

STUDIES IN REVELATION

BY GLENN PEASE

1. THE BEGINNING OF THE END Based on Rev. 1:1-2
2. THE BLESSED LIFE Based on Rev. 1:3
3. THE SEVEN CHURCHES Based on Rev. 1:4
4. THE KING IS COMING Based on Rev. 1:7
5. THE PRIORITY OF LOVE Based on Rev. 2:1-7
6. RETURN TO FIRST LOVE Based on Rev. 2:1f
7. RICH IN POVERTY Based on Rev. 2:8-11
8. THE CAPITAL OF HELL Based on Rev. 2:12-17
9. THE ROAD OF REPENTANCE. Based on Rev. 2:18-29
10. GETTING IN Based on Rev. 3:20 and 21:23-27
11. RELATIVELY IMPOSSIBLE Based on Rev. 4:1-11
12. PROGRESS IN HEAVEN Based on Rev. 7:13-17
13. THE ULTIMATE WEDDING Based on Rev. 19:1-9
14. A PAIN FREE PARADISE Based on Rev. 21:1-8
15. THE JOY OF HEAVEN
16. THE MOTIVATION OF HEAVEN
17. NO COWARDS IN HEAVEN Based on Rev. 21:7-8
18. THE MOUNTAIN PERSPECTIVE Based on Rev. 21:9-14
19. THE PRESENCE OF GOD Based on Rev. 21:3

1. THE BEGINNING OF THE END Based on Rev. 1:1-2

The Apostle John is the patron saint of everybody, for he is the hero of young and old alike. Jesus called him to be His disciple when he was likely in his late teens. He was the youngest of the 12, and is an example of the faith that Christ had in young people. John also lived the longest of the 12. He was used of God for service right to the end, and so he is also an example of the value of older people in discipleship. God used him to write down the last of the books of the Bible.

When the government looks for a man to go into space they select a man of maturity, but not a man of old age. When God sought for a man to travel to heaven and see mysteries beyond what any astronaut has ever seen in space, He choose a man well past our retirement age. John was a senior citizen, but it was no rocking chair for him. He had an assignment far bigger than anyone ever had. He was to be the recorder and reporter of the greatest revelation every given. God does not discriminate against the aged. God is an equal opportunity employer. He uses young and old alike. He has no retirement requirement, but will go on using a person as long as they live.

Your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams is the word of the prophet. Nobody is to be left out in the task of fulfilling God's plan. This last book of the Bible is an

encouragement to all to plan to be used of God at any age. We should expect to do something great for the Kingdom even when we are old. Alexander Maclaren wrote his famous Exposition of Holy Scripture after he was 80. DaVinci was 77 when he painted the Last Supper. Tennyson was 81 when he wrote Crossing the Bar. The world is full of great works done by those who were old, and we are studying one of the greatest of these works of the aged as we study Revelation. John was an old man, but still a capable instrument in the hands of God.

The first lesson we learn from this last book of the Bible is from the author. We learn that every year of our lives should be a year of labor for the Lord, and a year of expectation that He will use us for His purpose. The rest of life can be the best of life is to be our motto at any age. Studies reveal that the reason people get tired and fatigued in old age is not because of exhaustion but because of stagnation. Life demands labor and expression. If we settle down to do nothing, we stop the springs of energy and lose our motivation. If we keep on going and doing things, the waters of life's energy keep flowing. John never stopped being active. He was always available for God's service and the result was, he was used to his dying day.

John is not only a great example of love, but a great example of labor. He never did retire from Christian service, and God used him to give the world this greatest of books-The Revelation of Jesus Christ. In these opening verses he tells us of the source of the revelation; the subject of the revelation, and the servants to whom the revelation is given. Let's consider first-

I. THE SOURCE OF THE REVELATION.

Notice it is not from John as the title in the King James Version might imply. It is not the revelation of St. John the divine. That title was added by man. John tells us it is the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him. In other words, the ultimate source of this revelation is God the Father. He gave it to His Son and His Son gave it to His angel, and the angel gave it to John, and John gave it to us, the body of Christ. We see here a 5 rung ladder, as when an owner gives a plan to his son, and the son takes it to the manager, and the manager gives it to the foreman who lays it out for the workers. God may use many means to communicate with man, but he always begins with His Son who is the Word. He is the first and the last, the alpha and omega. Everything God does begins and ends with Jesus.

This book is not what John the Apostle is teaching us, but what our Lord, the master teacher, wants us to know, for it is the revelation of Jesus Christ. We must approach this book with minds focused on Him, and with the prayer in our hearts that He will teach us.

Hushed by the noise and the strife of the schools,
Volume and pamphlet, sermon and speech,
The lips of the wise and the prattle of fools,
Let the Son of man teach.

Who has the key to the future but He?
Who can unravel the knots of the skein?
We have groaned and have travailed and sought to be free.
We have travailed in vain.

Bewildered, dejected and prone to despair,
To Him, as at first, do we turn and beseech
Our ears are all open, give heed to our prayer,
O Son of man, teach.

Author unknown

As mysterious as is much of this book, the main concepts can be grasped by everyone. Jesus is the door that invites us in, and not a door that locks us out. A revelation means an unveiling of what is hidden. In this book Jesus opens up the door to the future and lets us see what His plan and purpose is, and how He intends to wrap it all up. It tells us how He will reward His bride and judge those who serve the cause of evil. It is a revelation of how men will journey through history to either heaven or hell. Genesis tells us how Satan began his work on earth, and Revelation tells us how he will end in doom. Genesis tells us how sin brought man's fall, and Revelation tells us the ultimate consequence of sin. Genesis tells us how everything got started, and Revelation tells us how everything will end. It is a fitting climax to the Bible.

We need to keep before us, that the source of this revelation is God, and it is a revelation of Jesus Christ, and so our first objective is not to know the future and satisfy our curiosity. Our first objective is to know Christ. This revelation is to primarily lead us back to the source and draw us near to Him who gave it. Our prayer should be-

Lord Jesus, make Thyself to me
A living, bright reality;
More present to faith's vision keen
Than any outward object seen;
More dear, more intimately nigh
Than even the sweetest earthly tie.

Author unknown

II. THE SUBJECT OF THE REVELATION.

To show to His servants what must soon take place. The subject than, is the future. We are dealing with prophecy and the prediction of what is to come. Henry Swete says, "Revelation is the converse of concealment, the process of casting aside the veil that hides a mystery." We could never know the things in this book if God had not revealed them. Everyone likes to be in on a secret, and Jesus is letting His people in on the secrets of the future. Not all secrets are sweet however. Some of them are bitter such as the revealing of God's wrath and the terrible judgment ahead. Even the negatives can be an encouragement, however, if we see them properly.

This is illustrated by the two Rabbis who approached Jerusalem and saw a fox. Rabbi Joshua began to weep and Rabbi Eliezer began to laugh. "Why do you laugh?" asked Joshua. "Nay, but why do you weep?" came the reply. "Because, I see the prophecy of Lamentations fulfilled." "Because of the Mount Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it." Eliezer said, "For that same reason do I laugh, for when I see with my own eyes that God has fulfilled His judgments to the letter, I have thereby a pledge that not one of His promises will fail, for He is even more ready to show mercy than judgment." Even the negative fulfillment's remind us of the certainty of His

promises.

Many times I have used the saying that we don't know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future. This is true in terms of our own personal lives, but when it comes to events which affect the whole world, we do know what the future holds, for that is what this revelation is all about. John stresses two things about these future events.

1. THEIR NECESSITY.

He says they must soon take place. This is not a revelation of what ought to be, or of what God hopes will be. This is a sure thing, and it must come to pass. This is not a series of predictions like you read in one of the papers by a contemporary psychic. They make a lot of educated guesses and a few wild ones for publicity, and once in a while they get one right. The test of any prophecy is, if it does not come to pass it is false, and the prophet is a false prophet. Any careful study of the so called prophets of our day show them to be false. If John's prophecy is truly from God, then it will not be 60%, or even 99.9% correct, but completely 100% accurate. John says these things must come to pass-it is a necessity.

2. THEIR NEARNESS.

They must soon come to pass. This word soon is the basis for the first debate over the book. Since many Christians feel most of the book is yet to be fulfilled in the future, they give the word soon a different meaning here than its usual meaning. They say that since from the Lord's point of view a thousand years is as a day, that means it has only been a couple of days since this revelation was given. So that leaves several thousand years yet for the fulfillment to come even in what would be only one week from God's perspective. That is very soon to Him. Others say the word means speedily, for it is used this way in Luke 18:8 where it says, "He will vindicate them speedily." They stress that when the Lord begins to fulfill these prophecies they will come in rapid succession and soon be fulfilled.

Many others resist trying to get around the plain meaning of the word. They prefer to take it as it stands and see that John is saying to the Christians of his day-these things will take place in your lifetime. After all, the other two great Apostles, Paul and Peter, said the same thing. Paul in Rom. 13:12 wrote, "The night is far gone, the day is at hand." Peter wrote in I Pet. 4:7, "The end of all things is at hand." There is no way to escape the fact that the Bible authors felt the end is near, and that Christ would soon return.

We are caught, therefore, in a dilemma. It is clear that the word soon meant soon to John and the early Christians. Yet, we know that the end did not come, and 2,000 years later we have not come to the end. What are we suppose to think? The solution is really quite simple. You merely recognize that both views are right, for it is a part of the nature of Biblical prophecy. George Eldon Ladd, the prophetic scholar wrote, "It is the nature of Biblical prophecy to make it possible for every generation to live in expectancy of the end." Each generation of Christians can see the events of this book fulfilled in their lifetime. History goes in circles until one day the final round will be made, and the literal end will come. No generation knows for sure that it is the last, but each one could be.

As we study this book we first of all must try to see what it meant to the Christians of the first

century. Then we must try to see what it has meant to Christians through history. And finally how does it apply today, and what does it mean for its final fulfillment at the end of history which could possibly be in our lifetime. The reason this revelation causes so much debate is because so many Christians want to take it for themselves and leave all other generations of Christians out of it. They want it to be for the first century Christians, or for the Christians of the last day only. These exclusive theories are not wrong, for both are right, but it is just that they are too narrow and limited.

As we read through the book, we will be following those who see this as a revelation to all God's people with meaning to every generation from the first to the last. This means that soon means just that in every generation. The events of this book are always just around the corner for every generation. Jesus could have returned in any century. If this was not the case, then the waiting Christians who have lived in expectation for centuries have been deceived. The Bible says they were right to have been watching, for His coming is always near.

The third thing we want to look at is-

III. THE SERVANTS TO WHOM THE REVELATION IS GIVEN.

This revelation was not given to idle curiosity seekers, but to those who are servants of Christ. It is a servants manual and not just a guide to prophecy nuts who love to get into speculation about all the details of the future. It is primarily practical in its purpose. It is to aid Christians in their service for Christ. It is to be a blessing to those who keep what is written says John. If one does not serve Christ and live a more practical life of benefit to others because of this book, he has missed the purpose of it, and poverty of purpose is worse than poverty of purse. Only those who serve can really see the future and be motivated by this revelation, for they alone can see that their labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Barclay rightly says, "No man can be anything greater than a servant of God." This is the name first given to Christians in this book and it is the title that John and all of the Apostles proudly wear. God lets his servants in on his plea for the future, for if they are going to suffer for His Word and even give their lives in His service, it is only right that they should share in knowing the outcome of it all. The Christians who will get most out of this revelation are those who are most anxious to serve Christ in the world, and keep the things written in this book. Frank Laubach said something so simple yet so profound: "It would be better for us to throw away 99% of our learning and of our tangled philosophy and stick to just one single thing for our daily life-to keep asking God, who needs me next, Father!"

Whatever we learn from the study of this book will be worthless if it does not make us better servants. If growing in knowledge does not lead to growth in service, we will have missed the whole point of this book. On the other hand,, if we fail to grasp some of the mysteries and are wrong on some of our interpretations, but we are motivated to greater service, we will have accomplished the primary purpose for which this revelation was given. So our prayer should be, Lord, help us to see and then obey, as we launch into this study of the beginning of the end.

2. THE BLESSED LIFE Based on Rev. 1:3

The famous medical missionary Dr. Grenfell of Labrador once came to John Hopkins Hospital in America looking for a head nurse to go back to Labrador with him. He made this appeal: "If you want to have the time of your life, come with me and run a hospital next summer for the orphans of the Northland. There will not be a cent of money in it for you, and you will have to pay your own expenses. But I guarantee that you will feel a love for life you have never before experienced. It's having the time of anyone's life to be in the service of Christ." The nurse who responded wrote this after she came back to America: "I never knew before that life was good for anything but what one could get out of it. Now I know that the real fun lies in seeing how much one can put into life for others."

She learned that the blessed life is the life of the servant. This is one of the major truths of the Bible, and one that John stresses in this book of Revelation. The first chapter and the last chapter have the same emphasis: This is a revelation to servants, and blessedness is found in the keeping of what is revealed. Listen to Rev. 22:6-7 which shows you how the last chapter sounds so much like the beginning of the first chapter. "And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to sow His servants what must soon take place. And behold I am coming soon. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." From beginning to end this book is for servants, and the blessing is found in doing.

In this third verse of the first chapter John spells out most fully the actions that lead to the blessed life. The three things you can do with this book that leads to blessings are: You can read it; you can hear it, and you can keep it. Readers, hearers, and keepers, are the three kinds of servants who will reap the benefits of this revelation. Before we look closer at these three actions, we need to look at the implication of this verse as a whole. This verse makes this the most unique book in all the Bible. All Scripture is profitable, therefore, there is a blessing connected with reading, hearing, and obeying any part of it, but this is the only part of Scripture where it is plainly stated.

This is the first of seven beatitudes in the book, and is the most comprehensive. Every Christian in history has this blessing as a potential for his life. There are exceptions, like the thief on the cross, who never had a chance to even see the book, and likely there are many others in history who also did not have a chance to see it. But the fact remains, Christians of every generation have had the chance to enter into this blessing. This makes the interpretation of this book, by necessity, a book that has to be a meaningful one to every generation of Christians. If it is not, this promised blessing is a farce and a mockery. If only the first Christians could understand it, then the blessing is meaningless to all the Christians since. And if only the last generation of Christians can grasp it, then this blessing has been meaningless to all the Christians through history.

There is just no alternative to this conclusion: If we are to take this blessing as a legitimate promise to all readers, hearers, and keepers, then it must be a revelation that is relevant to all Christians of all time. How can you keep what has no meaning to you? How can you be blessed by reading what makes no sense because it is not meant for you, but for Christians of some other age? There is only one way you can do justice to this third verse, and that is to recognize that it makes this book a now book for all time. The very first Christians who received it entered into the blessed

life, and the very last who receive it will enter into the blessed life. The blessed life is not all out there in the future when the world is coming to an end. The whole point of a revelation of the future is to bring the blessings of the future back into the present so we can begin to enjoy them now. The best is always yet to be, but the better is always near for those who know what that best to be is.

Realized Eschatology is what the scholars call it. It simply means that the future can greatly influence the present in the lives of those who live now with eternity's values in view. They begin now to experience in some measure the blessings that God has prepared for those who love and serve Him. If a man gets a letter telling him that the girl he loves is going to say yes when he proposes next week, that knowledge of the future affects how he lives that week. He is already enjoying the future.

This verse says that the blessed life is now. The overall theme of the book is the conflict of Christ and Satan, good and evil, light and darkness. We don't have to wait until the battle is over to enjoy the fruits of victory. Christ wants to live in us and gain victories now over the forces of evil. We might even become martyrs in the conflict, but this book makes clear that if we do, it only leads us more quickly to be crowned, and to join the battle in the spiritual realm even nearer to Christ. No matter how fierce the conflict, and no matter how rough the persecution, Christians must recognize that the blessed life is now. Any interpretation of this book that robs any Christian of any age of this opening blessing is missing the mark. We are dealing with a perpetual now book, and the important thing about this revelation about the future is, how does it affect our now? How does our knowledge of God's plan and purpose for the future alter our present character and conduct? The first thing we have to do to allow the future to change the present is to enter into the three-fold blessing of this verse. The first blessing is on-

I. THE READER.

The first thing we need to observe is that this blessing is designed to fit the specific situation of the first century Christians. The reader is singular. "Blessed is he who reads." The hearers, however, are plural, for it is they that hear. We have a clear picture of the public service where one reads the Word and the congregation listens. The reading here is not the private reading in your home, but the public reading in the church. In the early church where there was only one copy of the book, no one had a copy to read at home in private. It would have been meaningless to offer a blessing to those who read the book to themselves at home, for no one could do that. The Living Bible; the RSV, and other modern translations stress the public reading by translating: "Blessed is he who reads aloud." It is not a silent private reading that being referred to here.

The implication of this is clear. This book is meant for a group experience. It is guide for the body in its decisions and strategies for doing the will of Christ in history. It is not designed as a devotional guide for personal devotions like the book of Psalms or Proverbs. It is to be a public standard for the guidance of the church as a whole. In verse 4 John addresses the seven churches of Asia, and the second and third chapters deal with Christ's view of the church. What this means then, on the practical level, is that the principles of this book are to guide us as a body. This book is to be more important to us as a local congregation of believers than our constitution. Here we have a revelation of how our Lord, the Head of the church, feels about what goes on in His church. He is to determine what theology we teach; what actions we take, and what attitudes we express toward our

world.

In order to guarantee that the Lord's view of the church might never be lost, He made it a blessing for churches of all ages to have this book read and heard publicly in the worship service. This does not mean there is no value in reading the book in private. It is just that the blessing is designed to keep this book as an open and public guide to the local church all through history. The leader or reader may be a pastor or a layman who keeps this guide before the body by reading it in public, and he is blessed for doing so. The other two categories of blessing are really one, for to be a hearer and not a keeper of the Word is a curse rather than a blessing, and so we can link them together and call them-

II. HEARER-KEEPERS.

The obvious reason why it is a blessing to hear this book read is because you thereby become informed on the mind of Christ. You are then able to live in obedience to His will. The reverse truth is also obvious. It is a curse to be in the dark and not know what your Lord's will is. To be in a battle and not know what your commander's goals and objectives are is to be an aid to the enemy, and a stumbling block to your fellow soldiers in the faith. If we are ignorant as a local church as to what Christ expects of us, we can burn up all of our energy doing things that do not accomplish His purpose. As we shall see, it is possible for a local church to be in just that kind of situation. To avoid it we must be hearers of this portion of the Word and doers.

The ear gate was the primary means of receiving the Word of God in the early church, and the preached Word is still the main means for most Christians to be exposed to the truths which Christ wants the church to hear. This means that good listening habits are important for Christians to develop. Boredom is not always the fault of the speaker. Quite often the listeners are lethargic. They do not take the message seriously enough to overcome the distractions and the tiredness that makes the mind drift and sink into a stupor where the message does not penetrate.

This verse is saying, it will be a blessing for those Christians who take this revelation serious enough to fight all obstacles to good listening so that they can hear what Christ has to say to the church. Over and over we will see the phrase in chapter two and three: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches." In other words, you can have an ear and still not hear. It is the hearing that leads to understanding and obedience. The good listener is one who is always asking questions about what he hears. How does this apply to me and my church? What can we do to live up to this ideal of Christ? You must be looking for insights as you listen. Those who do listen will hear what the inattentive will miss and lose their blessing. Good listening enables you to find gems of truth that the speaker is not even talking about. Good listening will enable you to see things that the speaker doesn't see such as, implications that apply to you that the speaker knows nothing about.

Our understanding and interpretation of this revelation may be immature, but that is part of the process of growing. We must see on a lower level before we can see on a higher level. Our interpretation will become more clear as we respond in obedience to the highest we can grasp at the time. Child like misunderstanding will be corrected as we share what we see and hear. Our own experience will be corrected by the wider experience of the body. A little boy visiting the farm walked through a flock of chickens, and suddenly the rooster flopped his wings and let forth with a

crow. The boy ran to the house and gave this interpretation of his experience: He said the rooster spanked himself and then cried. From his perspective that seemed the most logical interpretation of the event. It was not accurate, but as he listened to others explain he would grow in his understanding.

The point I am making is, the blessing of this book revolves around a group experience. The important thing is not what I learn, or what you learn, but rather, how does this revelation affect us as a church? How will we respond to what we learn about Christ's will for the local church? It is a body-life experience. We must share how we feel about what is revealed to us, for only as we do can we keep what is written.

In 1959 Hans Kraus bought a 13th century copy of Revelation for \$182,000. That was a world record, and doubtless Hans will keep that copy after he reads it, but that is not the kind of keeping John has in mind. Hans may be blessed to have that 13th century copy of the book, but that is not the blessing John speaks of here. Keeping means doing, or acts of obedience because of what is written in this book. This means the goal of this book, like the goal of all Christian education, is to change conduct so that it conforms to the will of Christ. This means the book has principles that are universal for all Christians in every age.

A Mrs. R. L. Bartlett received a postcard 42 years after it had been mailed from only 6 miles away. It said, "Will be down Monday about 5:00 P.M. Do not stay at home on my account. Hope your cold is better." It was totally irrelevant when she got it, and of less value than yesterday's paper. The point is, once a message no longer fits the situation in which you live, it is a worthless message. The book of Revelation is not like the paper. Some say it is as current as the daily news. Not so! It is far more relevant than that. The daily news is only relevant for a few hours, and then it is obsolete. Revelation is relevant always to all believers in all churches, for the principles of life it reveals can be kept by all who will choose to do so at all times.

Satan will be delighted if our goal is only to satisfy our curiosity about the future. C. S. Lewis in *Screwtape Letters* has Satan telling one of his demons how to succeed in deceiving a Christian: "The great thing is to prevent his doing anything. Let him do anything but act. No amount of piety in his imagination and affection will harm us if we can keep it out of his will-the more often he feels without acting, the less he will be able ever to act, and, in the long run, the less he will be able to feel." If Satan can get us to feel excited about his book so that we are content with just feeling good because we are learning more, but keep us from changing our lives in response to what we learn, he will have succeeded in robbing us of the promise blessing.

G. K. Chesterton, the great Catholic author, scolded the church of his day in poetry because of their failure to take practical action to meet the needs of the community. He wrote,

The Christian Social Union here
Was very much annoyed;
It seems there is some duty
Which we never should avoid,
And so they sing a lot of hymns
To help the unemployed.

To keep what is written in this book is to be practical. To remember the Sabbath and keep it holy was not just a motto to the people of God in the Old Testament. In order to keep it holy they had to do many things, or refrain from many things. To keep the Sabbath was primarily a matter of conduct. To keep the things revealed in this book is likewise a matter of conduct. We are not true believers of what we hear revealed until it affects our lives. Paul Johnson put it: "A belief is a faith not merely when it is accepted as true, but when it determines what one shall live for and shapes the way of living."

Adoniram Judson in 1812 sailed to Burma to carry the Gospel there. He suffered greatly as he was imprisoned for two years. Starved and beaten, yet he survived, but with his hands and feet marred by the chains. He went to the king of Burma and asked permission to preach. The king responded, "I am willing for a dozen preachers to go, but not you. Not with those hands. My people are not such fools as to take notice of your preaching, but they will take notice of them." Judson was effective, and is now a famous hero in the history of missions because he was a keeper of the things Christ revealed to His church.

This last book of the Bible starts with the same principle with which the book of Genesis starts. It is a test of obedience. Will Adam and Eve keep the will of God by obedient conduct? They did not! Now, each member, and each church in the body of Christ has the same option. Will we, or will we not, keep God's Word by obedient conduct. The promise for those who do is an entrance into the Blessed Life.

3. THE SEVEN CHURCHES Based on Rev. 1:4

A math teacher asked one of her less enthusiastic students, "If I take 23 away from 30, what is the difference?" He responded, "That's what I say, what's the difference?" In other words, it made no difference to him. Not everybody enjoys math and working with numbers, and you certainly do not need much knowledge in this area to understand the Bible. John was no great mathematician, but there is one number he used over and over again, and that was the number 7. The whole book of Revelation is built around the number 7. It is used 54 times in this book, and is the key number that forms the structure of the book.

John was not the first to use 7 this way, for 7 has been the number of perfection and completion all through history. The Greeks and Romans considered it a sacred number, but long before them the Chinese divided their empire into 7 provinces. In India the earth was divided into 7 divisions, and they had the 7 rivers of Hindustan, and 7 celestial mountains. The Babylonians made much of the number 7, and they referred to all gods as the 7 gods, and their 7 story tower was symbolic of the whole universe.

The idea of 7 being symbolic of perfection and completion is almost universal, and, therefore, it is the easiest of all symbolic numbers to understand. It usually means all of the category being dwelt with in the context. God has built this right into creation.

7 days make a complete week.

7 colors make a complete rainbow.

7 whole tones make a complete scale with the 8th a repetition of the first.
7 seas, 7 wonders of the world, 7 years and the body is renewed.
7 days of rest.
7 day feast.
7th day for circumcision.
7 fold sprinkling of blood on the day of atonement.
7 branch candlestick.
7 times dipping of Naaman.
7 years labor for Rachel.
7 years of famine and 7 years of plenty.
7 last words from the cross.
7 baskets of fragments.
7 husbands of one wife.
7 demons cast out of Mary Magdalene.
7 deacons.
7 parables of Matt. 13.
7 woes on the Pharisees.
7 times 70 for forgiveness.

We could go on and on for there are 600 references to the number 7 in the Bible. There is no point in trying to prove what is obvious to everyone. 7 is a symbolic number which stands for totality. It gets this meaning because it is a combination of three and four. Three represents the trinity, or heaven, and four represents the earth because of the four directions and four seasons. 7 is the combination of heaven and earth, or the total reality.

This means that when John in verse 4 addresses the 7 churches in Asia, he is addressing the total church, or all churches for all time. These 7 actual churches of his day are representative of all the local churches that will exist through all of history. Just as the 7 spirits before the throne represent the Holy Spirit in the fullness of all his functions. One of the popular systems of interpreting the book of Revelation is the system that sees the whole book as 7 great visions, each of which starts at the first coming of Christ and ends with the second coming. Whether this theory is correct or not I cannot say, but it definitely has some truth to it which we will observe as we go through the book.

Another popular method of interpretation based on the number 7 is that each of the 7 churches represents a period of history. Again, there is some truth to this theory, but to press it only leads to a lot of contradiction, for no two who follow this theory seem to be able to agree on what period of history each church represents. It is wise just to recognize that in every period of history the church falls into one of the 7 categories represented by the 7 churches. In fact, the church today world wide has local churches that fall into everyone of the 7 kinds. The idea that all churches of any age fall into the same category is based on ignorance of church history. The church may be dead in one part of the world, and in great revival in another part.

Some people get so excited about numerology that they go to extremes. I have several books in my library devoted to finding 7's in the Bible. This is an old hobby and goes back into ancient Judaism. They actually get down to the very letters of the Hebrew and Greek. For example, Gen. 1:1 has 7 Hebrew words made up of 28 letters, or 4 times 7. The first three words have 14 letters or 2 times 7, and the last 4 words have 14 letters or 2 times 7, and on and on it goes with dozens of

combination of 7 right in the first verse of the Bible. They go on through the whole Bible finding 7 absolutely everywhere. Some men have spent their whole life finding the 7's in the Bible in every conceivable combination; all of which is much ado about nothing. J. B. Segal writes, "Statistics of the Bible, like the calculations of the Great Pyramid of Egypt, have a fatal attraction for cranks and crackpots, and even for wise men in their less guarded moments."

We must beware of the danger of getting all excited about numbers, for as John Davis points out in his *Biblical Numerology*, the Bible nowhere tells us that it has any special hidden meaning in numbers. He feels that the number 7 is the only significant symbolic number in Scripture, and it has a clear and obvious meaning to all-completeness. Even here we need to remember that it can also mean completely evil and does not always mean perfect in a good sense. In 13:1 the great beast has 7 heads, and so 7 can be complete for either good or evil.

As we focus our attention on the 7 churches of Asia who first received this book, we need to remember that though they are representative of all churches, they were also real churches. This book is anchored in history. No interpretation can be very convincing if it does not face up to the fact that it was originally given to the 7 historic churches. The fact that there were other well known churches in the same area, such as Colosse, Galatia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Antioch, and Miletus, makes it clear that 7 is used symbolically for all churches. We are not opening and reading other people's mail, therefore, but just as Paul wrote his letters to 7 specific churches which are guides to all the churches of history, so this revelation to the 7 churches is for all the churches of history.

As we look at the greeting of John to the churches, it is a typical greeting of the New Testament Epistles. Grace and peace are the two things all of need perpetually. The fact that we even need God's grace is evidence that apart from God's favor we can never make our own lives meaningful and effective. The fact that we need His peace is evidence that we live in a disturbing world where nothing is ever alright. This life is a battle-field in contrast to the joy, victory, and peace of the new heaven and new earth. The book of Revelation does encourage us to look ahead to that great eternal peace. Grace Crowell in *Songs Of Hope* wrote:

Lift up your hands, make straight the paths,
Though dark the way may seem,
Ahead are the orchards bright in the sun
Where the golden apples gleam.
Let no bitterness trouble your heart,
For after the night is passed,
The gold and the scarlet, rain-washed fruit,
Of peace will be yours at last.

This is a legitimate hope of the believer, but John in this greeting is saying, the grace and peace of God can be ours now. We can have some of the future in the present because the God of the future is also the God of the present. John describes God as the one who is, who was, and who is to come. Anytime and anywhere, one thing is sure, God is there. This first description of God in the book also anchors this book in history, for it describes God as the God of history. He is the God of the past, the future, and the now. History is God centered, but this is not always clear except to those who have this revelation of how God is active in history.

Note that God is on a throne. It is referred to here in verse 4, but in chapter 4 we have a description of God on His throne. This becomes a basis for the church to enter into the grace and peace of God now, even before the final victory over evil. This message of peace in a world of turmoil, due to the fact that God is on the throne, is to many, the key purpose of this whole book. It was written to strengthen and encourage Christians going through persecution by making it clear to them that no matter how bad things get on earth, God still is on the throne, and whether we live or die we are in his hands.

William Justice in his book *Our Visited Planet* tells of the physics professor describing to his college class the laws of motion. He described how each of the planets with their moons were in regular motion around the sun; how the earth itself was spinning on its axis over 1000 miles per hour, and at the same time sailing around the sun at 18 and one half miles per second. While this is going on, the sun itself is speeding on its massive flight through space at the velocity of 43,000 MPH carrying all the planets, their satellites, thousands of asteroids, a thousand comets and millions of meteors with it toward the great star Vega. The class was almost frightened with all of this movement, but he said ever this does not exhaust the matter. The Milky Way, our own galactic system, which is 100,000 light years across is turning at an incredible speed about an axis located in the direction of the constellation Sagittarius. This system is so immense it takes 200,000,000 years to rotate once on the axis. At this point the professor paused and with impressive solemnity said, "Young ladies and young gentlemen, every object in the universe known to man is in motion except the throne of God."

What that professor stated is one of the key truths of the book of Revelation, and because it is so, the peace of God is possible for the believer to experience in the present. Again, let me remind you, this is a new book for all Christians of every age because it is a revelation of the God who always is. Because he is the God who is, He is always involved in history. R.T. France calls Him the Transcendental Interferer. He means by that, that God is a Living God—a God who does not ignore history, but a God who gets involved in history. A God of the New Testament is the same God as the Jehovah of the Old Testament. He is going to be present in history leading His people to accomplish His will in the world. He also has His hand on non-Christian people's, and works out His will through them as well, even as He did in the Old Testament. It was not just Israel that God delivered. In Amos 9:7 God says, "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?"

Any view of God that limits His involvement in history to His own people is too narrow to be Biblical, and is not worthy of the God of history. God tells us in the Old Testament that He was just as much the God of the nations as He was the God of Israel. In Isa. 10:5 He calls Assyria, "The rod of my anger." He used Assyria to judge His people in Israel. In Jer. 25:8-9 God says, "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon my servant." The reason I stress this Biblical truth at the beginning of our study of Revelation is to caution you against any interpretation of the book that sees it only from an American perspective, as if what happens to us is all that really matters to God. I am rather inclined to believe Wilbur Smith, the great evangelical scholar in the area of prophecy, who says in his book *You Can Know The Future*, "I am sure that there is no particular prophecy about the U.S., although many books have been written on this...." We must see God as the God of all history and not limit Him to our experience of history, or our knowledge of history. He is the God of all history.

This three-fold description of God, plus the mention of the three Persons of the Trinity in verses 4 and 5, brings us to another favorite number in numerology. God has built this number into His creation also. Time is three fold with past, present and future. You have earth, air, and water; mother, father, and child; length, breadth, and depth; day is divided in morning, noon, and night. You have right, middle, and left; you have high, medium, and low. There are numerous threes that deal with completeness and totality just as the number 7 does. The Bible has many series of threes. The three sons of Noah that populated the whole new world; the three friends of Job; the three night watches; the three temptations of Jesus, and the three prayers in Gethsemane, and three disciples and the inner circle; the three denials of Peter; the three fold holy, holy, holy of the Seraphim; the three graces of love, hope and faith; the three languages above the cross; the three hours of darkness on the cross; the three days and nights in the grave; etc.

The practical value we can get from numerology is the assurance that our God is able to handle the problems that plague us and make life such a mystery. He is pictured here in Revelation as both three-fold and seven-fold: The two numbers that represent perfection and completeness. God is lacking in nothing, and faith in such a God says, even though I do not grasp what is happening in history, I trust in Him who is over all, and He will make sense of it all to those who do trust Him. Donald Gray Barnhouse points out that this is the only place in the Bible where the order of the Trinity is not Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here it is Father, Holy Spirit, and in verse 5, the Son. It is clear why this is the case, for John goes on to say much of the Son. The Father and Holy Spirit are just mentioned here, but the rest of the of chapter deals with the Son. The focus of this revelation is on the Son.

4. THE KING IS COMING Based on Rev. 1:7

Joanna Baillie, an English dramatic poet of the last century, told the touching tale of a maiden whose lover had gone off to the Holy Land. The report had come back that he had been slain. She refused to believe he would not return to her, and so every night she kindled a fire on the shore of the Mediterranean and watched for his return to take her to be his bride.

The story is a parable of the church and her lover, the Lord Jesus Christ. He too has gone away, but He promised to return, so the church waits in expectation for that day when the shout will be heard, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh," and she will be taken as a glorious bride to His mansion in the sky.

This theme of waiting for the return of one's lover is an ancient one. Homer in the Odyssey tells of the hero Ulysses who went off to the war of Troy, and spent ten adventurous years trying to get back home to his waiting wife. She was wealthy and the result was many men wanted to marry her. They insisted that her husband was dead, and that she was foolish to wait. She had to endure enormous pressure, but she remained faithful to her husband, and finally he did return to wreak vengeance upon those wicked men who sought to take advantage of his wife.

Again we see a parallel of what the church must endure as it waits for the return of Christ. The

world says forget this Jesus you wait for, and come make love with us. He is gone, and you are foolish to wait for Him, and miss the love of the world. Peter warned the early Christians about the world's attack on the hope of the second coming. In II Pet. 3:3-4 he writes, "First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the father's fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation." By their scoffing they hoped to cause the Christians to give up their hope.

The Lord will return and wreak vengeance upon those who seek to entice His bride away. Those who try to lure the bride of Christ into the arms of the world need to hear the warning of the Word, for their will be hell to pay when the Bridegroom comes. II Thess. 1:6-10 says, "...God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His might, when He come on that day to be gloried in His saints, and to be marveled at in all who have believed."

The second coming will be both a day of great joy, and a day of great judgment. The Bible alternates between these two pictures depending upon whose point of view by which it is seen-the Bride or the world. Christians are warned over and over again to watch for the coming of their Lord, for carelessness in this area can lead them to get so involved with the world that that day will come upon them like a thief in the night, and they will be caught naked and ashamed at His coming.

In other words, if the Bridegroom comes and finds His bride flirting with the world and embracing another lover, it will be a day of judgment rather than joy even for those believers who are not found faithful. But Jesus says in Luke 21:37, "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching." In order to motivate us to watch, we want to focus on this great text where John emphasizes these two aspects of the second coming. First we see-

I. THE REALITY OF HIS RETURN.

Behold He is coming says John. The faithful bride never questions the promise of her bridegroom to return and receive her unto Himself that where He is she might be also.

He'll come again,
And prove our hope not vain.
We wait the moment, Oh, so fair;
To rise and meet Him in the air,
His heart, His home, His throne to share,
O wondrous love!

Author unknown

This has been the blessed hope of the church from the day of its birth. This is the goal of history. It is the final leg of the tripod of history: Creation, crucifixion, and coming again. The prophets predicted it; the Lord Himself promised it, and the Apostles fervently preached it. The New

Testament refers to the second coming 318 times. Everybody who truly believes the Bible believes in the second coming, for to deny its reality is to deny the validity of Biblical revelation. Christians in every denomination, and people in every cult that studies the Bible, believe in the reality of Christ's return.

You would have a very difficult time finding anyone who rejects the second coming, except those who do not believe the Bible. The problem today is not unbelief, but too much belief. Modern Christians have developed so many different ways of looking at the second coming that it gets very confusing, not just to laymen, but even to the scholars. I have known pastors who became nervous wrecks over the doctrine of the second coming because there was so much truth in different systems in interpreting it. All the different views are held by outstanding leaders of the evangelical church. A whole new phenomenon is taking place. New books are coming out all the time with all of the views being presented by well known authors in the same book. This is a clear sign that Christians are finally becoming aware that it is likely that no one view has all the answers, but that there are values and insights in all of them that need to be considered by the whole body.

Charles Erdman in *Remember Jesus Christ* wrote, "...while there should be no doubt as to the reality of the personal glorious return of Christ, much diversity of views, regarding details and circumstances must be allowed." Those who go on dogmatically insisting that their view is the only true one only reveal their own intellectual dishonesty. I have studied all of the views and find Biblical values in each of them, and find that none of them is complete and without problems. There are so many passages in the Bible that deal with the Rapture, the Resurrection, and the Return from the point of view of the world, the church, and Israel, that nobody has ever been able to put them all together into a simple chart that explains them clearly.

So many things, both good and bad, are going to happen when Jesus returns that it is futile to try and get all of the events organized. Those who think they have done it only aggravate those who know the complexity of the second coming is beyond the charting of the human mind. Listen to the greatest Baptist preacher of all time, who read more widely possibly than any man who ever lived-Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

"As for the Lord's second coming, we know not when it shall be. Shall the world grow darker and darker till He comes? It may be so. There are passage of Scripture and signs of the times which may be taken to indicate it. On the other hand, shall the age grow brighter and brighter until He appears to bring the perfect day? Through the preaching of the Gospel shall there be periods in which multitudes shall be converted, and whole nations saved? I do not know: there are texts that seem to look that way, and many a brave worker hopes as much. There are brethren who can map out unfulfilled prophecy with great distinctness; but I confess my inability to do so. They get a shilling box of mathematical instruments. They stick down one leg of the compasses and describe a circle here and a circle there, and they draw two or three lines, and there it is. Can you not see it plainly? I am sick of diagrams;

I have seen enough to make another volume of Euclid. My impression is that very little is learned from the major part of these interpretations."

We could quote hundreds of the greatest minds of Christendom who stand with Spurgeon. They recognize there is probably an aspect of truth in almost everything that can be said about the second coming, and that is why they reject any narrow and limited man made scheme that pretends to lock Christ into a specific schedule. Some of the old prophetic preachers were very bold and dogmatic, but the wiser modern prophets have learned they cannot program God to do things their way, and so if you read their books today you will read a lot of maybe this could be, or possibly this could mean, or probably this indicates. There is a great caution today because too many godly men have made too many wild guesses in the past and have been wrong. Our blessed hope is not a hope of producing a perfect chart and schedule of the events of His coming. Our blessed hope is the reality of His coming.

Behold He is coming says John.

II. THE RESPONSE AT HIS RETURN.

This text emphasizes the main reason for the return of Christ, which is to judge the world. Every eye will see Him, and even those who pierced Him, and there will be a response of universal wailing. This picture of the coming of Christ as judge is the main theme of the Creeds of Christendom all through history. The Apostles' Creed declares that Christ "Ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." The Nicene Creed affirms that Christ "Sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead." In the Athanasian Creed, the confession is similar: "Christ sitteth on the right hand of the Father from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead." Dr. James Denny out of lifetime of study of the Word said, "If we are to retain any relationship to the New Testament at all, we must assert the personal return of Christ as Judge of all."

The articles of religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and also the fourth of the 39 articles of the Church of England read this way: Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again His body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, where with he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until He return to judge all men at the last day."

The Augsburg Confession of 1530 reads, "...in the consummation of the world, Christ shall appear to judge, and shall raise up all the dead, and shall give unto the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joy; but ungodly men and the devils shall He condemn with endless torment." The New Hampshire Baptist confession of 1833 says, "We believe that the end of the world is approaching, and that at the last day Christ will descend from heaven and raise the dead from the grave to final retribution; that a solemn separation will then take place."

John seems to focus on the judgment of the world only, but the creeds and testimony we have just read stress that the judgment includes the believers as well as the unbelievers. In other words, this day of the greatest joy possible for Christians will be a day of wailing for many, for they did not give heed to the Word, but let themselves be enticed by the world. The result of their not watching will be that they will, along with the world, be caught naked when Christ comes as a thief in the night,

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

