

Revelation — Chapter 1

The Introduction, the Divine Salutation, and the Vision of Christ

An Outline of "The Revelation" — Walter Scott From The Faith and The Flock, 1910–1911

Introduction

Introduction

There are clear indications that we are on the eve of the Coming.

Faith rests on God's Word, not on signs, yet these latter are highly significant, such as the budding of the fig-tree, the national reappearance of Israel, just before the end (Matt. 24:32, 33), and the present condition of the Christian profession exactly before the rise of the personal Antichrist, or, Man of Sin (2 Thess. 2). But, beloved Christian reader, "signs" do not constitute your Hope. What wait we for? The Lord Himself would have your heart, your spirit, your whole being wrapped up in those grand words— "I will come again and receive you unto Myself" (John 14:3), and "Behold, I come quickly" (Rev. 3:11).

Lean all your weight of faith and hope on those soul-stirring words! "The Revelation" is just the book for the hour. Its reading will bless you, and its study arm you for immediate conflict, while preserving from surprise, as events unfold themselves in rapid succession.

Personally, we have no fear of what is coming, no dread of what may happen. We know the end from the beginning. The course of events is mapped out in orderly sequence in the prophetic pages of the Divine Word. The full and final result of all now transpiring in the Church and in the world, yea the doom of the professing Church,* and of the world itself, are unfolded in this remarkable wherein the Holy Ghost dwells and acts is given over to judgment (1 Peter 4:17).

True Christians are "caught up." The mass of spurious professors is "spued out." Both acts are the necessary consequence of the Lord's descent into the air. The book of human destiny. Not only has the midnight cry been sounded, "Behold, the Bridegroom (omit 'cometh'), go ye out to meet Him" (Matt. 25:6), but we are a step nearer the goal of Christian desire. The general dread all over is expressed in the earnest and pleading request of the foolish, unsaved Virgins, to their wise companions, "Give us of your oil, for our torches are going out." But God alone is the Dispenser of Grace. In the midst of their

perplexity, the Bridegroom came. Beloved, He is just at the door!

Hark to his footfall!

Our divinely assured portion is grace upon us, and peace within (Rev. 1:4, 5), and thus we calmly contemplate the future. The marvelous disclosures unfolded in this book of plan and purpose fill us with a certain moral greatness; that we—sinners, only sinners saved through grace—should be privileged to enter Heaven’s Watch-tower, and from thence survey the future—one of mingled judgment and glory. This high honor is not the privilege of the few, but is freely open to all God’s people irrespective of attainment, education, or age.

Governments have their very existence threatened on every hand by the wild and determined forces of Anarchy and Socialism, the end of which is plainly foretold in Rev. 6:12-17. The reorganization of the social system on a democratic basis, and in which all are reduced to one dead level. The end of all these socialistic ideas—for they will never be realized—is declared in Rev. 13. Universal submission to a Devil-appointed authority, or death in case of refusal, lies before the Church as the Body of Christ is a divine work from its conception (I Cor. 12:13) till its establishment in glory (Eph. 1:22, 23), and consequently cannot become a subject of judgment. peoples of Christendom. The professing Church, now the home of the Holy Ghost, becomes at the close—and when rejected by God—the dwelling place of the demon host of hell (Rev. 18:2). But why multiply? “The Revelation” is the book of eternal results, as “Genesis” is the book of sources; the former gives the end of all things, the latter the beginning of things.

When man has played his last card, and gone over the theatre of human history ending in shame and judgment, then the triumph of God, and the Kingdom of God, and the Rest of God over the rebellions of men and angels are celebrated in the songs of the redeemed in the heavens and earth, “Alleluia,” sing we, and say angels, “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” This, then, is our grand outlook and in which we shall have our part.

Section 1 — Chapter 1:1-8

The introduction occupies the first eight verses, and must rank as almost unequalled and second to none for fulness and variety of subject compressed into so brief a compass. We have first a Preface (vv. 1-3); second, a Divine Salutation and a suited response (vv. 4-6); third, a prophetic Testimony (v. 7); fourth, the Lord’s own announcement of certain Divine Titles (v. 8).

The Divine program unfolded in this marvelous book of plan and purpose is indeed a revelation of thrilling interest. We have here the completion of all previous prophecy—spoken and written; here, too, are given the closing stages in the exciting drama of human history.

The mysteries and wonders of time and eternity; of heaven, earth, and the lake of fire are herein disclosed. The veil is rolled back, the curtains drawn aside as the very word “Revelation” implies. “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” This should have been the title of the book. It is not a Revelation of Jesus Christ personally, so much as a communication to Him from God of things which must shortly come to pass. At the same time the whole scheme of prophecy is here seen to converge on Jesus Christ, and given to Him by God.

Jesus Christ is the faithful custodian of the prophetic word of our God.

The direct object of the book is then stated. “To shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass.” The word servants or bondmen is by no means confined to a special or official class of persons in the New Testament. All God’s people are here contemplated not as priests, nor pilgrims, but as servants. Then Christ’s angel and His servant John, are introduced as the mediums through and by whom the Revelation is passed on to us.

This seems a round-about way of communication. Distance and reserve are because prophecy ever supposes a state of hopeless ruin.

In this book the Church, Israel, and the world are regarded as apostate and fit subjects of divine judgment, while, of course, a remnant in each, approved of God, i.e., distinctly recognized, in the central part of the book (Chaps. 6-19.). God is here viewed as apart from His professed people as a whole, and speaking to “His own” through the intermediary of the prophet. “Who bare record of the Word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, all things that he saw.” The deletion of the second “and” in the verse as in the Revised Version and other authorities is to be carefully noted. The meaning is that the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ are the two subjects of the book, and are embraced in the visions beheld by the seer. “All things that he saw” is not an independent statement, but constitute in brief the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. All were beheld in vision on one day (v. 10). The visions in Daniel and Zechariah were witnessed during the night. The Apocalyptic sights were seen during the day. Both the word and testimony are of a judicial character in keeping with the grand object of the book which is to shew the public intervention of God, as also the steps preparatory to Christ’s assumption of His

world-kingdom (11:15).

Then follows a word of cheer and encouragement to all who read, hear, and keep the words of the prophecy (v. 3). It is also a warning—a much needed one—against the neglect of this invaluable book, and every form of indifference with which it has been treated in all ages, and never more so than now. The book is guarded as no other Divine book, both at its beginning and at its close (see 22:6-9, 18- 20). “He that readeth...they that hear...and keep.” All cannot read.

No doubt, however, the public reading of the Word of God—a Jewish and Christian custom—is referred to here (Luke 4:16-20; Acts 13:15). To this public reading of the Word Paul exhorted Timothy (1 Tim. iv. 13). Read “the Revelation” in your assemblies and in your households. And do not confine the reading to the first three chapters, as many do, but if you desire the Lord’s special blessing, then read in orderly sequence the whole book; read it also to others so that they too may share in the promised benediction.

But why the imperative demand to read the book and hear it read?

Not only is there blessing accruing therefrom, but the grand reason is stated in one emphatic declaration, “for the time is at hand.” Every vision of every prophecy is about to be fulfilled. Prophecy leaps over times and circumstances and sets us down on the very eve of its accomplishment. The tread of the Master’s footstep, almost the sound of His voice is heard. “The time is at hand.” Thus fitly closes this interesting preface to this delightful book—a book which has done, more for the writer than tongue can tell. Does the expression “The time is at hand” seem inconsistent with an almost 2,000 years’ lengthened delay? Ah! they count time differently in heaven. The years of earth are but moments in heaven. According to Divine reckoning the Lord has not been absent in the heavens two days yet (2 Peter 3:8).

We have had a Divine benediction pronounced on all who read, hear, and keep the words of this book; now we have a Divine salutation addressed to “the seven churches which are in Asia,” which in their totality comprehend the whole body of the redeemed.

John’s direct service to the Church now commences. It is the beloved apostle no doubt—for there is but one John to every Christian heart. The apostle who always in his gospel and epistles writes in the third person, is expressly named five times in this book (1:1, 4, 9; 21:2; 22:8). “The seven churches.” “Seven” is the ruling number in the Apocalypse, and intimates what is morally or spiritually complete.

The church is here regarded as a whole. There were more churches or assemblies in Asia than seven, but that symbolic numeral in its moral force sweeps the whole earth and contemplates in its range the Church of God on earth at any given moment. Now observe that ere the mutterings of the coming storm of judgment are heard, ere one threatening word is uttered, ere seal is opened, trumpet blown, or vial poured out, the God-head, each in His own Divine Person, unites in a message of grace and peace to the whole body of the redeemed on earth. This twofold blessing is the common property of all the saved, and is given and secured to us by God Himself. Grace, God's full, free, sovereign, unclouded favor, ever rests upon His own, and peace, their blessed, happy state within.

Need we say, that, ere the horrors of the coming day burst upon the scene we shall have been "caught up." Every saint of God at the Coming is translated from earth to the air to meet the Lord. This Divine salutation is from Jehovah in the eternity and greatness of His Being— "which is," then "which was," intimating His relation to all the past, whether of things, angels, or men, "and which is to come," His connection with the future. What a tower of strength! and this God is our God, great in His greatness.

The "seven Spirits." The Holy Spirit is not presented here as the Comforter, but as the perfect agent in all God's ways. Then, "from Jesus Christ," Who is presented in connection with the past, present, and future.

(1) "The faithful witness." What He was on earth. Faithful in all His rugged path. He never swerved in His pathway from the manger to the cross. He never compromised the claims of God nor adapted the Divine requirements to the caprice, or fear, or favor of man.

(2) The present: "the first begotten of the dead"; and

(3) the future: what He will be: "The Prince of the kings of the earth." The moment Christ is presented thus, there comes an immediate response from His own. "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Notice how all this brings out the characteristics of those who form the church. They are in the consciousness of Christ's love; the great proof of which has been given in His blood.

They know that all their sins have been taken away. They are fully aware of their place of privilege "a kingdom of priests," and they are intelligent as to the place that belongs to Christ, and anticipate with heartfelt desire the time when all will be His.

Such is their response to Him, but, then, turning, as it were, round upon the world, they bear this testimony: "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they

also Which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so. Amen.” How solemn is this announcement ; and how different the attitude of the world towards Christ to that of those who know what it is to be loosed from their sins in His blood.

Then, before the communication John has to make is opened, there is again a reminder that we are brought into the presence of One Who is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending—the Almighty. If everything is to be shaken, and all pass away that does not come up to the divine standard, yet He abides, Who was before anything existed, and remains when everything of man disappears.

Almighty to uphold or destroy, and able to give effect to all that He purposes.

Section 2 — Chapter 1:9-20

We trust every reader has secured a copy of the Chart issued with the February number of *The Faith and the Flock*, in which the twelve sections of the Revelation are shewn. In turning then to the chart, we find this section thus characterized: Christ in the midst of the seven Golden Lamp-stands. This, then, is the first of the visions beheld by the seer in the lonely isle of Patmos—a convict place of banishment for prisoners peculiarly obnoxious to the Emperor and Government. All passed before the rapt gaze of the prophet on the Lord’s day—the first day of the week. “I was” or “became in Spirit”; that is, the Seer for the time being was taken possession of by the Spirit—heart, mind, and in fact the whole man controlled by the Holy Spirit; the absence of the article before “Spirit” marks the action as specially characteristic. Whatever Domitian—one of the cruelest of the emperors—laid to the charge of his distinguished prisoner, yet the real ground of his banishment is there stated to be his uncompromising testimony to “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” That no political offence was justly chargeable upon the aged apostle is shewn from the fact that on the accession of the just and humane Nerva, the apostle was released.

This would not have been done had a political offence been proved, for all the Roman emperors were exceedingly jealous of their sovereign rights—such offences were not forgiven, nor readily forgotten.

In the closing words of the previous section (v. 8), the voice of God is heard. In the opening of this section, we listen to the words of man (verse 9). There are awful scenes revealed in this book, enough and more to appall the stoutest heart, but He who stilled the angry and raging elements which sought to get out of control of their Creator (Matt. 8:26),

who trod on the billows of the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 9:24-27), speaks once again, before ever the storm of divine wrath bursts forth from the throne (Rev. 4:5), and from the altar (Rev. 14:18). The voice of God is the terror of the wicked. To us His voice is the sheet anchor of our souls, and as we travel through the numerous and sublime scenes unfolded in this wonderful book, we carry with us the voice of v. 8, and our souls are calmed. It is grand in these days to be lost in the greatness of Another—and that other even God Himself.

John announces himself as the channel of these divine communications—not as an apostle, but in words of severe simplicity— “I, John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus” (omit “Christ”).

Those three things embrace all the saints of this age and those of Apocalyptic times as well.

Let us now put together the various separate links in one chain which introduce John into the prophetic scene. There were many distinguished men bearing the honored name of John, but to the heart of the church there is but one such. On moral and spiritual grounds the writer of the fourth Gospel, the three epistles ascribed to the same writer, and the reposer in the bosom of Jesus (John 8:25, R.V.), is the John the writer of The Revelation. Banished from the haunts of men, he is the more alone with God. His natural powers for the occasion were held in abeyance—he “became in Spirit.” The visions were beheld in one day—the first day of the week in more senses than one. The emperor unwittingly accomplished the purpose of God in sending His servant to Patmos, the very center of the prophetic situation. In front of him lay the Asiatic assemblies whose history and end he is about to relate. Jerusalem crowded with sacred memories lay south. Rome, whose prisoner he was, but whose doom the Seer is going to unfold, lay west. Babylon, the enslaver of God’s people of old, lay to the east. Russia, the Magog of prophecy, lay north. Here in Patmos, the visions contained in the book were beheld. “I...heard behind me a great voice” (v. 10). “And I turned to see the voice that spake with me” (v. 12). Evidently, the seer had his mind and eyes directed onward to the kingdom, but ere the glories of Messiah’s reign could be entered upon, the fortunes of the professing church—the most responsible witness for God of all others—must first be depicted. The ruin of the church necessarily precedes the full revelation, and establishment of the kingdom. The “great voice” was the voice of God. He is the Source of all authority in this book— “All power is of God.” He has already morally judged the professing Christian body on earth, but the sentence of utter rejection (Rev. 3:16) is not yet executed. Till then, that body is God’s public witness to bear His name and exhibit His character on earth. Alas! it has miserably failed. The church as the body of

Christ is intact, and is maintained in essential unity before God. It cannot come into judgment as in its inception, maintenance, and perfection in glory—all is secured by God Himself. And it is not in this aspect the church is presented in Revelation, but as the House of God.

The seven churches in Asia to whom John was to write are severally named (v. 11). These various churches had each their own special message sent them, but apart from the local and distinctive application, the seven churches separately and together formed the coloring and background on which the history of the church as a whole could be depicted, from her moral fall (Rev. 2:4) till her rejection (3:16). Note that here the churches as such are addressed; whereas in the next section the representatives are written to. “I saw seven golden candlesticks” or lamps. In the Spirit’s interpretation of the symbol we read “the seven candlesticks...are the seven churches” (v. 20). Each lamp stands on its own base. Each church is within its own sphere, responsible alone to God. There is no Metropolitan church on earth. Each assembly in its own geographical locality is directly and solely responsible to Christ, and not to another or group of such, whether in London or Rome. The mystical body of Christ is composed of the aggregate of saints (1 Cor. 12:13). A confederation of assemblies may display a certain external unity, but only for a brief season. The thing is bound to break up, and the truth of this has been amply verified in our own days. The Spirit’s unity is that of all saints, not of many, or all assemblies. “The seven golden candlesticks.” The numeral seven points to what is spiritually complete, while the gold refers to what is righteous before God. The meaning is, that the Church here viewed as the House of God (1 Tim. 3:15) was constituted in Divine righteousness. In the symbol, therefore, of the Seven Golden Candlesticks, we have the Church shewn as God sees it, morally complete and divinely righteous as His vessel of testimony on the earth—not what the Church became, but what it was in God’s sight, and this it should have been practically—a reflex of God’s character.

But the seven golden lamps do not form the subject of this introductory vision. What is the church apart from Christ? Its life, glory, and blessedness are derived from Him. Beloved reader, let us come out of our narrow and circumscribed surroundings and contemplate with profoundest reverence the One here characteristically described as in the midst of the Seven Candlesticks— “One like unto [the] Son of Man.” The church has moved from her center. She has got out of touch and contact with her Head in heaven. She has lost faith in the Living God. She has lost sight of the glorious One in her midst. Hence the drifting process, rapidly bearing her down till the climax of horrors is reached, and she fathoms the depths of

Satanic wickedness (Rev. 18:2).

It is the characteristics of the Son of Man that here come before us.

In the character of Son of Man He touches the human race. Under that same title He shall exercise universal sovereignty, and to Him as Son of Man all judgment is committed. The judicial glory and majesty of Christ overwhelmed the Seer (verse 17). What effect has it wrought upon the soul and conscience of the writer and reader? “Clothed with a garment down to the foot” intimates calm, deliberate, dignified judgment. “Girt about the paps (breasts) with a golden girdle.” Divine Righteousness and Divine Faithfulness constitute the girdle, but these are never separated from the love of His blessed heart, though these have to be restrained. “His head and hairs white like wool, as white as snow.” This part of the description identifies Him with “The Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7:9). The Son of Man and the Ancient of Days are distinct in Person, but certain characteristics and actions are similar to both (Dan. 7:13, 22; Rev. 1:13, 14). Divine wisdom—essentially so—and absolute purity in the color named— white—is what we gather from the head and hairs. Divine wisdom is ever exercised in essential purity. The uncovered head points to what He is personally, not what He is officially. “His eyes as a flame of fire.” Nothing escapes His keen penetrating judgment. “His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.” Firm, unyielding, judicial judgment upon all that which His eye searches out in the churches. “His voice as the sound of many waters.” The waves of human passion and rebellion will yet as before rise and hurl themselves against the throne of the Eternal, but the majesty and terror of His voice— more powerful than many cataracts—will break and utterly overwhelm every combination of evil (Ps. 93).

In v. 16 certain official glories are presented, and we may add, what is relative also. “He had in His right hand seven stars.” Stars are meant to shine in a dark night and reflect the light of heaven on earth. “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches” (v. 20). Christ is the source of all gifts to His church, and they are upheld by His power; whether for administration or edification.

All here is viewed in Divine order. (Compare with 3:1). As the night darkens, may every spiritual ruler and guide shine increasingly, and draw his resources more deeply from Christ. He will sustain every faithful servant in His “right hand.” Further, “Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.” The execution of Divine judgment by the irresistible force of His word (see 2 Thess. 2:8). Christ never puts His hands on His foes. He speaks, and at once the judgment is executed. “His countenance as the sun shineth in his strength.”

Supreme glory is indicated in His blessed face, and glory of such sort as no mortal can gaze upon.

The sight was all too much, even for the disciple peculiarly loved of the Lord. John himself narrates the effect of the vision. “When I saw Him I fell at His feet as dead” (v. 17). This was the overwhelming effect of the vision. “And He laid His right hand upon me.” O how the gentle pressure of that hand must have thrilled the heart of John as he lay at the feet of his adorable Lord. Then, once again, the familiar “Fear not” would calm and quiet the soul. “I am the First and the Last.” Here is a title essentially Divine and a rock of strength for human weakness and sorrow. Build upon it, rest your soul’s weakness upon it. Jehovah takes that same title in the book of Isaiah three times (Chaps. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). Christ applies it also to Himself three times in our book (Chaps. 1:17 ; 2:8 ; 22:13).

As the “First” He is supreme and before all. As the “Last” He is the end, the Consummation. He is source and end. And this One is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, now glorified in the heavens.

Then He says—who says ? not the Seer, but the Lord Himself, “I am He that liveth.” The Living One victorious over death and all the circumstances of life. “Was dead,” or “became dead.” Death had no claim upon Him. He voluntarily entered into the domain of death. He laid down His life. Death is the stronghold of Satan and the result of sin. Men enter it of necessity. He voluntarily passed through its portals. Now hear the shout of the victor, “BEHOLD I AM ALIVE FOR EVERMORE.” This, then, is our everlasting strength, our strong consolation. Our Lord calls attention to a mighty truth practically forgotten by the church. It was the battle cry of Luther. The Lord lives! The Lord lives! “And have the keys of death and of hades” (not the English word “hell”). He is Master of the whole situation. He is Lord of death and hades, of the bodies and souls of all—but especially does He preserve those of His own.

There are two commands to write (vv. 11, 19), but between these we have the glorious visions of Christ and the consolatory truths contained in vv. 17 and 18. What the Seer is to write is contained in three divisions into which the contents of the book are distributed, not including the Introduction (chap. 1:1-8), nor the closing section (chap. 22:6-21). “Write the things which thou hast seen (past) and the things which are (present) and the things which shall be hereafter” (future). Those three divisions are consecutive; they do not overlap.

Each is complete in itself, and contains within itself its own group of events. The first division is found in chap. 1. The second division occupies chaps. 2 and 2. The third division

is the largest, commencing with chap. 4 and closing with chap. 22:5. [The mystery of the stars and candlesticks (v. 20) has been already referred to.]