

Revelation 1 — Introduction and The Vision of Christ

Notes on The Revelation with Practical Reflections

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chapter, where the third division commences, on to the end, we have also several sub-divisions or sections. These are not arranged as a number of historical discourses, each following the other in regular order of narration, but each division gives us a distinct line of instruction. Thus the whole book may be regarded as a series of pictures, each distinct from the others, and every one, so far as it goes, complete in itself; and if we will only be content to take one of these sections at a time, and study it prayerfully, we shall find that at least the outline of the book will be clearly seen, though we may have still much to learn as to the details. The book opens with introductory sentences, extending to the end of the eighth verse. Then we have the sections of the book fairly presented to us. 1. The vision of the first chapter, and its connections, form a distinct section or picture -- the things which John saw -- the Lord as Son of man in the midst of the assemblies, judging them as to their responsibility to Him, as light-bearers in a dark world. It extends from the ninth verse to the end. 2. The second and third chapters form another division -- the things which are. Here the saints' accountability as to the rights of Christ, the honor of Christ, and the truth of Christ, are clearly brought out. We learn the solemn responsibility of assemblies bearing the name of Christ; and see everything judged according to the love, and truth, and holiness of that name. How few seem to be aware of their accountability to Christ for their corporate position and action, and of what is really involved in being gathered together in the name of Jesus. 3. The fourth and fifth chapters present to us another picture. It is mostly a heavenly scene. Everything is looked at in connection with the throne of God. The lamb, as it had been slain, fills heaven with joy and praise, and the circle so widens, that our spirits are led out into the contemplation of millennial blessing, when every creature in heaven, and earth, and under the earth, will praise the Lamb. 4. We may look at the opening of the SEVEN SEALS as another section. It extends from the beginning of the sixth chapter to the fifth verse of the eighth chapter. The seventh chapter coming in between the sixth and seventh seals is a parenthesis. There is also a parenthesis between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets, and the outpouring of the sixth and seventh vials. Each of these seven-fold series of judgments terminates in lightnings, and thunderings, and voices, and a great earthquake. 5. The sounding of the SEVEN TRUMPETS may be looked at also as a distinct section, extending from the sixth verse of the eighth chapter to the end of the eleventh chapter. Observe that this division goes on to the judgment of the dead at the end of the millennium. It is important to notice also, that at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, when there are lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, the Lord Jesus comes forth in glory with His saints to take the kingdom, and judge the world in righteousness. The voices in heaven say, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever {Rev. 11:15}.

The parenthesis between the sixth and seventh trumpets occupies the tenth chapter, and the first fourteen verses of the eleventh chapter. 6. The twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth chapters give us another section. It is a deeply interesting portion for our spiritual contemplation. It goes back to the incarnation of our Lord -- the man-child -- and extends to His coming in flaming fire to tread the winepress of the wrath of God. It is the history of the remnant of Israel in the time of the great tribulation. 7. The fifteenth and sixteenth chapters may be read together. We first have the martyred remnant of the previous section now standing on the sea of glass before the throne of God in heaven; then we have the outpouring of the vials. There is also a short parenthesis between the sixth and seventh vials. 8. Though we have had the judgment and fall of Babylon announced before, yet so important is the consideration of this mother of harlots and abominations of the earth {Rev. 17:5}, that the next two chapters are occupied in giving details of her mysterious working and bewitching influence. Multitudes are deceived by her, and drawn within the vortex of her intoxicating grasp. As she had a place of luxuriousness and popularity in the world, both in a civil and religious aspect, so her sorrow and torment must be accordingly. 9. The nineteenth and twentieth chapters, and also the first eight verses of the twenty-first chapter give us another separate portion of this blessed book. The Lamb's wife is here seen in contrast with the great whore. The marriage of the Lamb takes place, and heaven is opened for Christ and His saints to come forth in manifested glory. The judgment of the beast and false prophet, the kings of the earth and their associates, and the binding of Satan, usher in the millennial reign. Here we get the first resurrection defined, as, in a manner, distributive, and all who have part in it reign with Christ. We have also the letting loose of Satan at the close of the thousand years, and the judgment of God upon the myriads of living wicked deceived by him, followed by the final judgment of all the wicked dead. This is succeeded by a description of the eternal state, the new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. 10. The next scene takes us back again. It gives us the Bride, the Lamb's wife, in relation to the kingdom during the reign of Christ, filling up a most important and necessary part in prophetic truth. It extends from the ninth verse of the twenty-first chapter to the sixth verse of the twenty-second chapter. It is a golden scene, full of light, and life, and blessing. The former part of the chapter shows us the Bride in her eternal state. The last section is followed by some fragmentary sentences, in which the coming of the Lord as the present hope of the believer is the most prominent thought. With this book the Scriptures are closed, so that for any man now to add to God's word is to expose himself to the plagues written in this book. It is addressed by the Lord to the assemblies, and concludes with the thrice repeated assurance of His coming quickly.

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In looking through this blessed book, however hastily, we cannot fail to notice how often Christ is brought before us as THE LAMB. Its importance is obvious; for the believer proves in his experience that truth itself, apart from The Truth, is rather calculated to amuse the intellect than to warm the heart; it also shows us that God's way of teaching prophecy is not so much by the arrangement of events in chronological order, as viewing everything in relation to Christ Himself. In the Revelation, THE LAMB is the center around which all else is clustered, the foundation on which everything lasting is built, the nail on which all else hangs, the object to which all points, and the spring from which all

blessing proceeds. THE LAMB is the light, the glory, the life, the Lord of heaven and earth, from whose face all defilement must flee away, and in whose presence fulness of joy is known. Hence, we cannot go far in the study of The Revelation, without seeing THE LAMB, like direction-posts along the road, to remind us that He who did by Himself purge our sins is now highly exalted, and that to Him every knee must bow, and every tongue confess. If the saying of another be true, that “They flourish as the watered herb, Who keep THE LAMB in sight.”

then this one feature of this inspired book should be enough to engage our hearts, and warrant the largest expectations of blessing. And if the frequent contemplation of the precious blood of Christ keeps down the weeds of our flesh, nourishes the inner man, and is the wine that cheers both God and man, we may be assured of gathering much profit from the frequent and prayerful reading of this book, where THE LAMB as it had been slain is so prominently set forth, and where we are so often reminded of the sufferings of Christ, and the judgments and glories which follow.

The first words give us the title of the book -- “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” The first three verses are a kind of preface. We are reminded that the ascended Jesus, though invested with all power in heaven and in earth, is still Jehovah’s righteous servant, and as such receives this book from God. John, not simply by the immediate inspiration of the Spirit, as was usual, but by the guidance of an angel, receives the particulars of the book to communicate to the churches. We are told that the object of the Revelation is to show unto His servants the things which must shortly come to pass. (They are not called, as in John’s other writings, the friends of Jesus, or sons of God, but servants.) To show the shortness of time in the mind of God, and the speedy fulfilment of the prophetic word, it is added in the third verse, The time is at hand {Rev. 1:3}.

enjoyment of peace is entirely dependent on our apprehension of Divine grace. But it is not, as in other epistles, added, from God the Father, but from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come {Rev. 1:4};

that is, from the eternal I AM; for this book is rather the dealings of God with man in the earth, than of the Father with His sons. Then we get, From the seven Spirits which are before His throne {Rev. 1:4}.

As seven is a symbol of perfection, we have the Eternal Spirit in fulness in His various actings, rather than the indwelling and actings of the “one Spirit” in the Church, as in Ephesians (v. 4).

John writes with authority, being conscious that he is recording God’s truth, and that the various scenes and actions he was about to relate were the testimony of Jesus Christ -- things which he had heard and seen in vision (ver. 2).

Lastly, it is from

An especial blessing is promised to those who hear (even if unable to read) (ver. 3). How encouraging! How different are man’s thoughts to God’s! Man says, Do not read the book of Revelation, it is so difficult; or do not listen to any who may read it to you. God says, Whether you read

or hear you shall find blessing.

for He is the Son begotten in resurrection; the first who rose from the dead, never more to die; and He is also presented as

By keeping those things which are written therein {Rev. 1:3},

we have not the thought of obeying commands, like the law of Moses, as much as keeping in the heart the solemn instruction which the prophetic word conveys. In this book, the future passes before the mind's eye like a panorama, shedding its light upon everything of the present, and pointing out the course of all the principles at work around us. All who keep these things in their hearts will find present blessing. We are told that Mary kept the sayings of Jesus in her heart. Jesus also spoke of this as a special mark of those who loved Him: If a man love me, he will keep my words: . . . He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings (John 14:23, 24).

Surely this is a searching word for the conscience of any who have neglected the sayings of Jesus contained in "The Revelation." Verses 4 to 8 may be looked at as introductory to the great subjects of the book. Seven churches in Asia are selected for John to address. He salutes them in the usual apostolic manner with Grace unto you, and peace {Rev. 1:4}.

Observe the order. -- not peace and grace, but "Grace unto you, and peace"; because peace always flows from grace, and our

Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness;

for every other witness has proved more or less unfaithful: the first-begotten from the dead,

the Prince of the kings of the earth {Rev. 1:5},

because the book largely treats of kings, and other things of earth; hence His title and power are asserted. Immediately the glory, triumph, and dominion of Christ are spoken of, the Church seems at once exultingly to respond with, Unto Him that loved [loveth] 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 {Rev. 1:5, 6}.

Notice in this song -1st. They have the joy of present redemption. 2nd. That all true believers are priests -- a royal priesthood; and 3rd. That all is traced to Divine love, and flows to us through the blood-shedding and death of the Son of God. This fills the heart with joy, and the lips with praise (vv.5, 6). In v. 7, the Lord's coming is presented to us according to the subject of the book in relation to the earth. His saints (of course) are with Him, having been previously caught up to meet Him in the air. The scene is Christ manifested in glory as the only Potentate. The last time the world saw Christ was on the Cross; the next time they see Him will be coming in the clouds of heaven. Then, in His own glory, the glory of the Father and of the holy angels, with all His saints changed and fashioned into His glorious likeness, with a dazzling brightness that is inconceivable,

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The Jews, too, shall look upon Him whom they pierced, and mourn {see Zech. 12:10};

while all the tribes of the earth in bitterest anguish wail, because Jesus is come to take vengeance, and put all enemies under His feet. “Bright with all His Crowns of glory, See the royal Victor’s brow; Once for sinners marred and glory -See the Lamb exalted now; While before Him Every knee on earth must bow. “King of kings! let earth adore Him High on His exalted throne; Fall, ye nations, fall before Him, And His righteous sceptre own; All the glory Be to Him and Him alone!”

Happy those who can peacefully contemplate that day, and truly say, Even so. Amen {Rev. 1:7}.

After we are thus instructed about the manifestation of Christ in glory, the announcement of His eternal Godhead closes the introduction (v. 8).

Chapter 1:9-20: The Things Which John Saw

We now come, strictly speaking, to THE REVELATION. It is divided into three parts: The things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter,

or after these things (v. 19).

The first division occupies the first chapter, from the twelfth to the seventeenth verses. These are the things which John had just seen. John addresses himself, not as one in apostolic office, or as a member of the “one body,” the Church, but as a brother of all the servants of God, and their companion in the kingdom, now characterized by tribulation and by exercise of patience. The kingdom predicted by prophets promised peace and blessing, as will be known in millennial times; but the kingdom has hitherto been, and in the action of this book is marked with tribulation and evil by Satan’s power, although also by God’s blessing to His people, and will end in judgment, as we learn from Matt. 13:11, 42, 50, and other Scriptures. It is the kingdom of heaven in mystery. There is, therefore, need of patience until Jesus comes. In the world ye shall have tribulation,

said Jesus; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world {John 16:33}.

The Lord’s aged and honored servant was banished to Patmos, a desolate island in the Grecian Archipelago, for the word of God and the testimony of Christ. Little, perhaps, did he think that the solitary and barren island would be a place for his being favoured by God with such deep communion and astounding revelations. But so it was. Again the apostle proved that before honour is humility {Prov. 15:33, 18:12},

and that God’s way of preparing us for special blessing is to bring low; as we sometimes say, “The way to exaltation is the dust”; and the thought is full of comfort to God’s tried and humbled children. Those who are exercised before God will usually find that the longer and deeper the time of trial, the richer the blessing that follows. The apostle tells that he was in the Spirit {Rev. 1:10}.

While all believers have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, we are not always “in the Spirit.” To be “in the Spirit” implies that the faculties of the soul are so under the power and unction of the Holy

Ghost, as to enable us to discern and enter into the mind of God, and to be occupied with His things. This is an important practical point. It is to be feared that we often set about attending

to spiritual matters in a carnal frame, and are content to know that the Holy Spirit dwells in us, without being careful to be “in the Spirit.” We need the anointed eye, and a spiritual frame of soul, if we would profit others or enjoy the truth of God ourselves. By the Lord’s day {Rev. 1:10}

we are not to understand “the day of the Lord,” but the first day of the week; the day which reminds us of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, of rest in a finished work, and triumph in a risen Head. The first thing that arrested the attention of the apostle was the sound behind him of a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches, etc. {Rev. 1:10, 11}.

Thus the person is announced, and the apostle’s service clearly marked out. This trumpet-like sound induced John to turn round to see what it was, when the glorious vision of one like unto the Son of man, in the midst of seven golden candlesticks {see Rev. 1:13},

was immediately brought before him. With regard to the candlesticks, we are told The seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches (Rev. 1:20);

thus we do not get here the doctrine of “the Church,” the body of Christ, “one body,” “one new man,” and such-like expressions, but “seven churches”; because the vision has regard to those who bear the name of Christ in earthly circumstances, and in responsibility to Christ, rather than the one body, or as seated in heavenly places in Christ, as we find treated of in Ephesians. The Lord is therefore seen in the midst {Rev. 1:13}.

This is His promised place. Whosoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them {Matt. 18:20}.

The thought, however, of the one body of Christ is in a certain sense included, inasmuch as there was but one candlestick in one city -- no division. In fact, the idea of different churches in one city is nowhere found in Scripture, while division, or a sectarian position, is most solemnly condemned. The Church, therefore, composed of all the believers in a city, as in Ephesus for instance, was a golden candlestick, -- costly, precious, and valuable as gold, and a fit vessel for bearing light. Such is the Church of God. It has no light in itself -- nothing but what is bestowed by the ascended Jesus.

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Christ is seen in the midst of the “golden candlesticks,” and that, too, in the character of a discernor and judge in His own house, the only time we have Him in such a character, with readiness to bless and encourage, as well as to correct. And I cannot exclude the thought, that His first being presented as

Such is Christ’s present place among the churches. Though, strictly speaking, no company of Christians can now lay claim to be the candlestick in any place, because of our sinful divisions and sects, yet we can always count upon His presence, if really

like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle {Rev. 1:13},

But while we are assured of His presence, we should never forget our responsibility to Him as the Head of the body, and Master of His own house (Heb. 3:6).

is to remind us that He is also a merciful, compassionate, and sympathizing High Priest. By His head and hairs white like wool, as white as snow,

we are taught that He not only bears the marks of the Ancient of Days (Dan 7), but is infinitely pure and holy; while His eyes, as a flame of fire {Rev. 1:14},

are all searching, from whose notice nothing can escape. His almighty power to put all enemies under His feet, and trample them in His fury, may be brought out by His feet, like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace;

and His voice, as the sound of many waters {Rev. 1:15},

may teach us that His mighty voice may be heard far and wide as the thunders of the fall of Niagara; for unto Him is given all power in heaven and in earth. Nor are the assemblies to forget that out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword {Rev. 1:16},

by which He can execute judgments (Rev. 2:16). His countenance, the bright effulgence of glory and uncreated light, was as the sun shineth in his strength {Rev. 1:16}.

By the seven stars in His right hand {see Rev. 1:16},

we are taught not only that He is the Source, but the Sustainer of all ministry to the Church. He gave gifts unto men {Eph. 4:8},

and in His power alone they can be exercised for true profit. Christ is presented to us as judging the churches, as Peter tells judgment must begin at the house of God {1 Pet. 4:17}.

It is quite unscriptural to call a building of brick and stone a “sanctuary,” or “house of God.” God’s people, the members of Christ, now are God’s house; it is composed of living stones, and Christ judges both individually and corporately. Blessed it is to know that the Master’s rule is If we judge ourselves, we should not be judged {1 Cor. 11:31};

but it is very solemn, that when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world {1 Cor. 11:32}.

Like the true antitype of Aaron, Christ trims the lamps, removes the hindrances to the bright burning of the light, pours in oil, and never extinguishes the feeble glimmer of little faith. Christ must have realities.

gathered together in His name (Matt. 18:20).

Verse 17. The effect of this glorious vision of Christ on the beloved apostle he then describes: When I saw HIM, I fell at His feet as dead {Rev. 1:17}.

Overpowered with the glimpse of the glorified Son of man, the mortal powers gave way; but it was only to bring out the grace and tenderness of Him who was so precious to the apostle's heart. The right hand

of Jesus was soon laid on His servant, now fallen prostrate at His feet, and the comforting words fell from His gracious lips, Fear not; I am the first and the last. I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death {Rev. 1:17, 18}.

Thus, by the eye and heart being again fixed on the triumphant Savior, who conquered death and hell for him, and by the Lord's tender assurance that He was his loving Savior, and that there was no ground for fear, John was comforted, and then instructed to write what he had just seen.