

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Part one

Chapters 1 to 4

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The book of Revelation is not the revelation of John but the revelation given to John, now an old man but very much alert and living on the isle of Patmos a Greek island off the coast of Phrygia, which is now the west coast of Turkey where the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 were located. The book has been called the Book of the triumph of Christ and that is an apt description. It has also been called the Apocalypse and deals with eschatology or futurism, things that will happen.

The book begins in chapter one with a vision of a vision of Christ so glorious and powerful that John fell at the Lord's feet as dead (verse 17).

And there is a mighty lesson here. The greatest of the prophets said that without such a vision the people will perish. What the world and Christendom needs today is a fresh vision of Christ. So many churches emphasis the Holy Spirit, charismatic gifts, entertainment, social matters and wordly methods. Some churches are merely social clubs and ' somewhere to go.'

Chapters 2 and 3 are the letters to the seven churches which the Plymouth Brethren and other evangelical churches give as a history of the church from Pentecost to the Rapture. The first church is at Ephesus who are hard working, patient, under persecution but has remained faithful, although there are some who have fallen and need to repent because they have lost the love they first had for the Lord. The Nicolaitians had apparently altered some of the doctrines of both the Lord and the apostles and that is happening today. As with Ephesus, we are called to be loyal and to overcome all falsities. (verses 1-7).

The second church is the one at Smyrna who are also enduring persecution and are impoverished. They are contending with blasphemy and with some people who say that they are Jews but are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan. Some in this church will end up in prison for a short while but if any believer is faithful in all things and faithful unto death he will receive a crown of life (verse 10). We must recall that the first converts to Christ were 3000 Jews (Acts 2. 5 and 41).

We now come to the Church at Pergamos who have honoured the Lord and not denied Him but have a place for the Devil among them; a reference is made to Balaam which introduced fornication and other evils to the people of God which was a stumbling block to Israel. The Jews also had, to some extent, taken on the false doctrine of the Nicolaitians and, even today in our churches, we have those who have a form of godliness but deny its power and purpose and lead others astray. Man made variations of the faith are increasing. In the final chapter of Revelation, we are warned about adding to or subtracting from the truth and, in Jude, we are told to hold fast to the teaching once and forever delivered by the Lord which teaching is unchangeable.

There is a warning here in verse 16 to repent or the Lord will deal with the offenders quickly but there will be rewards for those who are true.

Verses 18 to the end of chapter 2 deals with the church at Thyatira and their good works, charity, faith, service and works but there are some justifiable complaints particularly about a false prophetess, likened to Jezebel, who was into paganism, idolatry and prostitution. In the prophecy of

Jeremiah, we read about the prostitutes in the Temple, both male and female, and how the priests did not stop this vile behaviour which is described as fornication. It has been recorded that the priests were paid by the adulterers and so the spiritual leaders allowed it. Sex is thrown at us from every source today and the sanctity of true and faithful love is ridiculed and abused. The anger of God against these immoral practices is noted in verse 23 and the following verse refers to the depths of Satan and, again, the Christian is called upon to be true and faithful in all matters and, consequently, will receive God's praise and rewards.

God is not made fun of... because whatsoever someone sows that they will reap.

The last three churches are dealt with in Chapter 3. God knows the works of the church in Sardis and that people think it is a living church. But it is dead and they are called upon to strengthen themselves, to repent and hold fast since their service is not perfect. If they do not change their ways, God will descend upon them as a burglar in the night. However, there are some in the church who are not defiled and they will walk with the Lord in white for they have overcome, and the Lord Jesus will gladly present them to God the Father as stated in the closing verses of Jude.

Are there churches like this today? Indeed there are. There are lively and living churches, but they dead.

The church at Philadelphia has an open door which no one can shut. They have little strength and, perhaps, a small congregation but they have been faithful to the Word of God. As with the church at Smyrna, they have Jews, who are not Jews, but belong to the synagogue of Satan.

There are Christians today who ridicule small congregations and accuse them of being old fashioned and worthless and not vibrant and successful like modern churches.

The prophet Zechariah tells us not to despise the day of small things

It must be remembered that these letters were contemporary at the time when John received these message that these letters to the seven churches, But they also give a history of the church from Pentecost to the Rapture. When it speaks of the angel of the church it merely means a leader or a representative. An angel is often described as a messenger.

Philadelphia is basically a faithful and beautifully spiritual church and this may refer to the evangelical revivals of the 19th and the first 50 years of the 20th century.

But then comes Laodicea which is wealthy and a self important church, lively and modern and caring for personal prestige. They create celebrities and disregard the Lord. But they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked and therefore a shame and disgrace. We read in verse 20 that they are a church who will not let the Lord Jesus in. Christ does not have the pre eminence which is His right (Colossians 1. 18). The emphasis in such churches is not on the Lord Jesus but on the Holy Spirit, charismatic gifts, social issues, entertainment and everything has to be lively and everyone has to have a jolly good time. Reverence for the Lord Jesus is in very short supply and doctrine does not matter that much.

I despair at some modern churches who have leaders, some of a celebrity status, who are the subjects of adoration and admired more than the Lord Jesus and these leaders allegedly prophesy saying that their words are just as important as the Bible. There are others who teach that Old Testament characters are types of picture of Christ.

Psalm 89 8 states that no one can, or should be, compared to the Lord Jesus as does Isaiah 40. 18, and yet some Christians want the glory and Isaiah 42 8 has the Lord saying that He will not give or allow His glory to be taken any other.

The other feature of this final church concentrates on what people have done including a plethora of books about peoples experiences which often takes preference over the Lord and God's Word. What both the world and churches need is a fresh vision of Christ and to always keep Him in the front.

It raises the question that when the Lord returns to earth will he find faith here?

We are living in these days.

Chapter 4 begins with John being summoned into heaven. There was the sound of a trumpet. This ties up with the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4 15-18 with the Lord descending from heaven and summoning all believers both dead and alive into heaven and with the sound of the trumpet of God. All believers will then be forever with the Lord.

Watch! for the morning is breaking.
A moment, and He will be here !
The mists and the shadows are fleeing
The darkness will soon disappear;
And He, who for ages has waited,
The Lord who has tarried so long
Will come in an outburst of glory,

A moment, and we shall be gone.
Watch! for the morning is breaking.
A moment, the crown will be won
A moment, and we shall be with Him,
A moment, the journey is done !
Lord, keep up each moment unsleeping,
And count us all worthy to be
In the noble band of Thy watchers,
Whose life is a vigil with Thee.

In heaven, John saw the One who sat upon the throne and twenty four elders sitting clothed in the purity of white raiment. Out of the throne proceeded thunder, lightning and voices. There were seven lamps burning before the throne. Before the throne was a sea of glass and four beasts, or rather living creatures, whose respective faces resembled a lion, a calf, a man and a flying eagle. These living creature had wings full of eyes and were continually worshipping god saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty which was and is and is to come. Glory and honour was given to the Lord and the twenty-four elders also worshipped Him that sat upon the throne.

The main lesson here is that all glory belongs to the Lord Jesus. He alone is worthy and, as already said, I despair when Christians refer to Old Testament persons being a type or a picture of Christ and this devalues the Lord; some modern day Christians want both the glory and the acclaim and to enjoy celebrity status for themselves.

The apostle Paul states that there is only one thing in which he, and we, can glory and that is in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6. 14).

As we have seen in the spiritual realm all the glory belongs to the Lord. We are not to glory in men (1 Corinthians 3.21 and see verse 31).

The glory of man is like a flower or grass (1 Peter 1. 24), short lived. James 4. 6 states that God resists the proud,. those who glory in themselves and receive glory from others.

(1805)

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