

“REVELATION: DOES IT DESCRIBE OUR DAYS?” SERIES

#6: “Chapter 1”

(READ CHAPTER 1)

INTRO:

So far, you may be disappointed that I haven’t gotten into the “juicy” parts like who is “666”? and what is the “mark of the beast”? As we study through the book, section by section, maybe we can get more specific about the symbols.

So, let’s jump right in...

First of all, we have...

THE PROLOGUE (verses 1-3).

A prologue (prolog) is an opening to a story that establishes the context and gives background details, often some earlier story that ties into the main one, and other miscellaneous information.

Verses 1-3 form the prologue to the Revelation that Jesus gave to the apostle John. Let’s take a look at what’s in it.

First, we are told that what is about to be written is from Jesus to John. John didn’t make any of this up. He simply wrote what Jesus told him to write.

Second, we see the purpose of this writing: ***“to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.”*** We can take that literally for two reasons: first, because the English word ***“soon”*** or ***“shortly”*** is an accurate literal translation of the Greek; and second, because the ink was hardly dry on John’s papyrus when ***“the things”*** did start to take place.

Third, we have John’s testimony that what he received from Jesus through the angel was the word of God.

Fourth, there is the pronouncement of a blessing on the ones who read aloud what will be written, on the ones who hear what is read, and on the ones who keep what is written. What could that blessing be? Could it be that the message of Revelation, if heeded, could be life-changing? Could this life-changing be the blessing?

Finally, we have this motivational word: ***“for the time is near.”*** In other words, the stuff that the Revelation reveals is going to start happening pretty soon. Now, John is probably writing along about the middle of the A.D. 90s of the first century, say 95 or 96. Was the church being persecuted along about that time? Absolutely.

I think the most significant thing we have here are the two references to when the things prophesied in the book start. John says, ***“things that must soon take place”*** and ***“the time is near.”*** John may have lived long enough to see some of the

prophecies fulfilled. There's no doubt that the battle between Christ and His church and Satan began very soon.

Next, we have a...

GREETING TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA (verses 4-8).

This is not modern Asia. This is an Asia that was a province of Rome in John's day. Why **"seven"**? Seven is the number of completeness as far as its biblical use is concerned. These seven churches together represent the complete church age in that their spiritual conditions are illustrations of the church at various times.

Verses 5b through 6 give us a clue that points us to the church as the new **"kingdom"** and to the priesthood of believers.

Verse 7 is the reminder: **"...he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him."** There's no "secret rapture" here. When Christ comes for His church, everybody's going to know it. Christians will rejoice, and those who rejected Him will wail.

And then, in verse 8, is the reminder of God's eternity: **"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."**

Next, we have...

THE VISION OF THE SON OF MAN (verses 9-20).

John had been exiled to the Isle of Patmos, a Greek island in the Aegean Sea, of a little more than 13 square miles. The other apostles had been executed, but John was exiled. This was where he was when he received the Revelation.

He says, **"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, 'Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.'"**

"In the Spirit" simply mean that John was focused on the Lord in such a way that he could hear the message from God and be used to deliver it the way God wanted it delivered.

"The Lord's day" is Sunday, the first day of the week. By John's day, Sunday had become the day for Christians to gather, mainly, to participate in the Lord's Supper. The resurrection occurring on Sunday had something to do with it, no doubt.

John wrote in verses 12-16:

¹ Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a

son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

Of course, this striking figure is Jesus, who was known to refer to Himself as both Son of God and Son of Man. While having been born of a woman, He was conceived of the holy Spirit, hence, Son of God, Son of Man.

This is a caricature, not an exact representation of Jesus. Why, do you think, is Jesus portrayed this way? The entire description here reflects how people of John's day perceived glory, power, and victoriousness – just as Jesus is shown here.

Throughout the Revelation are such fearsome caricatures, such as the **“four living creatures”** of chapter 4, **“the dragon”** of chapter 12, **“the beast”** of chapter 13, **“the second beast”** of chapter 14, and **“the beast from the bottomless pit,”** figures common in what is called “apocalyptic” literature.

John says:

¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars that 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 are the seven churches.

So, the imposing figure identifies Himself as the resurrected Lord and instructs John to write – and please note that John is to write what he sees, which will be both things that are and things that are soon to take place. In other words, some of what Revelation describes was already happening, while the rest of it would begin happening soon. For example, Christians had already suffered at the hands of the Jews and under Nero. And the Emperor Domitian would persecute the church in the near future.

The seven churches referred to are named: the church at Ephesus, the church at Smyrna, the church at Pergamum, the church at Thyatira, the church at Sardis, the church at Philadelphia, and the church at Laodicea, all churches in the Roman province of Asia.

Why address these churches? What about the church at Corinth? What about the church at Rome? What about the church at Colossae? What about the Galatian churches? As to why seven churches were chosen: the symbolic meaning of seven indicates completeness or perfection. It appears to be a deliberate choice, like the many other occurrences of seven in the book of Revelation, to signify that these

seven churches typify all churches in every age. These seven were all different, and at any given time in the church age, any church would resemble any one of the seven. In addition, at any time during the church age, the condition of the church as a whole might be like that of any of the seven.

What about this church? Which of the seven do we most resemble? In the next installment, I'll try to answer that, with your help.

The **“angels”** of the churches are probably “messengers” – leaders of the churches who would communicate to their particular church what God communicated to John. The word “angel” didn't always refer to created beings like Michael and Gabriel. So, here it could probably be translated “messenger.”

IN CLOSING...

William Hendriksen, in his commentary on Revelation, says:

“Christ instructs John to write the things which he saw, that is, this vision of the Son Of Man; and ‘the things which are,’ that is, the condition, at that very time, of the seven churches in Asia Minor; and ‘the things which shall come to pass hereafter,’ that is, the event that would happen throughout the entire future, according to their leading principles.

“He tells John that the seven stars which he had seen in the right hand of the Son of Man indicate the angels of the seven churches. Angels must be taken in the sense of pastors, ministers. The Lord holds them in his right hand: he exercises absolute power over them; they are his ambassadors. He protects them; they are safe when they obey him and are faithful in his service.

“and the seven lampstands are seven churches.’ The churches are lampstands, that is light-bearers.”

The seven churches are “light-bearers.” The church is a “light-bearer” in the dark world. Jesus said, **“You are the light of the world”** (Matthew 5:14).

Tell me, if Village Christian Church's “light” were measured in wattage, what wattage would we be?