The central person in all this is Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. This Divine title reveals to us who Jesus is – God the Son. For those who question who is speaking here, we would refer them to Revelation 22 v 13 where it says, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last...*" and He carries on speaking until in verse 16 He declares, "*I Jesus have sent my angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.*" Who is the Alpha and the Omega? It is the one who says, "I, Jesus." If He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the source and the end (τελος – telos in Greek, which means the final end, the goal, the complete fulfilment of all aimed for), then He is also the one who is and who was and who is to come, or, as it says in Hebrews 13 v 8, "*Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever*" and He is also the Almighty. The Almighty is the Omnipotent One. In the Old Testament, the Lord God omnipotent reigns. He is the Lord. Isaiah 9 v 6, that prophetic verse referring to the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ gives this description of Him, "*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given...and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*" The rabbis of old used to use the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet to refer to completeness and would use the expression 'from Aleph to Tau to convey the idea of what was complete and whole. However, the names of letters in Hebrew also have meanings: Aleph is an ox, the beast which symbolises being a servant or of humility. It is one of the faces of the four living ones in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4. Tau represents the gibbet or, in New Testament language, the cross. Jesus is the faithful witness who was faithful from His coming as the servant of the Lord, as the one who made Himself of no reputation and who humbled Himself to death,

even the death of the cross. This is the Alpha and the Omega, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Almighty.

John's Vision of the Lord Jesus Christ :: Revelation chapter 1 vv 9-20

The second part of this chapter is concerned with the vision of the Lord Jesus Christ which John had. The human agent in this revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ is John. And he said, *"I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."* We can bear in mind here that Paul spoke in II Corinthians chapter 12 about the thorn in the flesh which was given to him because of the abundance of the revelations that were committed to him, for John here speaks about himself, not as an apostle or as an elder but as a brother, and especially as a companion in tribulation. If we expand the translation of that word 'companion' (Greek = συγκοινωνος) it would be 'one who fellowships together', one who has a share in common, a fellow-sufferer, with those who are experiencing tribulation. The Greek word for tribulation is θλιψις (thlipsis), which refers to the sort of pressure that crushes a person down. It is a heavy burden bearing down upon and oppressing the victim. John is aware that, in writing to the churches in Asia, he is writing to those who, like him, are suffering persecution. He is on the island of Patmos, a small island in the Aegean Sea, lying some thirty five miles from the mainland of Asia minor where these churches were situated. The message implicit in his introduction is that if they are suffering persecution, he is suffering also with them. But he is their companion not only in tribulation but also in the kingdom. This is something which causes our heart to rejoice if we are thinking about persecution and tribulation. Jesus told his disciples that, in the world, they would have tribulation. If we are experiencing persecution and if we are experiencing the crushing burden of oppression and tribulation, we can encourage ourselves in the Lord that we are also in the kingdom of God. This message in Revelation, you see, is not for those who are 'at ease in Zion'. That is a marvellous little phrase from the book of Amos, where it says, *"Woe to you that are at ease in Zion."* This message in Revelation is not for those in the church who are at ease, for those who appear to be Christians but who love this present age. They avoid the persecution, the tribulation and the hardness by compromising with the world. The book of Revelation has no appeal for such. John writes to those who are in tribulation and who are in the kingdom. This is really encouraging. It is a re-assurance because it means that wherever you are, even in the direst of times, you can rejoice because you are in the kingdom, that place where the Sovereign Lord reigns. You are under God's rule and, in that case, nothing can go wrong for you in the end. Times might be hard, and maybe you do not understand why that should be so, but, in the Kingdom, God knows how to manage your affairs and all things will work together for good as the Scriptures promise in Romans 8 v 28.

We are reminded by the testimony of others throughout history and in modern times that this is the case. Madame Guyon, who was a prisoner in the Bastille in France for many years, wrote, in her prison cell, the words of that wonderful hymn:

All scenes alike engaging prove
To souls impressed with sacred love
Where'er they dwell, they dwell in Thee
In heav'n, in earth or on the sea.

To me remains nor place nor time
My country is in every clime
I can be calm and free from care
On any shore, since God is there

While place we seek or place we shun
The soul finds happiness in none
But with my God to guide my way
'Tis equal joy to go or stay

Could I be cast where Thou art not
That were indeed a dreadful lot
But regions none remote I call
Secure of finding God in all

You can sing those words when you are in the kingdom, under God's rule. Then, as it says in Philippians, you can rejoice in the Lord always.

In Matthew chapter 5 v 10, in what we call the Beatitudes, Jesus said, *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* John was in tribulation; John was persecuted for righteousness' sake. He was writing to those who were being persecuted for righteousness' sake. However, he could also rejoice because he knew that the kingdom of heaven was his. He was in tribulation but he was also in the kingdom of God. But he was not only in the kingdom but also in the patience of Jesus Christ. Patience means endurance. It is that very quality which comes from the experience of going through tribulation when you are in the kingdom of God. It is developed out of the very trials which you go through. James, in his epistle, wrote, *"Let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."* Where is that patience produced? It is in the trials of your faith. We cannot have a Christianity without the trials of faith. We cannot have a Christianity without the tribulation which Jesus spoke about. *"In the world you will have tribulation."* It is not easy to get on as a Christian, true to the Word of God, in this world. In Acts 14 v 22, it relates, *"And they confirmed the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God."* That again is the principle. We are not looking for hard times, we are not looking for difficulties, but it must be so, because the world is at enmity with God. In Second Timothy chapter 2 v 12, Paul, writing to Timothy, says, *"If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us."* There is the idea again: tribulation is associated with the Kingdom; suffering is associated with reigning. They are all interconnected and this is following the pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 12 v 2, it says of Him that He *"for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."* And the exhortation to us is *"Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself lest you be weary and faint in your minds."* Let us run with patience the race that is set before us! This was John. He was on the island of Patmos. He was not there on holiday or for his health. He was there because He had been exiled there for his faithfulness to the Word of God. He was there for righteousness' sake. He was there for the Word of God and for the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 2 of this first chapter of Revelation it states that they are the things of which John bore record. And he was exiled to this small, rocky, barren, little island where there were quarries and mines for the exiles to slave in as a punishment for his Christian faith and work. He had been sent there because of holding forth the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. And the word translated 'testimony' carries within it the idea of a suffering witness, for it is the Greek word μαρτυρ (martur), which gives us our English word 'martyr'. When we use the word 'martyr' we use it to indicate someone who bears witness to his or her faith in the face of suffering and persecution. Yet, although he was on this lonely little island, he was not alone. There was no complaining; there was no plea for sympathy. He was not concerned to bemoan his own uncomfortable position, but he was rejoicing rather in the Kingdom of God. What an example he is to us! We sometimes sing that chorus, "Wherever I am, I'll praise Him; whenever I can I'll praise Him..." and I wonder how true that is in the lives of believers when we hear so much complaining in the face of the slightest inconvenience. If we had been stuck on a rocky little island, separated

from friends and loved ones, would we still be bouncing up and down in such joyful song, magnifying the name of Jesus because we are in the Kingdom of God where He reigns supreme? What an example John is of how we can rejoice in the Kingdom of God at all times whatever may come across our pathway! What a testimony is being produced from a life that is enduring such tribulation! Precious qualities come out when the saints of God are crushed and bruised. It is when the olive is pressed that the oil is produced; it is when certain flowers are crushed that the fragrance is fully released. There is the same example here when the believer is facing seemingly overbearing circumstances, for that is when the power and the fragrance of the Kingdom of God should manifest itself more and more. There is no tribulation in this world that can overcome the true believer. It might not be pleasant, but there is no oppression of the enemy in this world that can overcome and defeat a child of God.

There is a warning which we might sound here as well. I believe that the Scriptures exhort us to shun the way of popularity. It does seem unfortunate that many churches nowadays are clamouring along this way of popularity. Let us do things in a way that will be popular and appealing in the eyes of the world. It is unfortunate because the popular way is, in most respects, the way of the flesh. It is appealing to the flesh, for what is in the world, *“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.”* (I John 2 v 16) Jesus said, *“Woe unto you when all men speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets.”* (Luke 6 v 26) In II Timothy 3 v 12 it says, *“All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”* Now that is a challenge, because if we do not feel the world system coming against us, might that be a challenge to us that we are not living the godly lives that we should be living? For instance, do we join in the conversations of smutty humour or do we distance ourselves from them? Certainly, as a balance, our attitude should be to endeavour, if it be possible, as much as lies in us, to live peaceably with everyone. (Romans 12 v 18) We are not out to invite hardships and trouble, but it is a point to bear in mind. In Luke 21 v 19 there is a word of encouragement which Jesus spoke to His disciples, about the end times as far as they and the people of Israel are concerned, but we can take instruction from it too: *“In you patience, possess your souls.”* What shall it profit us if could gain the whole world, yet lose our own souls?

So this is John, the man who is being used to bring the Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the church. Something happened:

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet.”

I have considered various explanations of this verse. What does John mean by “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day”? I used to think that he was conveyed by the Spirit to the Day of the Lord, that is, the Day of the Lord’s coming in judgment. But there is one thing that leads me to think that this is not right which is that the vision which he immediately speaks of is not the Day of the Lord. It is Christ walking amongst the churches and is, therefore, still the church age. Also, ‘the Lord’s Day’ is called exactly that where it appears in the Greek text: ἡ ἡμέρα Κυρίου, but here it is the Lordly Day. It is the only place in the New Testament where this particular phrase in the Greek occurs where an adjective has been made out of the noun “Lord”: ἐν τῇ Κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ. In the second century, that phrase became the name of the first day of the week. It does seem that he is referring to the first day of the week, that he was in the Spirit on the first day of the week, that day when, according to the book of Acts, believers were accustomed to meet and break bread together. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, he referred to such a practice: *“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him...”* (I Corinthians 16 v 2) For early Christians, this day was important, because it was the day on which Jesus rose from the dead; it was the day when the Holy Spirit was poured out in fulness upon believers. It was a day to be remembered. It was a day of new beginning. It was the day of the new

creation. It was a special day. The one problem I did have in thinking that it was the first day of the week is that John said, "I was in the Spirit" and every believer, who is truly a believer, is in the Spirit. In Romans 8 vv 8 & 9 it says, "*They that are in the flesh cannot please God, but you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if anyone have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His...*" So why would John say that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day? Surely, as a believer, he was in the Spirit all the time. He was, but the phrase here should be translated literally as "I became in Spirit" Now I think that is very instructive for it brings us into the same kind of situation which Paul experienced in 2 Corinthians 12, where he spoke about himself ("I knew a man") who was caught up to the third heaven. I think we might find that Paul would have said, "I became in Spirit." A transformation took place. That is what is implied by the use of the word "became". John did not say, "I was in Spirit" but "I became in Spirit." There was something transforming about the experience. Indeed, the revelation which John received was on a heavenly plane and, in fact, in chapter 4, the invitation to him is, "Come up hither!" John is referring to his mighty experience during which time he received the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Let us look at the sequence of what happened! It is the result of being gripped, as it were, by the Spirit of God. He heard the heavenly voice, a great voice like a trumpet sounding, drawing John's attention to the speaker and what He had to say. The voice, that he heard giving the revelation of what was to be conveyed to the seven churches in particular and to the Church in general, was behind him. Just as every human being before God deals with their lives, he was facing the wrong way. And so he turned to see where the voice was coming from. Is that not an important part of the gospel message and of our continuing life in the Lord? The Lord wants us to turn to Him, away from all that is of the flesh and of the world. It is the first part of the Gospel: repent! And when he had turned, then he could not only hear but he could see. This is what happens when people are brought to the Lord. First, they hear the voice of God and faith comes by hearing. Then, when they turn, when they repent, then, by faith, they see. What do they see? They see the risen Lord, just as John saw the risen Lord walking in the midst of the seven golden lamp-stands. When John saw the Lord, he fell down as one dead. It is all a picture of the work of salvation, because that is exactly what must happen when we look by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. The flesh, the old nature, the old man becomes as one dead and must fall down before Him. Remember, we are talking about John the apostle. We are talking about the one who was so close to the Lord that he could lean on the Lord's breast at the last supper. It signified that he was very close to the Lord. He was the one who, when they declared that the Lord was risen, outran Peter and got to the tomb first. There was no fear; there was no falling down. He was the one, who, with Peter and James on the holy mount, saw Jesus transfigured, clothed with the glory that was His. He was the one who saw Jesus after His resurrection and saw Him ascend into heaven. Yet now, when he beholds the Lord, he falls down before Him as one dead. You see, before, as Paul says in II Corinthians 5 v 16, he had known Jesus after the flesh. Paul goes on to say that "*henceforth know we Him no more.*" The flesh had to be stripped away that he might know Him no more after the flesh but in a new, and spiritual, and living way. No flesh can abide in the tremendous glory of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a spiritual relationship and flesh can have no part in it. Daniel had a similar experience where he fell down before his heavenly visitor, confessing, "*...my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.*" (Daniel 10 v 8). Isaiah experienced this too in the temple. This priestly, godly, upright man of God, when he saw the glory of the Lord God Almighty in the temple, he cried out, "*Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*" (Isaiah 6 v 5) There is no place for the flesh in the presence of God and in the presence of the risen Lord. And yet there is life. As the flesh dies, so that spiritual life is manifested. The Lord said to John, "Fear not!" He placed His right hand of power upon John that he should not be grovelling in the dust, but that he should be raised up into his royal position in Christ Jesus.

The only strength that we can know and have in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ is that strength of His right hand of power. There can be nothing of the flesh.

Let us now come to the vision of the Lord! John first saw the Lord, and he did not fall down at that stage, when he proclaimed, *“Behold He comes with clouds and every eye shall see Him.”* (v.7) This is just what was promised in Acts 11 v 1 that Jesus would come back just as He went and as it was prophesied in Daniel 7 v 13 and Matthew 24 v 30 that He would come with the clouds, so He shall come to the earth. However, before the revelation of those future days, John is given a vision here of the Lord Jesus Christ in relation to His church now. The vision of the Lord coming with the clouds is a vision of a time of judgment, but what John sees here is a vision of Christ in relation to His church. It still contains aspects of judgment but not of the outpouring of the wrath of God but, rather, of revealing things which need to be put right in the church.

There are seven golden candlesticks or lamp-stands which John sees. Now in the holy place of the tabernacle in the Old Testament, there stood a seven-branched lamp-stand. It was made of pure, beaten gold. The beating reminds us, as a type, of affliction and suffering. It burned with pure, beaten olive oil and it provided light in the windowless holy place. It was symbolic of witness – shining forth. The pure gold was symbolic of Divine righteousness and purity, that which has been tried in the fire and has been purged of all dross. It is pure. And here, the seven lamp-stands represent the seven churches which are in Asia, which, in turn, represent the whole church. The idea of the lamps burning is of the righteous, earthly witness of the church. And the witness of the church is to the glory and to the power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the one that is shown in the midst of the lamp-stands, being revealed by the light of the lamps. This is the earthly witness of the whole church throughout time and throughout the whole world. The lamp-stand, in the Old Testament, burned in the secret place, in the Holy Place, hidden from the eyes of the masses. When the church is on fire for the Lord and shining for Him, with the power of the Holy Spirit, as the lamp-stand of old was fuelled by the holy oil, it is burning with power in the secret place that the world does not and cannot see. The enemy will try to introduce impure ministry, impure oil. We must be on our guard against it so that the source of the power is in the Holy Place where Christ walks in the midst of the churches. Do take note that in chapter 2 verse 1 it speaks of the one who walks in the midst of the seven golden lamp-stands. In other words, He is active in His church. He is not still. When we think about the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, He is seated on the right hand of the majesty on high, signifying that His work of salvation and redemption is complete. The work is done. But as to the church in its earthly witness, He is walking in and among the churches. He is looking out, with that perfect vision, for that which is not right that it might come under judgment before the great Judgment Day, that it might be dealt with and cast out. He is active in His church.

John saw the Lord Jesus Christ, walking in the midst of the lamp-stands, and he said that he could see one like unto, not **the** Son of man but, according to the Greek rendering, **a** son of man. The title, ‘The Son of man’ refers to the Lord Jesus Christ in His relationship to the earthly people of God, the nation of Israel, the Messiah. But here, John is just pointing out His humanity. He is a son of man. Daniel is called a son of man. Ezekiel is called a son of man. There is one occurrence of that in the New Testament. In John 5 v 27, and again it is mistranslated, it says that the Father has given to the Lord Jesus *“authority to execute judgment also, because He is a son of man.”* He has the right and the authority because He became a man. He lived the life. He did so perfectly and, therefore, He is the one who is in the position to judge. We cannot say to Him, “Well, you do not know what it’s like. You’ve never experienced it. You don’t know what we have to go through.” He became a son of man, born of a woman, but taking upon Himself the human form. The Word was made flesh. (John 1 v 14) It is relevant to judgment.

In John's Gospel, Jesus is very much "the man Christ Jesus" and John's Gospel is very concerned to show to us that He who lived as a human being is indeed the Son of God: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" Thus, in his Gospel, John is intent to show that He is God. In the book of Revelation, Jesus appears very much as God, but John is intent here to show that He is also man, the Son of man. And so He is walking in the midst of His church. It is His witness; it is His light. Look at His appearance as it is described here. Again and again, John uses verses and descriptions from the Old Testament, containing words which describe God, and he applies them to the Lord Jesus Christ, to this one like unto "a son of man".

His appearance in relation to the church here is in connection with judgment, not judgment in the sense of an outpouring of the wrath of God, but judgment in the sense of discerning the condition of the church. And some particular aspect of these descriptions of Jesus – His eyes like flaming fire, His feet like burnished bronze as if they were burning in a furnace – is taken and is applied to each church when we come to the letters in chapters 2 and 3. Some particular aspect is relevant to each of the seven churches.

He is one that is clothed with a garment down to the feet. The word that is used for garment here is the same word that is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament which is called the Septuagint (LXX) to translate the Hebrew word for "ephod", which was the garment worn by the high-priest as he performed his priestly duties. Here, in Jesus, we have our Great High Priest. He is also girded with a girdle, not around the waist, but around the chest. According to the Jewish-Roman historian, Josephus, that is how the high-priests were attired too. As our Great High Priest, He is the one who intercedes for us. He has not got his clothes girded up around His waist or about His loins, ready for work. His work is finished; His work is completed. He is now our High Priest. There is no further work to be done for our salvation, but He ever lives to make intercession for us. Then the gold of the girdle speaks of that perfect righteousness of our Lord which holds everything in place. He will never fail.

His head and His hair are as white wool and as white as snow. That does not mean that He is aged, as we know old age. Daniel had the same vision in [Daniel 7 v 9](#) where he saw a vision of God, the Ancient of Days. Here the description is applied to Jesus. Who is Jesus? In the words of that old Christmas carol, He "is God and Lord of all." This aspect of the vision speaks of His absolute wisdom in judgment. If there is one thing that people, in most countries of the world, have traditionally associated with age, it is wisdom. If you are old, you have much experience of life and should be wise. So, in His judgment, in His discernment, He is absolutely, perfectly wise.

His eyes are as a flame of fire, the fire again speaking of judgment, but also speaking here of His ability to see everything and not be deceived in anything. Nothing can escape His gaze. Do you remember when Peter denied Jesus and especially when he denied Him for the third time? In Luke's Gospel, it records that as he denied Him for the third time, "*the cock crew, and the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.*" His eyes met Peter's and that look penetrated to his innermost being. Peter went out and he wept bitterly. It was those eyes of the Lord which see everything. Let us remember that He walks in the midst of the church. He sees everything; nothing is hidden from Him with whom we have to do.

His feet are as fine brass burning in a furnace and the fine brass speaks again of judgment, crushing judgment. It declares in Hebrews that our God is a consuming fire ([Hebrews 12 v 29](#)). He will crush in the churches everything which is of the flesh and is not glorifying to Him.

His voice is as the sound of many waters. In [Ezekiel 43 v 2](#) it says "*The glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and His voice was like a noise of many waters.*" Who

is this describing? It is describing God and God's voice. Who is John describing? One like unto the Son of man. They say that if you stand by the Niagara Falls, you cannot hear yourself speaking and if His voice is infinitely greater than that, as the sound of many waters, then who can answer Him back? Who can make any reply to the Lord? When He speaks in judgment, there is nothing that anybody can say in their defence. We stand. We listen. We cannot answer Him back.

Now there is something else about Him, for in His right hand He holds seven stars. Here we can jump down to verse 20 where it explains that the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches. Now they are not the pastors or overseers of the churches, because in the New Testament they did not have churches with one pastor or one minister; they had elders. So we must look elsewhere to discover what is meant by the seven angels of the seven churches. In Matthew 18 v 10, Jesus was speaking about little children and said that, *"in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven."* In Acts 12 we get the account of the occasion when Peter was in prison. The church was praying earnestly for his release. An angel came to Peter in prison and woke him up. His chains fell off and the angel led him out through the gate which opened of its own accord, into the street and then was gone. Peter made his way to the house of Mary where the prayer meeting was being held and knocked at the door of the gate. Young Rhoda came to the gate, was thrilled to see Peter but instead of opening the door, rushed back into the house to announce Peter's arrival. They who had been fervently praying for his release would not believe it. When Rhoda maintained that it was definitely Peter, they replied that it was his angel. You see, there is the idea behind the idea of angels that they are not only the messengers of God but the heavenly representatives of the saints and young children which are on earth. They were certain that Peter was in prison and so they came up with the notion that this must be his heavenly representative coming to communicate some message concerning him from God. Perhaps they thought that Rhoda had seen a vision of such an angel - a vision, as it were, of Peter in heavenly places. When we think about ourselves, there is truth here, because, in the language of Ephesians 2 v 6, we can speak of ourselves being in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. We dwell in the heavenlies; we walk in the heavenlies; our citizenship is in heaven. Our physical bodies walk here on this earth but we have *"come to Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels..."* (Hebrews 12 v 32) This is true also of the church. *"...to the general assembly and church of the firstborn..."* (Hebrews 12 v 33) The church has an earthly witness and an earthly manifestation and form represented by the seven golden lamp-stands. But the church has also a heavenly position in Christ Jesus which is above the things and circumstances of this life and it is that complete and perfect position of the church in heavenly places which is represented by the seven stars. They are the seven angels of the seven churches – the seven, heavenly representatives of the churches here on earth.

The lamp-stands, the earthly manifestation of the church, they can fall; they can go into apostasy. They can have things wrong with their witness. They can even get to the stage where Jesus says to them, "I am going to remove your lamp-stand out of its place altogether." Their witness on earth ceases to function, but the church in its heavenly position in Christ Jesus can never be removed. In verse 16, they are in His right hand (*ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ χειρὶ*) and in v 20 they are upon His right hand (*ἐπὶ τῆς δεξιᾶς μου*) – supported, upheld by the right hand of His righteousness, and held in the right hand of his power. In John 10 vv 28 & 29, Jesus assures us that *"I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and none shall pluck them out of My Father's hand."* Your life is hid with Christ in God. (Colossians 3 v 3) There is no way that anyone or anything can snatch you out of his hand. There is no way that the enemy is going to overthrow the church which is held secure in heavenly places in the right hand of power. The message, therefore, is not to the earthly, outward form, but the message is addressed to the seven angels of the seven

churches, to the spiritual reality; those who are kept by the power of God, those who are responsible for the heavenly power and authority of the earthly witness.

Then, out of His mouth there is the two-edged sword. In chapter 19, it is with the sword that He smites the nations. In the church it is the sword of the Spirit which (AV) is the Word of God. It is important to note here that it is the Spirit who is the Word of God, the spoken, living word of God, and it is He, therefore, who is the sword. The word 'which' (AV) in Greek is neuter gender and cannot, therefore, refer to 'sword' which is feminine in gender. (Ephesians 6 v 17 – και την μαχαίραν (feminine) του Πνευματος (neuter) ὃ (neuter) ἐστὶ ῥῆμα Θεου). It is the Spirit who is the Rhema of God, a word that comes in the sword-like power of the Spirit, penetrating, discerning aright. However, in Hebrews 4 v 12 it says that it is the Word (Λογος) of God, the revealed and recorded word, which brings us into the place where we should be because... *"It is living, and powerful (working within), 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 discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* No Word spoken in the power of the Holy Spirit will ever be contrary to the revealed Word of God in the Bible. Thus we can know what is of God and what is not; what is God's will and what is just our own will. We know by the Word of God, that sharp, two-edged sword that goes out of His mouth, which has been spoken by Him. That convicting, prophetic word of God is necessary in the church. It says in Proverbs 29 v 18 that where there is no vision, the people perish. The idea in the Hebrew is that where there is no prophetic word, the people throw off restraint. How necessary that word is in the church.

And His countenance is as the sun shining in its strength. If you have ever been fortunate enough to go to some of these sunny climes like Africa or the Middle East, you can look up at mid-day and the sun scorches down on you so that you feel powerless even to move because it is so overbearingly hot. And such is the countenance of the Lord shining down in glorious holiness upon His people. It is no wonder that John fell down at His feet as one dead.

"The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now."

"We now see the glory of Your wondrous face;
Once that face was marred,
But now You're glorified"

The sun is shining in its strength, not veiled any longer.

Then there are these words which we have already mentioned, *"Fear not, I am the first and the last."* God says that about Himself in Isaiah 44 v 6. Again, that is something else attributed to Jesus. *"I am the living One and I became dead."* He does not simply say "I was dead," but "I became dead." That is very important to note when we are thinking of the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was not an ordinary person who was dead. He became dead. He did not have to die, but He laid down His life for us. Then He continues, *"Behold I am alive for evermore."* Moreover, He has the keys of Hades and of death. The grave no longer has any victory; death has no more sting. It is swallowed up in victory. He has led captivity captive; He broke the bars of Hades and led out the righteous in glorious triumph. He has the keys. Satan does not have the keys of death for, in Hebrews 2 v 14, it reveals that Jesus became man *"that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."* The Lord Jesus Christ is the mighty Victor. So, fellow believer, fear not!" In v 19 there is that threefold division already mentioned above, but just as a further encouragement in this idea of the church in heavenly places, John refers to it in v.20 as the Mystery of the seven stars. A mystery is, in some respects, a technical word in Greek used in the New Testament, to refer to something which was secret and hidden, but now has been revealed. However, it has not been revealed for everyone, only for those who believe and have heard, who have turned to the Lord and who have seen. To the world and

to the unbeliever, it is still a secret; it is still hidden. They cannot see it and so it is true that our lives, the lives of believers, are hid with Christ in God so that the world does not see the secret of our power in Christ Jesus. Let us praise God and magnify His name that that is the vision of the Lord Jesus Christ walking among the churches, a vision which applies still today.

As we go on into chapters 2 and 3, we shall be looking to what v 19 refers to as “the things which are”... in other words pre-tribulation church history. We are in there too in what I believe the current church age to be, namely the last age of the Laodiceans.

© 2015 Graham Jones The Church at Gun Hill, Bowers Gifford