

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ”

—An Overview—

*“Blessed is he that
readeth, and they
that hear the
words of this
prophecy, and keep
those things which
are written
therein: for the
time is at hand.”
—Revelation 1:3*

THE LAST BOOK OF THE Bible is often called the Apocalypse, which is its title in the Greek language. It appears in the *King James Version* as “The Revelation of St. John the Divine,” meaning that it was written by the Apostle John. However, in the very opening

sentence of the book, John describes what he is about to write as “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.”
—Rev. 1:1

Then the apostle adds, “which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.” The Greek expression here translated “signified” literally means “to give a sign.” In other words, the important lessons of this closing book of the Bible are, in most

cases, set forth by signs, or symbolisms, as contrasted with statements of a literal nature. It is, therefore, important to note the highly symbolic language contained in the Book of Revelation when studying the various features of its message.

Beginning with the 4th verse of the opening chapter, John addresses the “seven churches which are in Asia.” It is believed by historians that John was at that time regarded as an important spiritual guide in these churches. However, just as the other writings of the various apostles, while addressed in the first instance to certain “churches,” or perhaps to individuals, have applied to Christians as a whole throughout the entire Gospel Age, so it is with the Book of Revelation.

It is reasonable to believe that the seven churches in Asia to which John addresses the book, are representative, or symbolic, of the entire church during seven periods of its development. However, while there is some descriptive matter which is unique to certain phases of individual churches, there are other symbols which apply to all equally. God’s promises of his care over his people, and of their future reward, if faithful, which are made to each church, are certainly applicable to all.

SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA MINOR

The seven churches of Asia Minor designated as the original recipients of this wonderful message of Revelation, are those at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. (Rev. 1:11) In John’s day there was a group, or congregation, of believers in each of these places; but in the Lord’s providence he used the circumstances

associated with each of them as the basis for lessons to the church of the entire Christian Age.

As we have noted, John introduces the subject matter of the book as the “Revelation of Jesus Christ,” and in the opening chapter considerable information is given concerning Jesus whose revelation John presents. He is stated as being the “faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.”—vs. 5

John quotes Jesus directly, saying, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” (vs. 8) Translators of the Bible have used a capital “A” for “almighty,” in an effort to convey the idea that Jesus, the Son of God, is also the Father. However, the word almighty is not used here as a title but is merely descriptive of the fact stated by Jesus after his resurrection, when he announced, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” (Matt. 28:18) It was this highly exalted and powerful Son of God, who had died for the sins of the world and had been resurrected from the dead by the Father’s power, who addressed John on the Isle of Patmos.—Rev. 1:9

John gives us the setting, as follows: “I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”—Rev. 1:12-18

In the last verse of the first chapter, Jesus explains that the “seven candlesticks” were the seven churches of Asia, symbolic of the entire church. The “seven stars” which he held in his right hand represented, he explains, the “angels,” or messengers, to these seven churches. Thus, through these messengers Jesus has spoken to the church throughout the age. His promises to the “overcomers” in the church are wonderful. Below are quoted some of them.

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”—Rev. 2:17

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”—Rev. 3:5

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”—vs. 12

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”—Rev. 3:20,21

THE THRONE SCENE AND THE LAMB

Immediately after these messages of counsel, warning, and promise to the seven churches, John sees what he identifies as a “throne ... set in heaven.” (Rev. 4:2) It consists of a highly symbolic description of the glory of God, the Father, in which four “beasts,” or more properly, according to the Greek text, “living creatures,” and “four and twenty elders,” acclaim him, saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.”—vss. 4-8

The fifth chapter gives a highly symbolic presentation of Jesus as the “Lamb” who was found worthy to open a “book” which was held in the right hand of Jehovah God, depicted in the throne scene of the previous chapter. The same “living creatures” and “four and twenty elders” who acclaim the glory of God now sing the praises of the Lamb. Joining with them in their song of praise are angels, “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.”—Rev. 5:11

Their acclamation is: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, ... and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the

throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”—
Rev. 5:12,13

To summarize briefly what we have considered thus far, the opening chapter of this marvelous book is concerned mostly with introducing the one who is its real author, even Jesus. It shows him standing amidst the candlesticks which he identifies as the seven churches, seven phases of the one complete church. In this symbolism we see Jesus fulfilling his promise to his disciples that he would be with them always, even unto the “end of the age.”—Matt. 28:20, *English Standard Version*

Then, in chapters 2 and 3, are Jesus’ messages to the seven churches, which to some extent are progressive in nature, first promising that he would come quickly, and then, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.” (Rev. 3:11,20) Thus the promised return of the Master—as symbolized by his standing at the door knocking—is specially noted, in addition to his abiding presence with the church throughout the age, “in the midst of the seven candlesticks.”

Chapters 4 and 5, as we have seen, first present God, Jehovah, and then Jesus in their glory. Jesus is shown as the Lamb which had been slain presented as the one found worthy to open the book which was held in the right hand of God. The Lamb symbolism very beautifully and forcibly emphasizes Jesus’ worthiness to be the great executor of the divine plan and purpose. The book of God’s plan could now be opened and carried on to completion, because Jesus faithfully laid down his life as the Redeemer of the world.—Rev. 5:9

THE “LAMB” AND HIS OPPONENTS

Beginning with chapter 6, the Book of Revelation gives a mixed picture of faithfulness and apostasy in a struggle between the forces of righteousness and unrighteousness. To get the general theme of the drama depicted in the book, it is enough to think of it from the standpoint of mighty forces following, on the one side, the Lamb, and on the other side, the archenemy of God, Satan, and the various instruments he has used down through the Christian age.

In Revelation 6:1, the Lamb is first seen opening the seven seals of the book which he took from the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. When he opens the first seal a “white horse” is seen by John, “and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer [*Thayer’s Greek Definitions: come off victorious*].”—vs. 2

When the second seal is opened a “red” horse appears and power is given “to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth.” With the opening of the third seal, a “black horse” is seen, “and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.” When the fourth seal is opened there appears a “pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.”—vss. 3-8

Much has been written concerning the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, much of it misapplied to struggles between nations and would-be world conquerors. However, the Book of Revelation is not concerned with worldly kingdoms and empires except as they become linked with the affairs of God’s professed people. So, while we shall not go

into detail here, these four horses and their horsemen are symbolic of activities and developments within the ranks of those who, throughout the age, took the name of Christ as their banner, beginning with the “white horse,” symbolic of the purity of the Early Church.

Chapter 6 continues to narrate what happens as the seals are opened. When the sixth seal is opened there is a “great earthquake.” (vs. 12) The Lord uses an earthquake symbol to illustrate the shakings and upheavals which we call revolutions. Much happens as a result of the earthquake which occurs when this seal is opened. Verse 17 of the chapter identifies these occurrences as belonging to the “day” of the Lord’s “wrath.”

This expression identifies the time of the events as taking place in the end portion of the Christian, or Gospel, age. The day of wrath, or vengeance, is shown by many prophecies to be a period of time associated with our Lord’s return at his Second Advent, or invisible presence, its purpose being to set aside the “kingdoms of this world” preparatory to the manifestation of the Messianic kingdom of righteousness and peace.—Rev. 11:15

A remarkable picture is presented to us in chapter 7. The time is still within the general period described as the day of the Lord’s wrath. Great upheavals take place in the world, but restraining influences are revealed. “Four winds” are held back by “angels” standing on the “four corners of the earth.” (vs. 1) It is a dramatic setting. Literally, four mighty winds converging from the four points of the compass would create a powerful whirlwind which would be destructive to everything in its path.

These “winds” are symbolic of certain elements of the trouble throughout the world incident to the day of the Lord’s wrath, but they are shown as being held back. The reason given for this is that the work of God in sealing his own “servants ... in their foreheads” must first be completed. (vs. 3) This reveals the special importance the Heavenly Father attaches to his own people in these closing days of what Paul describes as “this present evil world.”—Gal. 1:4

These “servants” of God are shown as being one hundred forty-four thousand in number, divided equally among twelve symbolic tribes of Israel. (Rev. 7:4-8) These are the Gospel Age sons of God, who were found “faithful unto death.” (Rev. 2:10) In the beginning of the age, nearly all who qualified for this special position in the plan of God were natural Israelites. John wrote concerning Jesus, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”—John 1:11,12, *ESV*

However, there were not enough believing Jews to make up God’s foreordained number, so God “at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.” (Acts 15:14) These also become sons of God, but they come into this arrangement under the provisions made in the royal promises to Israel. They are symbolized as “wild” olive branches which, when grafted into the Abrahamic promises, are then counted as “natural” branches. (Rom. 11:17-29) Thus, they are shown in this Revelation picture as being spiritual Israelites.

The picture clearly shows that these are called from the world through the power of the Gospel and “sealed ... in their foreheads”—that is, stamped or attested to by God—during the closing scenes of the age, when the “day” of the Lord’s wrath has already begun in part. The severest of the trouble upon the world, however, is shown to be held back until this sealing work is accomplished. It is marvelous to realize that the Lord employs such mighty forces on behalf of a few of his little ones. No wonder Jesus said, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

SEVEN TRUMPETS

Revelation 8:1 records John’s seeing, in vision, the opening of the seventh and last seal. Then “seven angels” appear, and to these are given “seven trumpets.” (vs. 2) They are not, of course, literal trumpets. Generally speaking, trumpets are used in the Bible to symbolize messages which God designs to have delivered. That is the picture given us in connection with these seven trumpets.

In connection with the “voice” or trumpet of the seventh angel, “whenever he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God.” (Rev. 10:7, *Revised Version Improved and Corrected*) Following this, in verses 8 and 9 of the tenth chapter, a “little book” is spoken of, and the instruction is given to “eat it up; it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.”

This “little book” may well symbolize the great truths of God’s plan which have been unfolded to his people, especially during these last days. God’s

Word of Truth is indeed “sweet.” (Ps. 119:103) However, when it is assimilated, and acted upon, it often brings bitter experiences, which may be accompanied by ridicule, ostracism, and even persecution.

Another development is recorded in chapter 11, verse 15: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” Then, in verses 17 and 18, we are given a brief description of the results of the reign of Christ, from its beginning to its close.

We quote: “We give thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast; even because thou hast taken thy great power, and didst reign. And the nations were wroth, and thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, the small and the great; and to destroy them that destroy the earth.”—Rev. 11:17,18, *RVIC*

OPPOSING FORCES

Chapter 13 describes a “beast” with “seven heads and ten horns.” (vs. 1) Concerning this beast the record states, “It was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb.”—vss.7,8

In verse 1 of chapter 14, the Lamb is seen standing “on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name

written in their foreheads.” These are the “sealed” ones of the seventh chapter. By contrast, those who come under the domination of the beast are shown to receive a “mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads.”—Rev. 13:16,17

Thus we have brought before us these two opposing forces. On the one side are the Lamb and those who are with him; on the other, the beast, and those who have its marks of servitude “in their right hand, or in their foreheads.” It would require much more space than here allows to analyze all the symbols which are used to describe the struggle which takes place between these two mighty forces.

As this scene develops two other symbolisms are introduced: namely, two cities. One is called “Babylon.” It is an unholy city which reigns over the kings of the earth and commits “fornication” with them. The other is the “holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.”—Rev. 17:2,5,18; 21:2

The unholy city, Babylon, spoken of also as a harlot, symbolizes a false church system. Her “fornication” was in the fact that she allied herself with civil governments. It was while this union was a dominating factor during the Dark Ages that this combination was represented by the woman sitting on a “scarlet coloured” beast.—Rev. 17:1-6

Contrary to the picture given us in chapter 13, where the beast is shown to overcome the saints, now the Lamb overcomes the beast, and it goes into “perdition,” meaning utter destruction. (Rev. 17:8,11) Chapters 16 through 19 reveal in detail the complete destruction of all the forces of

unrighteousness, including Babylon, the harlot, the beast, and other related opponents of Christ.

Beginning with chapter 20, the glorious triumph of the Lamb and those who are associated with him is portrayed. These associates of the Lamb are shown as becoming the “bride” of the Lamb, in contrast with the harlotry of the woman who committed fornication with the kings of the earth.—Rev. 19:7,8; 21:2

Standing as the sponsor for every attack against Christ and his true church throughout the age has been “that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan,” and in the opening verses of chapter 20, he is shown to be “bound” with a “great chain” by an angel which comes down from heaven. By contrast, we see the resurrection glory of those who were symbolically “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God,” and “they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:2-4

Those who reign with the Lamb, as his bride, are not the only ones blessed in this glorious triumph of righteousness, for all the dead are raised to participate in the blessings of the Messianic kingdom. Other “books” are opened for them—not the “little book” which is so sweet to the saints now—but “books” which contain the will of God for the people dwelling upon the earth during the thousand-year kingdom. They are judged by the things written in those books; that is, their trial will be upon the basis of the will of God which the open books reveal. Those who pass the tests will have their names enrolled in the “book of life,” which will also then be opened for the world.—vss. 12,13

“NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH”

Chapter 21 presents another picture of the same kingdom period. Verse 1 tells of a “new heaven and a new earth.” These are symbols of the two phases of Christ’s kingdom—the heavenly, or spiritual, and the earthly. “And there was no more sea.” The “sea” symbolizes the restless, discontented masses of mankind, struggling for their real and imagined rights, particularly during the closing scenes of the present age. (Jer. 6:23; 50:42) With the establishment of Christ’s kingdom, they will find peace and security so there will be “no more sea.”

John sees the “holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” (Rev. 21:2) There is no mistaking the meaning of this symbolism, for verses 9 and 10 explain it. Here we are told that the new Jerusalem is the “bride, the Lamb’s wife,” in other words, those whom we previously saw pictured with the Lamb on mount Zion.

The glorious result of the coming of this holy city is revealed in verses 4 and 5—no more pain and death; tears wiped away; and all things made new. As we learned from the opening book of the Bible, because of sin, God sentenced mankind to death and withdrew his favor from them. However, now, as verse 3 reveals, God again dwells with the people, and through the agencies of Christ’s kingdom, the once sin-cursed members of a dying race are restored to become his people again, with the result that “there shall be no more death.”—vs.4

Chapter 22 presents yet one more picture of the thousand-year reign of Christ. Here the kingdom is

symbolized as “the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Proceeding out of this throne is a “pure river of water of life, clear as crystal.” “In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”—vss. 1,2

In the opening chapters of the Bible, we saw man driven from Eden and “a flaming sword” used to prevent his returning and partaking of the tree of life. (Gen. 3:24) Now, in this closing chapter, that sword is removed, and an invitation extended to “come” and “take the water of life freely,” “that they may have right to the tree of life.”—Rev. 22:17,14

This invitation is first given by the “Spirit and the bride,” and then all who hear are invited to amplify the call. The “river” and “tree of life,” of course, are not literal. They symbolize the fulfillment of those wonderful promises of God which we have found scattered throughout the entire Bible, promises of blessing for all the families of the earth.—Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:7-9

Here we see these blessings pictured as a mighty river of refreshing, life-giving waters, emanating from the “throne of God and of the Lamb.” Thus we are reminded that God’s promises to bless all the families of the earth depend for fulfillment upon two things—first, the authority and power of the throne of God: and second, the redemptive work of the slain Lamb, Christ Jesus. He, along with his faithful associates—his “bride,” the true Christian church—will constitute the government

which will rule the people in righteousness for a thousand years, and it will be the agency established by God for giving everlasting life to all who will then believe and obey.

Echoing these wondrous truths, the Apostle Paul wrote concerning Christ: “He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when it says, all things are put in subjection, it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.”—I Cor. 15:25-28, *ESV* ■