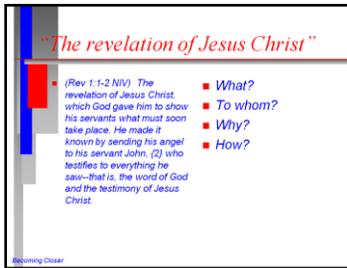


Revelation I

Prologue-Greeting-Doxology &
Vision

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Note that this is a *revelation* -- an unveiling of a mystery. As such, we are entitled to ask (and have answered) some of the detective's questions. In the process, however, we need to observe also the style in which they are answered.

To whom was it addressed? *To his servants.* First of all, that means us, and all Christians of all times. The church is one. God has sent us this revelation, and as Paul assures us :

(2 Tim 3:16-17 NIV) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, {17} so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So we may safely conclude that this book was meant to be understood. But Holmes, why did he send this particular book? To show us what must soon take place.

This, first and foremost, means that this is a book of prophecy. In my opinion, this rules out any thought that the poetic interpretation (which denies prophecy in this book) is possibly complete. It is, as noted, always correct.

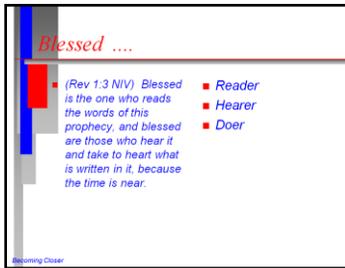
The word "soon" in this text is ambiguous in the Greek. It can mean "soon" or "suddenly" -- and of course the historicist and preterist take the first meaning, and the futurists are convinced of the second.

Finally, there is "how" the revelation is delivered. It is clear that it originates with God. This is important in the light of :

(Mat 24:36 NIV) "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

The message is then delivered from the Father to the Son, who commends it to an angel to deliver to John. The method is impressive; I suspect this is intentional. Sometimes the medium is the message; a warning can be delivered in jest, or in deep solemnity. The latter usually carries more weight. Winston Churchill once tried to send a very short, personal note with certain intelligence data to Stalin -- before the Germans invaded Russia. His ambassador (a hack politician who evidently had no sense of style) simply handed the note in, instead of making a formal presentation of it. Churchill, in his history of the Second World War, lamented this bitterly, for he felt if delivered with due pomp and ceremony (and starkness) it might have saved the Soviets so much surprise destruction.

The same thought applies to us. This is the most solemn of messages. It is our responsibility to heed it.



This is the first of seven “blesseds” in the book of Revelation -- a point of structure to note.

First, blessed is the reader. In John’s time, this would not mean what it does today, for the average person could not read. Instead, a reader would mount a pulpit (as is still done in many older churches today -- a pulpit on each side, one for the Gospels, one for the Letters, one for the Old Testament, one for the New Testament) and read aloud to the congregation the Word. Such a person was worthy of blessing not only because they shared their learning with the congregation, but because of the risk they ran of becoming a martyr. This was a very public act of worship, and the martyrdom reader was probably viewed as a key to extinguishing the church.

Next, blessed is the hearer. The only people who today can understand this quite like John’s original audience are those who listen to cassette tapes of the Word, either because they are blind, or because this is a profitable way to use commuting time. It is interesting to note that when English translations such as the Great Bible were placed in churches, usually chained to a pulpit, crowds would wait for hours to get in to hear the word -- read by anyone who could. Blessed is the hearer.

Finally -- and most important -- blessed is the doer, the one who takes these words to heart. James put it this way:

(James 1:25 NIV) But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.

Why? *Because the time is near.* Again, subject to different interpretations, but always because the prophecy is about to be fulfilled.



I must digress: many people (especially futurists) dismiss the poetic theory on the grounds that Revelation is not poetry. Indeed, it cannot be, because poetry (or allegory, or spiritual interpretation) is worthless. Chuck Smith puts it this way: “(the Spiritual interpretation) ...confuses things so completely that nobody understands what is what. This stand takes everything in a spiritual sense and nothing means what it says. Everything has an interpretation as a spiritual allegory. When you spiritualize the Scriptures you remove any authority or teaching from them, because every man is free to interpret the spiritual allegory as he desires.”

I must disagree. First, it is a poetic interpretation; poetry is a way of telling the truth. God used it in the Psalms (in which we see plenty of “spiritual allegory” -- a word which Pastor Smith misuses, as is common in America). I submit the question is not whether or not poetry can tell the truth; it can -- God used it in the Psalms. The question is, is Revelation a poetic book?

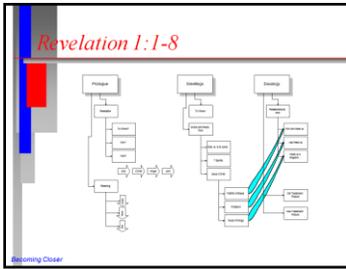
I submit that it is. To understand why, we need to look at how poetry is constructed in the Bible. Poetry, except lately, rhymes. But how? There are three kinds of rhyme:

- Sound (“rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain”)
- Rhythm (like a limerick)
- Thought (“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want”)

The last is the Lord’s own method in Hebrew (and a good one -- it translates into any language so well). But we need to look further than that.

Many people view poetry as restricted to wild outpourings of the heart. A good example of this is Psalm 51, David’s plea for forgiveness after his adultery (and murder) with Bathsheba. But there are other ways to write poetry in thought. As Psalm 51 is a wild splash of color across the poetic canvas, Psalm 119 is a tapestry. Each section begins with a Hebrew letter; in the Hebrew, each verse in a section begins with that letter. It’s like an acrostic in English. Revelation is like a tapestry, a point which I will make visually in the next slide.

One last question: if it’s poetic, does that mean we must not take it literally? Of course not. The Psalms are full of historical allusions, and in some cases (Psalm 106, for example) the Psalm is practically a history lesson. If God writes history in poetry that way -- why not future history?



If you cannot see poetry -- order and structure of thought -- in this, you are blind.

Every time God is referenced here, there are threes -- three in the Trinity, three aspects of Jesus Christ, which correspond to three relationships with us.

This is a case where a picture is worth a thousand pages of speaker's notes.



At this point Chuck Smith's comment might seem to carry a lot of weight: after all, did you really understand all that deep poetry you had to read in High School English (sorry about that to our English teachers)? But remember -- this is a revelation; it is meant to be understood. So therefore we must presume that God has given us all the tools we need to understand everything which is "profitable" for us. For those things not profitable -- they will be hidden, until the time comes when they are profitable.

The Bible itself, therefore, will be our guide on this exploration of Revelation. How will we do this?

- We will seek to interpret the images given in the light of other images. For example, in Daniel we see a "horn" used to describe a king or ruler; the beast on which we find the horn a kingdom. Is it too much a stretch to use horn to mean "king, ruler, sultan, president, czar, etc..... head of state?"
- We will seek to interpret patterns in terms of other patterns. When we see 1260 days (or three and a half years) we will seek to interpret this in light of other mentions of that time period.
- Whenever possible, we will check our conclusions with the plain language (prose) statements of the Gospels and Letters, and such of the Old Testament as might apply.

Truth is united; it cannot be divided. Let us work to perceive it.

Greeting

- (Rev 1:4-5 NIV) John To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, [5] and from Jesus Christ
- Seven Churches
- Grace and Peace from
 - him who....
 - seven spirits
 - Jesus Christ

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Why seven churches? It's the first of 54 instances in Revelation in which we see the number 7. It's worth a minute of our time to understand that this number is usually associated with *completeness*. We have seven days in a week. Often, in Revelation, after seven "somethings" it is finished.

So, is this then a sign of "completeness?" The futurist argues that this implies that this is the "complete" history of the church. Extending that argument to other sevens makes it seem rather weak. (Pun intended)

It's just possible that the completeness means that these churches may stand for all others. They are a picture of the "complete" church, not in chronological order as much as through all times.

One final possibility: they may simply have been the seven churches over which John had some authority, or for which he had some special love.

Grace and peace from

Note the order here. We are told in Hebrews (Heb. 8:5) that the tabernacle is the pattern of things in heaven, and this is the "tabernacle" order of the Trinity: the Father (corresponding to the ark in the Holy of Holies), the Spirit (the lampstands in the Holy Place) and the Son (the sacrifice on the altar).

He who was, is and is to come -- John butchers the Greek here. It is interesting to note that one author (Barclay) thinks the butchered Greek a good reason to deny the authorship of John the Apostle -- and then gives the butchering theological significance. For what John has done here is to alter the grammar in two ways:

- First, he changes it so that the name of God, I AM, remains unaltered by the demands of the Greek language.
- He also changes another tense to prevent giving the impression that God can change.

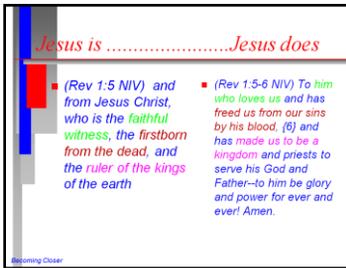
The next name, the seven spirits, has caused a lot of trouble for commentary writers (I notice that futurists tend to ignore the problem -- which may be a sign of intelligence!) We are not used to thinking of "Seven Spirits of God." There are these possibilities, among others:

- Again, it may simply imply completeness.
- It could mean (there is some textual support for this in the Greek) that the Spirit is present *equally* among the seven churches.
- It could be a reference to Isaiah's prophecy of Christ:

(Isa 11:2 NIV) The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD--

I suspect this is another "locked door."

And then, of course, Jesus Christ (segue to next slide).



The three points highlight in different colors are to make a point: this is poetry, these are reflective thoughts of each other. Take them in parallel:

- Jesus is the faithful witness and is him who loves us. Witness in the Greek is *martus*, which is the root of our word *martyr*. Greater love has no man than this: that he lay down his life for a friend. Get the connection?
- He is the firstborn. That can mean first in priority (which he certainly is), but I think the poetry demands the other interpretation: he is the first fruit of the Resurrection. As such, he has indeed freed us from our sins by his blood. (The KJV has a mistranslation here, based upon a faulty manuscript available at the time. It is translated “washed in his blood.” A great line for hymns, but not a good translation).
- He is the ruler of kings (see Psalm 89:27) {it is interesting to see that by His sacrifice he achieved what Satan offered him in the wilderness} and as such is entitled to have us as a kingdom (note here it’s kingdom *and* priests, not kingdom *of* priests, as in Hebrews).

Not shown on the slide is the end of the verse: to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.



The apparent quotation of the Old Testament is actually composed from Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10. There are two points about this text specifically:

- Please throw out the idea of the “secret” return of Jesus (as the Jehovah’s Witnesses would have it). The plain sense of the Scripture, here and elsewhere, is the highly visible return of the Lord.
- Even at the start of the book, we see the central theme: The Return of the Lord.

The passage here, poetically, is a counterweight. It is the Old Testament counterweight to the next quotation from God. It is an interesting pattern. Frequently, in the Old Testament, God will give a command, and end the statement with “I am the Lord.” It is as if to enforce the gravity of the command. Here, it is to enforce the gravity of the statement that He will return. It is an elaborate form of “I am the Lord.”:

- It is bracketed -- alpha and omega
- It contains a trinity of being (another three!)
- It uses an almost unique (except for 2 Corinthians 6:8, it is unique to Revelation) name for God: Almighty. This is the same word which in the Septuagint is translated “Lord of Hosts.” The implication to a Jew is clear: His return is guaranteed by the power of the Lord of Hosts!

"In the Spirit.."

(Rev 19:11 NIV) I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that were mine in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. (19) On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet. (21) which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

- Personal touches
- "In the Spirit"
 - Futurist
 - Everybody else
- Voice
 - Ex. 20:18-19
 - Isa. 57:21 - 58:1

Reforming Church

For those who think that John the Apostle didn't write this book, here's his signature. Look back at John 12:3 and see the little details -- the fragrance of the perfume that fills the house after being broken over Jesus' feet. Here are some other details. There is, as far as I can see, no significance whatever to the fact that John heard the voice behind him; nor that he turned around. John is a story teller, and this is his story. This tells me two things:

- This is the same raconteur of the Gospel of John
- The story is personal, and his.

The English translation says "on the Lord's day..." John was "in the Spirit." Most translators and commentators take this in the plain sense of it: John was in some sort of Spirit-led trance; the day of the week was Sunday, the Lord's day. To the futurist, however, this is "proof" of their theory. They interpret this to mean that John was transported forward in time (by the Spirit) to the Day of the Lord (the Greek words would be the same).

This strikes me as a "Krushchev" -- the name coming from the (probably apocryphal) story that Krushchev's notes once contained the marginalia "Weak point -- shout."

The "voice like a thunder" echoes the Old Testament -- even without the rest of the chapter we would know this voice from the Scripture.

- Hear the complaint of the Israelites after Moses came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments:

(Exo 20:18-19 NIV) When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance {19} and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

- Isaiah heard it as the voice of judgment (Isaiah 57:21 - 58:1):

"There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked." "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.



The Bible is its own best interpreter, I said....

And here it is: I have seen this image before, in the key to prophecy, the book of Daniel.

This slide is a quick one -- we will put the picture up next, for this is a visual work -- but "I have seen this picture before." And the Scripture confirms the idea that what I have seen before has not changed all that much. The picture may differ slightly, but it is the same Lord.

Here is a touchstone of prophetic interpretation. Does this look the same? Does this sound the same? God is not the author of confusion.



It's a picture book -- the storyboard of a movie.

So what does it mean?

Seven Lampstands - taken from Exodus 25:57, where there were seven lamps (with seven lamps each) in the Tabernacle (remember that Moses was told that the Tabernacle was a pattern of heavenly things?) and perhaps Zechariah 4:2, where we have a classic Menorah with a bowl in the center, we might be puzzled -- for those passages make no explanation. For now, we will just note the tie back to the Old Testament.

One key point: Christ is in the midst of the Lampstands (which are the churches) -- and where else would he be? For "where two or three are gathered together..." (a point which is, of course, confirmed by plain language Scripture). (Matthew 18:20)

The Son of Man - taken, as noted, from Daniel, we clear up the mystery of the Old Testament by reference to the New Testament. Daniel's Ancient of Days is identified. The white hair, so noticed by both John and Daniel, may stand for the eternal nature of Christ (along the lines of the elderly with white hair) or for purity (or both).

The robe is a long one. Think about it: if you lived in a time with dirt streets, would you wear a full length robe? Not unless you lived and worked in a stone building -- like a temple, or a palace. And indeed this is the same wording which describes the High Priest's robe in the Septuagint; Saul and Jonathan are also described as wearing such. The sash too is reminiscent of the High Priest. Therefore, we see High Priest and King -- the Christ.

The eyes are aflame, a phrase we use even today (guess where we got it?) The glow of the feet reminds us of the four creatures in Ezekiel -- perhaps reckoning judgment. The sound of his voice is like that of God (see Ezekiel 43:2, a scene in the Millennial Temple).

Seven Stars - A particular reminder of God's power (see Job on the Pleiades -- Job 38:31), we will see more of this later.

Two edged sword - if you cannot see the Scripture here, you are blind. Read Hebrews 4:12 -- it is exactly the metaphor being pictured here.

Transfiguration -- one cannot help but being struck by the similarity of this picture of Christ and that at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2). The message is clear: this is the Christ, the figure in Daniel, the Risen Lord. John's reaction is appropriate (segue to next slide).

Explanation

(Rev 1:17-18 NIV) When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. (18) I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

- **Reaction**
 - John
 - Daniel
 - Ezekiel
 - Peter
- **Comfort**
- **Titles of Christ**

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John's reaction is perfectly human. Having walked with the Lord on this earth, knowing him as intimately as I could possibly imagine (and more, I suspect), when confronted with the Ancient of Days he falls flat on his face. It's the usual reaction!

- (Dan 10:8 NIV) So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless.
- (Ezek 1:28 NIV) Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.
- (Luke 5:8 NIV) When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"
(said just before Jesus called him as a fisher of men!)

But Christ comforts him. (Have you ever noticed how often the angel says, "fear not?") He announces himself -- as if there could have been any doubt in John's mind. The titles are interesting, for the titles in the first chapter will be repeated in the letters to the church -- another example of the tight composition and artistic unity of the entire letter.

A Futurist Look

- (Rev 1:19 NIV) "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later."
- (Rev 4:1 NIV) "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.'"
- The "proof text" of the futurist view.
- Allowed -- but not required.

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A comparison of the two verses is essential. The Greek in the two phrases is identical. On the basis of these two texts, and the omission in chapter 4, it is claimed that chapters 2 and 3 are the history of the church.

This is said to be "obvious." (Reminding me of the phrase in physics textbooks, "it is intuitively obvious to the casual observer..." -- unfortunately, I was never able to be a casual observer). It does not seem so to me.

It is also clear, however, that the interpretation is not beyond possibility. This is a tight, artistic work. Conclusions which would be out of reach in the Gospels -- especially conclusions from the form of the work, indicating an absence of text -- might be permissible here. An intellectual honesty dictates that we hold this one open.

The argument is that chapter 1 shows past, present and future -- and thus when chapter 4 shows only future, it must be that chapters 2 and 3 are "present" -- which in dispensationalism means the church age. It logically follows that chapter 4 starts the age after the church age -- post Rapture.

They might be right. They might not be.



The word for “angels” in this passage means, literally, “messengers.” Commentators brood furiously over this little passage:

- It could mean, simply, messengers to the churches.
- It could mean their bishops (i.e., those who led the churches)
- In Jewish thought, these could have been guardian angels
- Or they could simply be the heavenly counterpart of the earthly lampstands.

This last appeals to me. Lampstands are earthly, as are churches. Angels are heavenly, as are stars (in the astronomy of the time). This concept -- that earthly things have a heavenly counterpart, and vice versa -- is as old as Moses, as is shown in Hebrews chapter 9. If this is so, it is a startling example of what Christ told us about “binding and loosing”:

(Mat 16:19 NIV) I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

It is disturbing to think that we are seeing the picture of that -- and this will be more so in the next two chapters.

There is one final thought. Barclay quotes an old Greek commentator as having this thought: the churches are not described as light -- they are described as lampstands, that which holds up the light so that all can see. What was it our Lord told us?

(John 12:32 NIV) But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

If nothing else results from our study, this should: that we should life up the Ancient of Days -- in our worship, in our thoughts, in our actions, in our lives. If we lift him up, he will draw all men to himself. Lift him up!