

# **The Gospel in Revelation**

## **Unlocking the Last Book of the Bible**

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**Notes on Chapters 1-3 For Those Who Wish to Study  
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**[From *The Gospel in Revelation: Unlocking the Last Book of the Bible*, 1989].**

# Chapter 1

## The Mystery of the Seven Stars

**Revelation 1:1, 2:** The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And he sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to all things that he saw.<sup>1</sup>

The very first words of the book encourage us! God thought about us so much that He wanted to impart this Revelation to us. It is a cruel enemy who wants us to feel that God is content for us to remain in darkness and ignorance. Be thankful that this Revelation is His special gift to you.

You can easily see the five steps by which He gave us this book:

- (1) It originated with God, the Father, Himself.
- (2) He gave it to His Son, Jesus Christ.
- (3) Jesus “sent and signified it by His angel.”
- (4) The angel revealed it to the prophet John in holy vision.
- (5) John communicated to God’s servants (you and me) “things which must shortly take place.” It is intended for us to understand. Its “mysteries” are not truths Christ wants to hide from us, but which He longs to impart to us.

**Revelation 1:3:** Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

This is the only book in the Bible that offers a special blessing on those who read it. Even the illiterate person is included if he will only listen to someone else read it to him! Of all the sixty-six books of the Bible, this is the one that must not be neglected.

**Revelation 1:4-8:** John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him, and they also who pierced

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<sup>1</sup> Bible texts are from the *New King James Version* unless otherwise noted.

Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. “I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

If these few verses were all that we had of the Word of God, there is enough in them to give us everlasting happiness. “Grace ... and peace” are freely given to anyone who will believe these words—even the most sinful. Do not any longer feel that you are shut out from the smiles and favor of Heaven. This greeting comes from the Father “who is and who was and who is to come,” from the Holy Spirit, and from Jesus Christ, the mighty One who arose from the grave. All Heaven looks upon you kindly and with tender love. Your job is to believe it, to rest in that confidence.

As soon as you believe this assurance, your heart will join in that glad song of praise “to Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” If anyone wonders if he is ready for heaven, let him consider whether or not he readily and happily offers praise to the Lord. “Praise from the upright is beautiful” (Psalm 33:1). “Be thankful to Him, and bless His name” (Psalm 100:4). “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17).

The unbeliever knows no joyful feeling of gratitude to God for praise is strange to his heart. He even eats his daily food without realizing who the Giver is, never offers thanks for sunshine and flowers, trees and birds. But he can be taught: “My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes” (Psalm 119:171).

With our own eyes, we shall see Jesus come “with clouds.” These are no ordinary clouds. They will be thousands of angels (Psalm 68:17, *King James Version*). “He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26). Even those who don’t believe His gospel must watch Him come, and those who crucified Him cannot look the other way. At His trial, Jesus told them, “Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64).

“Alpha” and “Omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Christ was in the very beginning, the eternal “only begotten of the Father,” and He is the end—He is all in all.

**Revelation 1:9-11:** I, John, both your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,” and, “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”

“By the emperor’s decree, John was banished to the isle of Patmos. ... Patmos, a barren, rocky, island in the Aegean Sea, had been chosen by the Roman government as a place of banishment for criminals; but to the servant of God this gloomy abode became the gate of heaven. ... Though banished from the scenes of his former labor,

he did not cease to bear witness to the truth. Even in Patmos he made friends and converts.”<sup>2</sup>

Because the Bible explains itself, it will be easy to determine what “the Lord’s day” is. “The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath,” said Jesus (Matthew 12:8). And what does Scripture say the “Sabbath” is? “The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:8-11). The Lord calls the Sabbath, “My holy day” (Isaiah 58:13). “It was on the Sabbath that the Lord of glory appeared to the exiled apostle. The Sabbath was as sacredly observed by John on Patmos as when he was preaching to the people in the towns and cities of Judaea.”<sup>3</sup>

“The names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian Era. The number seven indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages extend to the end of time, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world.”<sup>4</sup>

**Revelation 1:12-17:** Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.”

When John saw the seven golden lampstands, he knew he was looking into the temple (or sanctuary) in heaven. But where he had expected to see only heavenly beings, he was surprised to see “One like the Son of Man.” How could it be that there was a man in heaven?

When Jesus became our Savior, He made a sacrifice forever. Although He is glorified (as we shall be when He comes), He will forever remain a man, one with us. “Unto us a Child is born,” never to leave us (see Isaiah 9:6).

John’s description of Christ is almost the same as that which Daniel gives in Daniel 10:5-12. Both saw a “man” who was “girded with gold,” who had “eyes like torches of fire,” “feet like burnished bronze,” and His voice as the sound of many waters. Both Daniel and John fell before Him as dead men and to both He said, “Do not fear.”

Those who reject Christ may pretend to despise His word, and may imagine that it will have no effect upon them. But they are mistaken, for it is a sharp two-edged sword piercing to the “division of soul and spirit, ... a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Jesus says of the rejecter of His gospel, “The word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). That word will save you now if

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 570, 573.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 581.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 585.

you receive it; otherwise it will judge you at the end.

**Revelation 1:18-20:** “I am He who lives, and was dead, and, behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.”

Have you ever stood by the grave of a loved one? If so, you know how to appreciate this assurance. To us, the grave is a heavy door, securely barred. Not even the world’s wisest scientists can unlock it. But Jesus has the keys.

What are the seven stars? The word “angels” in the Greek has the meaning of messengers, or ministers. If the lampstands are the seven churches, the angels of the seven churches must be the leadership of the churches. “God’s ministers are symbolized by the seven stars, which He who is the first and the last has under His special care and protection. The sweet influences that are to be abundant in the church are bound up with these ministers of God, who are to represent the love of Christ. The stars of heaven are under God’s control. He fills them with light. He guides and directs their movements. If He did not, they would become fallen stars. So with His ministers. They are but instruments in His hands, and all the good they accomplish is done through His power.”<sup>5</sup>

Are you one of Christ’s ministers? Those seven stars include all who give themselves to the service of Christ as pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, yes, including those who teach the gospel to the children—all who have any part in the leadership of the church. Don’t fear, because you are held safely in the right hand of Him who is “alive for evermore.” Cherish your work; don’t try to be relieved of it, for the best place anyone can be is there in the right hand of the Son of God! And let us all respect and honor Christ’s ministers.

“We urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13).

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<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, pp. 13, 14.

# Chapter 2

## John Writes Letters to His Followers

**Revelation 2:1:** “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

As we go along, we remember that “seven” is a word that means complete, or perfect. Thus the seven churches represent the complete church, the church throughout its history from the time of the apostles down to the last days just before Jesus returns the second time. These seven messages apply to seven periods of the church through history.

The “angels” of the seven churches are the messengers, the human leadership of the church in each respective period. God speaks to His people through His ministers whom He has appointed.

The word “Ephesus” means “desirable.” It is a beautiful name for the church of the apostles. Impelled by the love of Christ, the early believers carried the Good News of salvation to the whole inhabited world in one single generation (see Colossians 1:23). The dates for the church of Ephesus can be roughly considered as from the time of Christ through 100 A.D.

**Revelation 2:2-6:** “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Like a brilliant star shining in a dark sky, the story of the early church thrills hearts in all ages. The Good News triumphed everywhere. Hard, proud, world-loving hearts were subdued by its power. There was no need to urge the believers to work for their friends and neighbors. The love of Christ constrained them. They would not resist. Each saw in his brother a reflection of the beauty of Christ. Hearts were bound together as with a golden chain.

But gradually there came a change. Many lost that first love. They began to forget what it cost the Lord to save them. Mist and clouds covered the cross, obscuring its radiance. The church lost the very idea of what Christ’s love means.

Love had been the power of the gospel. Just as an engine sputters and dies when the fuel is gone, so the soul-saving ministry of the early believers stopped when they left their first love.

The word John uses is *agape*, which is like sunshine in that it has within it all the colors of gospel truth. This love, which the early church “left,” was new to the ancient world. It was something very unearthly which came from heaven.

The pagan Greeks thought they had discovered what love is when the beautiful Alcestis was willing to die for “a good man,” her noble and handsome lover, Admetus. But the apostles said, No, that is not the real thing: “God shows His *agape* for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:7, 8, *Revised Standard Version*). This love for enemies turned the ancient world upside down (see Acts 17:6).

Leaving that “first *agape*” prepared the way for the corruption of Christianity. It was like substituting a candle for sunlight, the beginning of the “falling away” foretold by Paul (2 Thessalonians 2:3-7). The Book of Revelation will lead us to the re-discovery of that *agape*. What can be more important than finding that which was left by the early church?

The Nicolaitans were a group within the church who claimed to be disciples of Nicolas, one of the original seven deacons (Acts 6:5). However, Nicolas himself never taught the evil doctrines which this group believed. They taught that it was right and good to yield to evil lust and passion. This, of course, denied the gospel message.

“John was inspired to record messages of warning and reproof and entreaty to those who, losing sight of the fundamental principles of the gospel, should imperil their hope of salvation. But always the words of rebuke that God finds it necessary to send are spoken in tender love, and with the promise of peace to every penitent believer.”<sup>6</sup>

**Revelation 2:7:** “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

A man may have ears, and yet not listen. One of the first lessons a child should learn is to pay attention. Because human beings are usually too proud to listen, the Lord says, “Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise” (Proverbs 22:17). That wise one is none other than Jesus, “the faithful and true witness.” “It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools” (Ecclesiastes 7:5).

Genesis tells us that the tree of life was originally placed in the garden of Eden. To eat of its fruit was to live forever. When our first parents sinned, they were shut out from the garden, lest they eat of the fruit and live a miserable life forever in the sorrow that sin brings. At the close of the thousand years (see Revelation 20), the tree of life will be replanted in the “new earth” where it will bear its “twelve fruits. ... The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (see Revelation 22:2).

What does it mean to “overcome”? Must we fight a battle?

If you saw a poisonous snake in your pathway, you could not say, “I don’t want to get involved in any conflict; I’ll just do nothing and be neutral.” You would fight the snake and kill it, knowing that if you did nothing, it would either kill you or somebody else.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 587.

Jesus does not invite us to fight the other person's battle, only our own. Sin is worse than a poisonous snake, for it kills. Therefore everyone who has appreciated what Christ accomplished for him on the cross will join the battle, and will overcome sin in his own life. Whatever your problem, remember that Jesus had the same struggle that you have. You are not asked to do anything He has not already done, for He says that you are to overcome "even as I also overcame" (Revelation 3:21). Remembering Him, you cannot fail!

**Revelation 2:8-11:** "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.'"

The word "Smyrna" means something that smells sweet. This second period of the church was one of persecution and suffering, extending from about A.D. 100 to about A.D. 313.

God does not enjoy seeing His people suffer, but their faithfulness and loyalty under trial honors the name of the Savior who died for them. The early Christians were generally poor people. James says of them, "Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5.)

False brethren were a severe trial. The "Jews" mentioned here were members who professed to follow Christ, but who were in heart lovers of self and of the world. These insincere converts made trouble for those who chose to follow the footsteps of Christ. They continually sought to bring in heathen beliefs and customs to corrupt the faith.

The "ten days" of tribulation are a prophetic period of time. Each day stands for a year (see Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6, "I have laid on you a day for each year"). The last and the most bloody pagan persecution was under the Emperor Diocletian between the years A.D. 303-313, which ten years are a remarkable fulfillment of these "ten days" of prophetic symbolic time.

Those who die for their faith in Christ need not fear. The Lord will give them a "crown of righteousness" which is to be given at Christ's appearing when the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (see 2 Timothy 4:8 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). Some of God's people today may suffer death. Let them not fear, but trust in this promise.

The "first death" is not to be feared, for it is but a "sleep." "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matthew 10:28). The "second death" is the one to be feared, for it is eternal and hopeless, without any resurrection. The "second death" is the final destruction of the lost after the "thousand years" (see Revelation 20).



**Revelation 2:12-17:** “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. ‘Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.””

The word “Pergamos” means “height, elevation.” The original city was built on a high rocky hill rising a thousand feet above the valley. The church between A.D. 313 and A.D. 538 was highly exalted before the world. It had become very obvious that the religion of Jesus was what the world needed, hence the great success in attracting converts. This was the time when persecution practically ceased and even the Emperor Constantine himself professed to be a Christian. Honored and praised by the world, the church entered a time of great danger! Satan had failed to destroy the church through persecution; now he began to corrupt the faith from within.

“Satan’s throne” is the special place where he works. During this period, the “mystery of iniquity” was working to mislead the church, and Satan was laying the foundation of a great falling away from the truth.

History does not tell us about any single individual called “Antipas,” but it is understood that this name represents a group of people in the church who lost their lives because they defended God’s truth against the rising arrogance of the Roman popes. “Anti” means opposed, and “Papas” means father, or pope. Thus the “Antipas” party were those who opposed the growing power and claims of the papacy. Christ commended Antipas!

But some willingly denied God’s truth in order to reap the advantages of worldly wealth and honor just as Balaam was willing to curse Israel if paid a high enough price (see Numbers 22-25).

“Almost imperceptibly the customs of heathenism found their way into the Christian church. ... As persecution ceased, and Christianity entered the courts and palaces of kings, she laid aside the humble simplicity of Christ and His apostles for the pomp and pride of pagan priests and rulers; and in place of the requirements of God, she substituted human theories and traditions. The nominal conversion of Constantine, in the early part of the fourth century, caused great rejoicing; and the world, cloaked with a form of righteousness, walked into the church. ... This compromise between paganism and Christianity resulted in the development of the ‘man of sin’ foretold in prophecy as opposing and exalting himself above God. ... To secure worldly gains and

honors, the church was led to seek the favor and support of the great men of earth; and having thus rejected Christ, she was induced to yield allegiance to the representative of Satan—the bishop of Rome.”<sup>7</sup>

**Revelation 2:18-23:** “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed, I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death. And all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

During the long centuries of the Dark Ages, God still had a people who remained loyal to Him, even though pressed beyond measure by persecution and the hatred of the world. Thyatira means “sacrifice of contrition.” God never forgot them when it seemed to human sight as though they had been forsaken.

Just as Antipas refers not to some individual but to a group of people, so Jezebel is the name God gave to a group in the church whose beliefs and character resembled that of the heathen queen of ancient Israel.

A prophetess of the heathen god Baal, Jezebel did all she could to seduce God’s people in Elijah’s day. God never called Jezebel to her work. An apostate king of Israel, Ahab, married her and brought her in to seduce Israel. Bitterly she persecuted those few Israelites who remained loyal to God (see 1 Kings 18:13; 19:2; 21:7-14).

We can hardly blame God’s people in the Dark Ages for weakening a little now and then to permit the “Jezebel” of Roman apostasy “to teach and beguile” God’s servants. Apostasy is very subtle and alluring. But Jesus rebuked His church in the Dark Ages for weakening even a little!

Do not weaken your hold on the Lord and let the enemy discourage you. He will punish “Jezebel,” and will honor all who have endured trial and suffering for His cause.

**Revelation 2:24-29:** “But to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they call them, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron;  
As the potter’s vessels shall be broken to pieces’—

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<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 49, 50.

as I also have received from My Father; “and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Not to the proud people of earth, but to the meek, will be given this “power over the nations” at the second coming of Christ. While some people use guns to obtain power in this sinful world, God’s people surrender even their lives for Christ’s sake. They dare to follow the footsteps of Him who was “meek and lowly in heart.”

But they will be rewarded! The “nations” who have despised them will be prostrate before them, and they will “rule them with a rod of iron” in judgment.

# Chapter 3

## Jesus Speaks to His Church Today

**Revelation 3:1-4:** “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.’”

After the longest, darkest night, morning always breaks again. People who must watch through the lonely hours of night watch for the cheering light of the morning star, herald of a soon-rising sun.

The Thyatira church was the church of the world’s dark night. How glad they were for the new note of courage which the early Reformers brought! Many speak of John Wycliffe of England as the “Morning Star” of the Reformation. God found a man whom He could use. He lived in the thirteenth century.

A century later came Huss and Jerome, boldly lifting the torch of the gospel, though they were burned at the stake for their loyalty to Christ.

Then came the church of Sardis, church of the Protestant Reformation.

After the darkness and persecution of the Thyatira period, one would expect the Reformation church to be full of spiritual life, united, joyful, faithful, zealous like the apostolic church. But such was not the case.

The Protestant Christians claimed to take the Bible and the Bible only as their rule of faith. But they were content to continue with certain Romanist errors, doctrines which had their origin in paganism long ago. In the place of following Christ in the acceptance of new truth, various Protestant bodies were content to build walls around them as “creeds,” content to go no further than their leaders such as Luther and Wesley had taken them. This is one reason why Protestant churches are divided into many denominations and sects. Sardis professed to be “alive,” but in reality was “dead” because the church would not accept more truth as the Lord brought it to them.

Among the “few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments” may be mentioned honest, godly men such as Luther, Count Zinzendorf, Wesley, Whitefield, and others. These men were used of God to awaken the religious life of the people of Europe, including the English-speaking people.

“In some respects the eighteenth century is the most ill-used period in English

history. ... Nobody has a good word to say about it. ... 'Soul extinct; stomach well alive.' At the point of its faith England was dying. ...

"The true awakening of the religious life for the English-speaking race dates from Wesley. To say that he reshaped the conscience of England is true, but it is only half the truth. He recreated it! It was dead—twice dead; and through his lips God breathed into it the breath of life again." (W. H. Fitchett, *Wesley and His Century*, pp. 11-15). How much the world needs "John Wesleys" today!

**Revelation 3:5, 6:** "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Can you imagine a more thrilling honor than for Jesus Himself to take your name upon His lips, to confess you as His holy child before the Father in heaven and before the millions of loyal angels? In the Judgment which is now in session (see Revelation 14:6, 7), our text says there will be a time when all the assembled hosts of heaven will look at each of us alone and scrutinize our individual lives.

Will they see all our mistakes, all the shameful things that we hope will never come to light? Jesus knows that it was not our true purpose to do all those ugly things. We have been captives of sin. When we believe in Christ and begin to hate sin, "it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me" (Romans 7:17). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). He will cleanse them with His blood.

Remember that Jesus is seeking to save us. He is not seeking an excuse to condemn us. He wants us in His Kingdom, not out. At this moment, the Holy Spirit is drawing each one to Christ, and imparting to us His heavenly grace so that we may "overcome" if we will cease resisting Him and yield to His grace. He will draw us all the way. Our real battle is to trust God, to believe that He loves us—sinners, unthankful, impure, mean persons, that we know ourselves to be. "Overcoming" is overcoming doubt that God accepts us individually and personally. "This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4).

If you believe Him, you will overcome. No one who appreciates the love of Jesus can possibly continue living in sin. "The love of Christ constrains us" (2 Corinthians 5:14).

It is well to think often about that moment soon to come (no one knows how soon) when Jesus will take our names on His lips and say, "Father, this is My true child; he trusts Me, and I cannot abandon him! I died for him, and I must have him in My kingdom!" And when Satan whispers to you that you are too great a sinner, that you must give up hope, remind him of what Jesus said of the greatest sinner on earth, "The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). Claim that promise, and come.

**Revelation 3:7, 8:** "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens": "I

know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

The word “Philadelphia” means “brotherly love.” This was indeed the spirit that pervaded the church at the beginning of the “time of the end,” from about A.D. 1798-1844. Throughout the Christian world, the church enjoyed a marvellous awakening. The Bible societies were organized, and the Scriptures published in multiplied editions.

With open minds, people began seriously to study the books of Daniel and the Revelation. They became convinced that prophecy was fulfilling, and that the end of the world was near. Their hearts were set free from selfishness and love of earthly things. Convinced that Jesus was coming soon, many sold their houses and their farms, and brought the money to be used for the work of publishing the everlasting gospel to the world, wrongs were made right, confessions were made, many tears were shed in repentance. Never since the days of the apostles was there such a loving spirit among God’s people. The message of the “True Witness” to the church of Philadelphia contains no rebuke or censure.

“He who opens and no one shuts.” What does this mean?

Let us visit the sanctuary that Moses built long ago. There we will see the “door” that the high priest opened, which no one could shut, a type or symbol of the greater “door” that Jesus, our true High Priest in heaven, opens for us.

Moses was told by God to make the sanctuary after the pattern of the heavenly temple (Hebrews 8:5). So he built two rooms, one to be the Holy apartment, and the other to be the Most Holy. The first room contained important pieces of furniture that represented Christ’s work as Savior—a lampstand of seven lamps (“I am the light of the world,” John 8:12); a table for holy bread (“I am that bread of life.” John 6:48); and an altar of incense standing as near as possible to the mercy-seat where God’s presence dwelt (“Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son,” John 14:13). Every day in the year the high priest went freely into this first room.

But there was a veil that barred the way, like a closed door, into the second room. Here was the ark containing God’s holy law written on two tables of stone, with the mercy-seat—like the very throne of the infinite God—and angels of gold. No one except the high priest dared even peep behind that veil, lest he be destroyed in judgment, slain by Him whose presence “is a consuming fire to sin” (Hebrews 12:29).

And only once a year on the Day of Atonement did the high priest alone venture to enter the Most Holy apartment, to perform a work of reconciliation for the people of God. This was to them a type of their day of judgment.

It was to this same work of judgment performed in heaven itself that Jesus referred in His words to the Sardis church, “I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.” This “Day of Atonement” began in heaven at the close of the 2300 years of Daniel 8:14. As our true High Priest, Christ entered the Most Holy apartment in A.D. 1844, and began His closing work of “cleansing the sanctuary,” to make a people ready for His second coming. The “door” into the first apartment ministry was closed, and the “door” into the second phase of His ministry was opened. And no one can open what Christ has closed, nor close what He has opened. But this change is

not to be misunderstood as merely one of physical place. There are spiritual realities involved.

“The end of the 2,300 days in 1844 marked an important crisis. But while it was true that the door of hope and mercy by which men had for eighteen hundred years found access to God, was closed, another door was opened, and forgiveness of sins was offered to men through the intercession of Christ in the Most Holy. One part of His ministration had closed, only to give place to another. There was still an ‘open door’ to the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ was ministering in the sinner’s behalf.

“Now was seen the application of those words of Christ in Revelation, addressed to the church at this very time.”<sup>8</sup>

The “open door” is a door through which our prayers ascend to the Father. A thoughtful writer has encouraged us: “The simple prayers indited by the Holy Spirit will ascend through the gates ajar, the open door which Christ declared: I have opened, and no man can shut. These prayers, mingled with the incense of the perfection of Christ, will ascend as fragrance to the Father, and answers will come.”<sup>9</sup>

The “open door” leads us to a new understanding of precious truth. The treasury of the jewels of truth is open to all. No sword guards the way through it. The “open door” is also a special opportunity to preach the gospel of Christ throughout the world (2 Corinthians 2:12). It was in the time of the Philadelphia church that the great work of preaching the gospel of Christ to the nations that knew Him not really began in earnest. William Carey went to India from England in 1793, Adoniram Judson carried the gospel to Burma from America in 1813, Robert Moffat went to Africa to preach in 1817 and David Livingstone in 1840. The Church Missionary Society of the Anglican Church was founded in 1799, the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, the American Bible Society in 1816. New missions were pioneered around the world. Truly the Philadelphia church had “a little strength, and has kept My word.” A still more wonderful manifestation of the gospel message is to follow (see Revelation 14:6-12). But the Philadelphia church was to suffer persecution:

**Revelation 3:9-13:** “Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Many who hated the preaching of the second coming of Christ in the time of the

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<sup>8</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 430.

<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 467.

Philadelphia church from 1831 to 1844 lost their love for the Bible. A great change came over those churches that rejected the understanding of the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation. They became confused in their religious experience, so that the words of Scripture were true of them, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city" (Revelation 14:8). Those who reject truth must always change into "the synagogue of Satan."

"Just before us is the 'hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.' All whose faith is not firmly established upon the word of God will be deceived and overcome. ... Those who are earnestly seeking a knowledge of the truth and are striving to purify their souls through obedience, thus doing what they can to prepare for the conflict, will find, in the God of truth, a sure defence."<sup>10</sup>

The fact that Jesus says, "I am coming quickly," is evidence that the Philadelphia church was living near to the end of the world. The Thyatira church was told, "Hold fast ... till I come," but nothing was said about Jesus coming "quickly."

"But as you read these words you can know that His coming is very soon indeed, because the time of both Thyatira and Philadelphia is past. God has given all who love the Book of Revelation a precious knowledge of His truth for these last days. For this reason, hold it fast, "that no one take your crown." Do not trust anyone so much that you will permit that person to induce you to deny the Lord Jesus. Though you may not see it yet, your crown is already "laid up" for you (2 Timothy 4:8).

**Revelation 3:14-16:** "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth.

Just as the word "Amen" always comes at the end of a prayer, so this message is the closing appeal of Jesus' seven letters to His churches. This message applies to the church today, in the very last days of this world's history. There is no eighth church yet to come.

"Laodicea" is not of itself a bad word. It means "the judging of the people," or "the vindication of the people." This church lives on the earth during the time of the preaching of the three angels' message: "Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come" (see Revelation 14:6-12).

The time period of Laodicea is the same as the work of "judgment" or "cleansing of the sanctuary" which began in 1844 when Christ entered the Most Holy apartment for His final work (see Daniel 8:14). Thus the church of Laodicea covers the period from 1844 to the end of human history, when He will return the second time.

Although this message is one of severe reproof, there can be no mistake in it, for it comes from the "Faithful and True Witness." If one had a cancer in his body, it would be far better for the doctor to tell him the truth even though the news would be very disappointing. If one knew the truth soon enough, he could have surgery and be saved. To know the truth is always better than to be told a lie. Should we not thank our Lord

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<sup>10</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 560.



because He loves us enough to rebuke us and to correct us?

What does it mean to be “hot”? One thinks of being intensely in earnest, full of burning zeal, moved with love for God and for His truth and for those who are in darkness around us. To be “cold” is to feel exactly the opposite, to be shivering, and to realize one’s dangerous condition, and to have a strong desire to come to the fire to be warmed.

But Laodicea is neither hot nor cold: she does not have a burning zeal for God’s work nor a love for His truth and His righteousness; and neither does she understand and feel her terrible need. Truly, of all the seven churches, Laodicea is the one outstandingly sick and the most needy.

This description accurately reveals the spiritual condition of those who today profess to be looking for the soon coming of the Lord Jesus, yet who have lost their zeal. “The Laodicean message applies to the people of God who profess to believe present truth. The greater part are lukewarm professors, having a name but no zeal. ... fervor or devotion. They dare not give up wholly, and run the risk of the unbeliever, yet they are unwilling to die to self and follow out closely the principles of their faith.”<sup>11</sup>

To be “spued” out of Jesus’ mouth means that Laodicea’s prayers and worship are no longer acceptable to Him. However, Jesus did not say that Laodicea’s doom is final. The Greek words that are in the original are, *mello se emesai*. The *emesai* means to vomit (our English word *emetic* comes from this Greek word); the *se* is the second person pronoun; the key word is *mello*.

This word means “on the point of,” “about to” do something. It occurs in Revelation 10:4 where John says he was “about to write” what the “seven thunders uttered,” but he did not write it. The little boy in John 4:47 was “at the point of death” (*mello*), but he did not die because Jesus healed him. The *New International Version* correctly renders this phrase, “I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” In our modern language, what Jesus said is, “You make me so sick at My stomach that I feel like throwing up.” His people give Him nausea.

But there is Good News in this message to Laodicea. Repentance is possible, and Christ can be healed of His nausea:

**Revelation 3:17-19:** “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

We do not know how to be a faithful and true witness to other people because we do not know how to judge their hearts. The human heart “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9) Christ’s rebuke is right on target.

Our hearts may say something that our lips would never dare utter. God’s people

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<sup>11</sup> *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 87.

would never presume to claim openly that they are “rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” but Christ reads the language of the heart. He knows their secret pride and satisfaction with themselves. And He says “you do not know” your true condition.

Have you ever been before a crowd of people and did not know that you were improperly dressed or that your face was dirty? How embarrassed you were when you discovered the truth.

God’s church in these last days stands before all heaven in pathetic shame. Of all the seven churches, says the Greek, Laodicea is “the one” who is outstandingly, conspicuously “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Why?

Because, living in these last days, we are like students who imagine they are nearly ready to graduate from high school when they lack the knowledge that kindergarten students should have. We do not even possess the “first love” that the church of the apostles had (see Revelation 2:4.) And yet our position is more favored in that we should profit from the instruction to all the other six churches of past history. Truly, this message from Jesus is the most serious His people have ever received.

How long must Christ suffer such shame and pain?

If we will accept the remedy He offers, we shall “overcome,” and Jesus will again be happy with His people’s spiritual condition.

What is the “gold tried in the fire”? Peter says that it is faith which is developed and tested in the fire of trials and troubles endured for Christ’s sake (1 Peter 1:6-8). Have you had trials? Perhaps you thought they meant that God had turned away from you. No, He is seeking to give you this “gold” that will make you truly rich. Faith is strengthened by experience in trials, and love is thereby deepened.

What are the “white garments”? Clearly, something that covers our “nakedness.” We can never appreciate what the “white garments” are until we sense what that spiritual “nakedness” implies.

Every healthy person feels a deep shame if he is seen naked. The Bible likens this deep-rooted physical shame to our inborn love of self, and our spiritual enmity against God. “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Romans 8:7). By nature, we all have such a mind. We may try to deny it, but when we are not watching, our selfishness takes over, and our enmity toward others comes out in the open.

Enmity or resentment toward our fellow men is really directed toward Christ, because He says that “inasmuch” as we have treated others unkindly, we have done it unto Him (see Matthew 25:41-45). How ashamed will the people on His “left hand” be in the judgment, when they finally realize that all their lives they have been unkind to the Lord Himself! Then when it is too late they will feel the full shame of their “nakedness.” To realize the truth now, while we can still ask for the “garments,” is a blessing!

No one can “buy” of Jesus the “white garments” until he has come to sense his own inner rebellion against God, and felt ashamed of himself for what he is in his natural unconverted condition. Paul says “all the world” has become “guilty before God” (Romans 3:19). Since Christ is the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8), every sinner on earth from Adam’s day to ours has taken part in crucifying Him. Those who feel the shame of this “nakedness” will want to be covered.

We ask again, What are the “white garments”? He who sees Christ crucified and believes, is he who understands that he himself took part in crucifying Him. Peter’s

listeners at Pentecost received the Holy Spirit when they believed his words, “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). They felt convicted and broken in soul as they saw the shame and horror of their guilt. Thus they repented (verse 38).

The “white garments” are the forgiveness of Jesus that covers with His own perfect love the shame of our nakedness of soul. Thus, we see that Jesus prayed for us when He prayed for those who crucified Him, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

The only deep forgiveness that anyone can receive is that ultimate forgiveness. Do you feel your need of it? Do you want it? If so, your nakedness of soul is covered with the garment of Christ’s righteousness.

“When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness.”<sup>12</sup>

What is the “eye salve”? The eye is the inner light of the heart. “Man’s conscience is the lamp of the Eternal, flashing into his inmost soul” (Proverbs 20:27, Moffatt). “The word of God ... is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). The “eye salve,” the enlightenment provided by the Word of God, makes the conscience prick and hurt like a needle, because it convicts of sin. But the smarting is necessary, in order that the healing will help us detect sin in all its deceptive disguises. He who has bought the eye salve begins to see himself as God sees him.

He now feels a conviction of sin. Let him be happy, because Christ is now saving him “to the uttermost” (Hebrews 7:25). While the High Priest in this heavenly Day of Atonement goes on saving him completely, the Spirit of God goes on working ever more deeply in his heart. This is how we may overcome.

**Revelation 3:20, 21:** “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

The purpose of this message is not to condemn, but to save. And it will do its work in the hearts of God’s people in all the world.

It is not wrong to be a Laodicean, for Christ makes the same promise “to him who overcomes” in Laodicea as to the overcomer in any of the other churches. No one who believes in Christ will want to leave Laodicea, for it is at the door of Laodicea’s heart that Jesus is knocking. If you leave through the back door while a visitor knocks at the front door, you will miss seeing the visitor.

What is wrong is to be content to remain lukewarm, to be satisfied to be “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” It is a tremendous surprise to many good people to learn that Christ had the same battle to overcome that they have. It is Satan who wants us to believe that Jesus is so far distant from us that He knows little or

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<sup>12</sup> *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 312.

nothing by first-hand experience of our struggles to overcome our natural selfishness. Christ is near us, knocking at the door of our heart. God sent “His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin; He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Romans 8:3,4). Christ was ever pure and holy, but He was “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Christ’s promise to the overcomer in Laodicea assures you that whoever you are and wherever you are in your battle with sin, Jesus has taken your full burden on Himself and has overcome in your flesh, suffering all the disadvantages you suffer. You cannot wander so far from Him but that there remains a bond of contact between Christ and your soul, so long as you are willing to believe His promise.

When tempted to discouragement, remember that promise, “even as I also overcame.”

In verse 20 the Lord quotes the exact words of the LXX (Greek) version of the Song of Solomon 5:2. That inspired drama shows the selfish girl unwilling to let her lover come in, unwilling to surrender to him fully. Thus Christ sets His seal of approval on this book and shows that He Himself is its true hero, and that His Bride-to-be is His church on earth. As yet she has been unwilling to surrender to Him completely, but she can learn repentance. May it be soon!



**A Prayer:** Loving Lord, we thank You that Your love is so faithful that it rebukes us and chastens us. Those who do not love us flatter us and praise us insincerely. Now, Lord, we come to You to buy what You have to sell without money and without price. What shall we pay? We have nothing to give except ourselves—let us be Your willing servants.

Thank You Lord, for becoming one with us, fighting our battle. You ask us merely to overcome even as You also overcame. What glorious companionship we have in our overcoming! We choose to bear Jesus’ cross with Him day by day, and to follow His footsteps. In His name we pray, Amen.

# Notes on Chapters 1-3 For Those Who Wish to Study the Revelation More Thoroughly

## Who Wrote The Book of Revelation?

Almost all of the early Christian writers of the first centuries believed its author was the same John who wrote the Gospel, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria (third century after Christ) was the first to question this. His main reason was that the language and grammar of Revelation differ from that of John's Gospel. The Gospel is written in perfect Greek grammar, whereas Revelation uses unusual and even incorrect grammar. Further, some words that appear in both are spelled differently.

While it is true that the literary styles of John's Gospel and the Revelation differ, this does not mean that the "beloved apostle" could not be the author of both books:

(a) The Gospel which bears John's name could have been written with the help of others after the Revelation. He wrote the Gospel when he was old. Probably he dictated it. We read at the end what appears to be a notation added by his secretary and friends: "This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24). Such a secretary would be expected to put John's dictation into correct, idiomatic Greek. John himself being an unlearned fisherman (Mark 1:19, 20), we would hardly expect him to write his Gospel in such impeccable Greek if he were writing on his own.

(b) The author of Revelation tells us that when he had the visions he describes he was exiled to the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). Quite likely John would not have a secretary when transcribing his visions, and would be writing on his own. We need not wonder that his literary style would be different. This could even account for the fact that he spells "Jerusalem" differently!

(c) Early Christian writers confirm that the Gospel and the Revelation were written under different conditions, and even intimate that the Gospel of John was written by dictation.

(d) There are similarities in the Gospel and the Revelation that point to a common author: the frequent expressions "water of life," "living water," "let him that is athirst come," and "if any man thirst, let him come" (compare Revelation 22:17 and John 7:37). The Greek word for "appearance" or "face" (*opsis*) appears only in John's Gospel and in the Revelation, as also the expression, "keep My saying." Both the Gospel and the Revelation speak of Christ as "the Lamb," but no other New Testament book does, except when quoting the Old Testament.

(e) The author of Revelation introduces himself simply as "John." Not a word as to which John. *The* John of New Testament times was the apostle. Everybody knew who he was.

(f) The early Christians saw in Revelation the fulfilment of Jesus' promise that He would "come" to comfort them, and "manifest" Himself to them (John 14:18, 21). When He promised that the Holy Spirit would "show you things to come" (John 16:13), it was

natural for the early Christians to see in Revelation the fulfilment of that promise, for John said that he "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" and saw this vision of heaven and "things which must shortly take place" (Revelation 1:10, 1). And who would be better fitted to receive and pass on the news of the vision than the "disciple whom Jesus loved," the closest to Him of the Twelve?

## **What Is the Correct Method of Interpreting the Revelation?**

All interpretations of Revelation follow one of three basic methods: (1) Preterist; (2) Futurist; or (3) Historicist.

(1) The Preterist method considers the prophecy as relating to events that took place within the lifetime of the author, a purely local, contemporary application. In other words, the dragon and the beast are notorious emperors of Rome in John's day, such as Nero. This method does not accept Revelation as a prophecy of the future; indeed, Preterists generally consider that genuine prophecy is impossible. (Neither do they accept the miracles of the Bible as genuine.) Most so-called Higher Criticism favors the Preterist interpretations.

The practical impact of the Preterist method is to relegate the Revelation to the attic. If it concerns only events that took place nearly two thousand years ago, why should we study it today? The special "blessing" pronounced on the one who reads and hears the book is rendered meaningless, for it would have no special significance for us.

Incidentally, the Preterist method of interpretation was espoused by the Jesuit Alcazar from 1569 on as an attempt to counter the thrust of the Protestant Reformation. Many Protestants of today who accept this view are unaware that they are following the lead of the Roman Catholic Church in an attempt to evade identifying the beast as the papacy.

(2) The Futurist method is almost the exact opposite—it relates the prophecy to the distant future at the end of time. Some Futurists of every generation "find" applications of the prophecy that fit their notorious contemporaries such as Hitler or Stalin, or whoever happens to be the current villain. Sensationalists seize on these new and ingenious interpretations, but the excitement soon dies away until another novel application comes on the scene. Naturally, these wild guesses turn many sensible people away from serious study of the Revelation. Again, the special blessing pronounced on those who study the book is nullified.

The Futurist interpretation is largely the brain child of the Jesuit scholars Francisco Ribera and Cardinal Bellarmine, who saw that Alcazar's Preterism was too unbelievable to be a serious answer to Protestant prophetic interpretation. Their purpose was to deflect the Antichrist prophecies from the Papacy. Most Evangelical Protestant interpreters of Revelation today follow Cardinal Bellarmine's and Ribera's views, unaware of their Roman Catholic origin.

(3) The historicist method of interpretation sees "the Revelation of Jesus Christ" continuously in history from the time of John down to the end of the world. It sees Christ revealing Himself through the Holy Spirit in the great historical movements of time which have a bearing on preparing a people to meet Christ at His second coming. It recognizes in history the outworking of the great conflict between Christ and Satan.

Thus the Revelation had meaning and encouragement for the early Christians of John's day, and helped them understand the great struggle yet to come before the Second Advent. It appealed to followers of Christ in every generation through history, and has particular import for those living in the time of the end. It fixes the identity of the Antichrist with pinpoint accuracy and illuminates the otherwise mysterious confusion that pervades the modern Christian scene.

Revelation is to the New Testament what Daniel is to the Old. Much of what was sealed in Daniel is unsealed in Revelation. Revelation contains about 500 quotations or allusions to Old Testament books. It builds on Daniel by starting with Daniel's fourth world empire, Rome, which was contemporary with John. Thus it complements and confirms our understanding of Daniel.

The historicist method of interpretation was the one held by the Protestant Reformers. In fact, it was Luther's recognition of the Papacy as the Antichrist that provided the impetus for his break with Rome, and the establishment of Protestantism. Faithful scholars all through the ages have held to the historicist interpretation, while both Preterism and Futurism are relatively new inventions.

Bible scholars in the past have held to the historicist interpretation. Large numbers saw the 1260 days as literal years reaching to about 1800. As early as 1639 Thomas Goodwin recognized France as the "tenth part" of the "city" which should suffer a revolution. In 1755, Thomas Prentice declared the Lisbon earthquake of that year to be the opening of the sixth seal (Revelation 6:12). Many in past centuries also saw the Muslim empire in Revelation 9. The prophetic positions taken in this book are in harmony with those of the finest scholars over many centuries. Their truthfulness can be attested by common sense investigation. This book follows the historicist understanding of the prophecy.

## **Did John Copy Parts of the Revelation From Other Books?**

Scholars have found similarity in some of the ideas in Revelation and statements in the pseudepigraphical ("falsely entitled") Book of Enoch that was in circulation as early as 150 years before John wrote. Similarities include references to a multitude that could not be numbered, a star that fell from heaven, the first heaven departing and a new heaven appearing, horses walking in the blood of sinners up to body level, and names blotted from the book of life.

But this does not mean that John was dependent on the so-called Book of Enoch. The content of John's visions is original with him; only certain phrases and expressions in describing what he saw are similar to the book of Enoch. If the latter was in wide circulation in John's day (as it may have been), it would only be natural for John to employ certain well-known phrases or concepts already familiar. He also used phrases and allusions common to readers of the Old Testament—as many as 500.

For a Bible writer to borrow or quote from other writers does not compromise the integrity of his divine inspiration.

### **Revelation 1:1, 2**

Did Revelation promise that Christ would return within the lifetime of its original

readers? Because it speaks of "things which must shortly take place, "and "the time is at hand," and "behold, I come quickly," etc. some assume that the book is crying "Wolf! wolf!" and that we can therefore never know when Christ's coming is truthfully near. If God inspired John to tell the people in his day that the coming of Christ was near, was He not deceiving them with false hopes? Is it possible that He will not come for another one or two thousand years?

Seven statements in Revelation are superficially assumed to say that Christ would come in the lifetime of John. But when we read them in context and take them for what they say, we can see that the Lord was not misleading His people:

Revelation 1:1: "Things which must shortly take place." When Revelation is understood according to the historicist interpretation, this statement comes in focus as saying that events foretold therein would "shortly" or immediately *begin unfolding throughout history*, such as the seven churches, the seven seals, etc.

Revelation 1:3: "The time is near." In other words, the time for these events is now, and continues until the end (compare verse 19, where the Lord instructs John to write about subsequent events "which will take place *after* this").

Revelation 3:11; 22:6, 7, 12, 20: "Behold, I am coming quickly," etc. Four such statements come in the conclusion of the book, chapter 22. Any reader in early centuries who grasped the historical oversweep of the prophecies in chapters 1-18 would understand that the Lord's coming would be near when the events there foretold had already taken place historically. The prophecies of Daniel are the key to unlock those of Revelation, and early Christians already understood that the events foretold in Daniel would take centuries to fulfill. Thus the coming of Christ could not take place until the events foretold there had run their course, such as the supremacy of the little horn for 1260 years, etc. The apostle Paul clearly saw this, for he told the church of his day that the Lord would not return in their lifetime (2 Thessalonians 2:1-8).

The nearness of the Lord's coming began to be generally recognized, even widely so, in the early part of the nineteenth century, the "time of the end" pinpointed by Daniel (see Daniel 11:3, 5; 12:4).

Since then it is correct to see the Lord's coming as always "near" in that it is imminent. It is God's purpose that He come soon, and the Lord wants to come. But God's love requires that the message of the gospel first go to all the world, and only "then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

### **Revelation 1:10**

When John says that He "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day," could he have meant Sunday? Or did he mean that in vision he was transported to the final day of judgment as "the day of the Lord"?

Well after the time of the apostles, some of the church "fathers" referred to Sunday as the Lord's day. And today many Christian people assume that Sunday is the Lord's day. But as the old farmer said, calling a lamb's tail a leg doesn't make it one. The Bible never speaks of the first day as "the Lord's day."

Since the Bible consistently designates the Sabbath as the Lord's day and Christ Himself emphasized the same (see Isaiah 58:13, 14; Matthew 12:8), the apostles would not have dared to refer to any other day of the week as the Lord's day.

The Futurist method of interpretation assumes the Lord's day to mean the future



day of judgment. But this is contrary to the context. What John saw in vision in chapter 1 was not events of the far-distant future from his day, but Christ's current exalted position as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary—before the final day of judgment (see verses 12-18).

When the New Testament speaks of the day of judgment as "the day of the Lord," it uses the term *hemera tou kuriou* or *hemera kuriou*; but John here uses the term *kuriake hemera*. (Compare 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 1:10.) This means that "the Lord's day" cannot here be understood as the day of judgment.

### **Revelation 2, 3**

Can dates be assigned to the seven periods of the church symbolized by the letters to the seven churches? Not exactly, because major developments of history can seldom be pinpointed by precise dates. Scholars who recognize the seven churches as seven major periods of the church's history often disagree as to the exact times of transition. As the colors of a rainbow merge from one to another without a precise demarcation, so the times of the seven churches blend from one to another. But their broad outlines are clearly recognizable. From our perspective in this "time of the end," it is possible to discern the general outline of these seven periods as the fulfilment of John's prophecy.

### **Revelation 3:5**

The reality of a pre-Advent or "investigative" judgment is so clearly taught here that another look is in order. Some who contend against such a judgment say it is unnecessary because "the Lord knows them that are His." It is true that the Lord's omniscient knowledge makes such a judgment unnecessary from His point of view. An investigative judgment is not a time for the Lord to decide whom to save. Rather, it is a time for Him to defend the decisions He has already made, and to convince the world and the universe that He is just and righteous in making them.

Further, Christ's seven promises "to him who overcomes" show that a superficial "once-saved-always-saved" assumption is spiritual arrogance. It is a misunderstanding of Scripture to say that when a sinner initially professes faith in Christ that he has already come into judgment in the sense of a final acquittal. In a purely legal sense this is true; and it is true so far as God's desire and intent are concerned; but if a believer turns from his faith and resists the ministry of the Holy Spirit in overcoming, he frustrates the grace of Christ and chooses that his name be blotted from the book of life.

This passage reveals a heavenly investigation of every man's character to determine if he has in fact *continued* to believe toward the goal of overcoming. The present tense of the verb in John 3:16 also emphasizes this continuity: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever *keeps on believing in Him* should not perish but have everlasting life."

### **Revelation 3:14**

What does "the beginning of the creation of God" mean? Could Christ be a created being? The original word for "beginning," *arche*, can have both an active and a passive meaning, depending on the context. Thus it could mean either the one who is

created, or the one who initiates the creation.

But Revelation clearly defines the meaning here as the one who creates. Christ is introduced as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending (1:8). In the Gospel John speaks of Christ as "in the beginning with God," the Word who "was God," in whom "was life, and the life was the light of men." "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-10). John could not contradict himself by declaring that Christ Himself was "made."

Paul says of Him, "By Him all things were created, ... and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16, 17). Therefore the only way that *arche* can be understood in harmony with Scripture is in the active sense. Christ is the "beginning of the creation of God" as the Creator Himself, the initiator of the whole creation.

### **Revelation 3:16**

According to the *New King James Version*, Christ says to Laodicea, "I will vomit you out of My mouth." Is this therefore a promise to reject Laodicea? Is Laodicea's condition hopeless? Should individual Christians in "Laodicea" move back to "Philadelphia?"

The original wording is *mello se emesai*, "I am *about* to vomit you out," or "I am sick with nausea." The word *mello* has the meaning of "intention, to be about to do something," "indicating a design" (W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, pp. 15, 48, 266). The word conveys the idea of conditionality, intention not yet necessarily actualized. The same word in John 4:47 means that the sick boy was "at the point of death," but he definitely did not die. So the meaning in our passage is that Christ is "at the point" of vomiting (see *New International Version*), but this final act is conditional on Laodicea's rejecting His call to "repent." No way can Laodicea's doom be considered as hopeless.

Neither does Christ counsel individual Christians in Laodicea to move to some other church. His counsel is to "repent" *within Laodicea*. Although principles expressed in all the seven messages apply to the last church, Philadelphia does not exist side by side with Laodicea any more than Thyatira or Ephesus does, unless the entire consecutive sequence of the seven churches is meaningless.

Israel of old were often in a terribly backslidden condition, but the Lord never called on His people to move from Israel to some other land. His call by His prophets was always to "repent." Israel of old and the church of today are a body; and if one's body is sick, the solution for any individual member such as a sore finger is not to cut itself off from the body, but to cooperate in promoting the healing of the entire body. Individual members of Laodicea can help only if they do as Daniel did long ago (in his chapter 9)—confess the sins of the body as their own, and thus promote repentance until it permeates the body of the church.

Philadelphia is one of seven stages in the development of the church as it grows up into Christ in preparation for His second coming. The final stage will be Laodicea's repentance and overcoming, preparing a people to stand as the bride of the Lamb. Christ's message to Laodicea is a part of gospel "good news," if she will repent. Only Christ's enemy would try to distort the message into bad news of final condemnation.