

A pproaching hoofbeats - The Book of Revel aTion

SeSSionS 3 & 4

AN OVERVIEW OF REVELATION

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The Book of Revelation

Chapter 1- Christ revealed as Lord and God and in the midst of the Church.

Historical context:

John was exiled around 95 AD to Patmos off the coast of eastern Turkey during the persecution of the Roman Emperor Domitian. This was the second wave of persecution against the first century Church in which approximately 40,000 were martyred. The first was from 64-67 AD under Nero and the third was in 98AD under Trajan. Internal evidence suggests that John wrote the book while it was being

given to Him. God was sending a word of comfort through John to His suffering people. The Greek is rough and that of the fisherman.

The phrase "signified" in verse one indicates that it was put in sign or symbolical language. The phrase "in the Spirit" refers to a conscious awareness of being in the presence of God, in the dimension of the Spirit. It does not mean he was in a trance or anything strange, but was consciously passing into the awareness of the King and His Kingdom.

The phrase "the Lord's day" may refer to the first day of the week, the Sunday which was the day that Christians began to meet. However it may also mean the annual celebration of Caesar as Lord. Once a year Roman citizens had to offer a pinch of incense on the altar of worship to Caesar, and say the words: "Caesar is Lord!" This was an act declaring he was God and of course Christians could not do this. So the Lord's Day meant a day of intense persecution for God's people.

The first chapter is a description of the glorious Son of God, Jesus Christ revealed as Lord and God and in the midst of the Church. Jesus bears the name of God, (1:4) the one who was, is and ever shall be – Jehovah – He is timeless unchanging God. Christ is the Ruler over all Kings having obtained His Kingdom through suffering and through merit, not through Satan. Christ is revealed in searing, scorching and penetrating light, burning up all flesh and sin in the midst of His people. This is the heart of His Church, Christ in all His glory.

Here are 16 facts about Christ as He is revealed in this vision:

1. His called the Son of Man: which is His title 84 times in the New Testament. 21 times this title is mentioned in respect to His second coming as Judge of all the earth.
2. He is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the ending, having the first word and the last on every soul and situation and nation.
3. His feet are in a furnace – indicating stability combined with passion.
4. His hair is white like wool – indicating purity and wisdom.
5. His eyes like flames of fire – searching, all seeing.
6. Standing in the midst of the Churches – the High Priest attending the eternal flame of the seven lamps.
7. Clothed to the feet – dignity.
8. Girdle of gold – strength.
9. His face as the sun – radiating the glory of God.
10. The sword in His mouth – the power of the truth spoken by Him, penetrating, converting, transforming.
11. His voice as many waters – grandeur and variety.
12. Holding the seven stars – His intimate authority over His messengers.
13. Holding keys of death and hell – the prize of Calvary – all power and authority are now given to Him.
14. He bears the name of Jehovah – the being one "He who was, is and ever shall be" the timeless unchanging One.
15. His testimony – the One who was dead and is now alive for evermore. This is the testimony of His followers who fellowship with Him in the power of the cross.
16. He is the ruler of the Kings of the earth. He is king over all.

1. Chapters 2- 3

Jesus is in the midst of His Churches ministering to keep the light burning brightly. He addresses the Churches, correcting or commending and encouraging. The rest of the book is irrelevant unless the Churches are responding to their Lord. These are not types of Churches in historical succession, but rather are seven types of Churches that exist at any time in Church history.

Seven, the number that indicates perfection, is a key number in Revelation:

7 Churches

7 Spirits of God

7 Seals

7 Trumpets

7 Blessings in the whole book:

1. "He who reads and he who hears." Rev 1:3
2. "They who die in the Lord." Rev 14:13
3. "He who watches." Rev 16:15
4. "They who are bidden to the marriage supper." Rev 19:9
5. "He who has part in the first Resurrection." Rev 20:6
6. "He who keeps the words of this book." Rev 22:7
7. "They who wash their robes." Rev 22:14

Compare also with:

7 days of Creation

7 Churches of the New Testament epistles – 1. Rome 2. Corinth 3. Galatia 4. Ephesus 5. Philippi

6. Colossae 7. Thessalonica

The seven Churches of Asia:



The seven Churches of Revelation:

- Ephesus
- Smyrna
- Pergamum
- Thyatira
- Sardis
- Philadelphia
- Laodicea

The seven Churches are a picture of the Church throughout the Church age. Some have suggested that they are symbolic of the Church in a historical sense, each Church representing an era of Church history (Ephesus being the Church of the first century which lost its first love, and Laodicea the Church of the 20th/21st century which is lukewarm. This interpretation does not adequately address the differing conditions of the Church in different nations. It is rather that these seven kinds of Churches are to be found at any one time in Church history, both in the first and the twenty first centuries! What then are the main points exposed in these letters?

Ephesus – the loveless Church

Ephesus was the largest city of Asia and it was there that was found the one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: a huge statue to the goddess Diana. Paul's preaching had so broken the idolatry of Diana that there had been a riot by the traders in religious artefacts. No one was buying them anymore!

Ephesus was a successful Church and here once more it is important to recognise that not all that pleases man pleases God. The Church was hard working, had resisted false apostles (who shall multiply in the last days: 2 Tim 3:1-9 and 2 Peter 2:1). This meant that they had a great sense of authenticity. They had kept the "truth" in its doctrinal purity. Moreover the Church had not given in to weariness and fainting. The Church had been given the privilege of receiving the greatest ministry, being founded by Paul, pastured by Timothy and then having John in its eldership and Mary the mother of Jesus in its membership! Imagine having tea with Mary and John and all the fascinating stories they

must have known. The Church had been born in revival and among the early assemblies was one of the most privileged.

How sober then was the warning that even this great Church had fallen. Jesus said that the Church had fallen and thus indicated that as far as He was concerned the condition of this Church was dangerously similar to other fallen beings ("How you are fallen from heaven, Lucifer son of the morning," Isaiah 14:12). Many teachers of the word speak of the fall of Adam, although the phrase is never used in the Bible. This Church had slipped and fallen from its exalted position and there can be no doubt that privilege always brings with it the danger of smug satisfaction and pride. We are blessed because God is good and gracious to sinners, not because we are so great and worthy of blessing!

The Church continued on in the form of a successful Church but was heading for disaster. They had lost love for the Lord and for each other. Duty was the motive, not love. Outwardly, all was the same, but inwardly there was a coldness and distance from Christ and from each other. The times of prayer would have been marked with great prayers but coldness of heart. The teaching would have been marked with great correctness but no passion. The worship would have been a shadow of former days when zeal and love moved them to great acts of renunciation. Acts 19:19 tells of the burning of books worth 3 million US dollars!

Who were the "Nicolaitans?" The answer is not recorded anywhere, but the Greek word means "over comer of the laity" suggesting the formation of a spiritual elite that were allowed to perform special rites such as handling the communion. Jesus said He hates this elitism. Elitism rears its head again and again, with special groups who are the privileged few. This is against the Spirit of Christ.

Clearly the Church had chosen attractive alternatives to love which were: religion, good works, personal happiness etc... Now the Church was cold and close to death. Though this may seem hard to believe, Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 that the greatest of sacrifice, knowledge and even faith as meaningless and empty if there is no love. Clearly the answer for this Church is to return to first love, and to seek God and a renewal of intimacy in prayer and devotion.

Smyrna – the Church in times of persecution

Polycarp was at this time one of the leading elders in this Church. He was martyred years later in 153 AD. He was given the chance to deny Christ and live, but replied "Eighty and six years have I now served Christ, and he has never done me the least wrong: How then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" Polycarp knew John personally and received this wonderful message from Jesus through him. Today Smyrna is the second largest city of Turkey and a large sea port. There is still a living Church there to this day.

This Church needed words of affirmation and encouragement from the Lord. When we are in the right way, God seeks to affirm us and strengthen us. This Church was passing through severe opposition and persecution. They seemed poor in their own sight but were rich in the eyes of God. The key word of Jesus to this and to all Churches is "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life." This word does not mean merely that we must be faithful all of our lives, but that we must be willing to lay down our lives for the Church, and for the Lord. The Lord Himself loved His Church and died for her (Ephesians 5:25). Christians must have this life-style that is choosing God above life itself.

Pergamos – False teaching and immorality

This city had a great temple to the god Zeus. It was also the first city in the Roman Empire to erect a temple to Augustus Caesar. It had renowned medical schools and a temple to the Greek god of health Asclepius which was symbolized by a serpent. Ramsay said of Pergamos that “Beyond all the cities of Asia Minor it gives the traveller the impression of being the home of authority.” It had a 1000’ hill in the centre of the city on top of which was the temple of Zeus. The city was said by Jesus to be the centre of Satan’s power with his throne located here. From this may be judged that Satan needs physical headquarters to run his kingdom. The altar of Pergamos (as big as a tennis court) was taken to the Berlin Pergamon museum, where it is to this day. It was taken there at the end of the 19th century and within a few years Germany was at war and destroyed, then at war again and divided. Croesus was a king of Pergamos and he invented money (hence the phrase “as rich as Croesus.”) It was a rich city with the third largest library in the world (with 300,000 volumes), and many sports facilities and theatres.

This Church had kept faithfulness to the Lord through days of persecution. Jesus uses the interesting word “Antipas” to describe one of the early martyrs in this town. The word means literally “against everything!” This sums up the Christian’s lot: he is a stranger in every nation and an opposer of every other religion and philosophy. Though he is kind, loving and generous to all, yet in his mind and philosophy he is in direct conflict with the world and the powers of darkness that lie behind the world’s systems. (1 John 2:15-16). This is the fate of all who would live faithful to Jesus: they will be persecuted: 2 Tim 3:12.

Jesus commends this Church but is grieved that despite the many victories there is impurity in the teaching. The teaching of Balaam led to idolatry and immorality, and was a ministry that was motivated by financial gain. These are serious warnings in the twenty-first century when there are many scandals involving misuse of money in the ministry and sexual immorality. Once more the warning is chilling since these things can of themselves draw great numbers. Sinners do not want to renounce worldly carnal pleasures. But the Church who would please God, must live in purity, through faith and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thyatira – False teaching and immorality

This was the smallest of the seven cities. It had many trade guilds, which caused many Christian traders to come into a conflict of conscience, since in order to trade they had participate in heathen religious ceremonies.

Thyatira was in a similar condition to Pergamos, and had works that were greater than the early days of its founding. However the false teaching here was of greater level and involved a “Jezebel spirit”. Many have assumed this to be an attack on the ministry of women, but this is surely a gross oversimplification. The Church is the bride of Christ, but this does not mean that it is only open to females! Similarly there are many men with a “Jezebel spirit” which symbolises a teaching that waters down the message of holiness in the Church and permits fornication, adultery, divorce for trivial reasons and remarriage. While grace is needed in the Church in the handling of those who fail, yet there is to be a clear upholding of righteousness and holiness in the Churches, not by works of the law, but by grace

through faith and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Church must be holy, and no amount of numbers in the Church can change the mind of the Lord on this essential foundation of spiritual life.

Sardis – the Church with a great name but a dead spirit.

Sardis was a small and unimportant city, which had once been the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia. It was famous for dyeing wool garments. The city was destroyed in AD 17, and the Roman government gave 10 million Sesterces to rebuild it and the city of Philadelphia. Philadelphia nearly was renamed “Neocaeserea” in gratitude to the Roman emperor.

Think of the best possible name for a Church. Watchman Nee so disliked the denominational titles that he refused at last to recognise them and acknowledged only the Church of a locality, hence the Church of Singapore, the Church of London etc... Soon of course this name lost its significance. Others have thought out the best title believing that it will make a significant contribution. “The True Church of God.” “The True Apostolic Church of God.” “The True Apostolic, Full Gospel, Pentecostal Four Square Assemblies of God.” The name means in the end nothing but it is rather the lives of the believers that will make the reputation of the Church. Jesus rebukes this Church for having a great name but a poor life! He declares that they never see things through, they never finish things off. They start but do not finish, and they give up half way. This Church must turn back to remember how God had moved in the past and seek somehow to regain that original freshness by seeking God for a fresh out pouring of the Holy Spirit.

Philadelphia – the Church distinguished by fervent love

This city still has a Christian witness today. It was to pass through deep trials but it was a worthy Church. This is the second of the seven Churches with no reproof from the Lord. Jesus declares that though the Church has little strength, yet it is very precious to Him, no doubt because of the brotherly love. This means that the Church has an open door in the Spirit, in prayer, in preaching, in evangelism in all realms. Love will open the door, and love is the great key to growth. Love sinners, seek out people to help, take opportunities to pour out to people. Such a Church will grow and only such a Church deserves to grow! Moreover God will vindicate such a Church and show openly to all that this Church has His approval.

Laodicea – the half hearted Church

Laodicea was one of three cities (along with Philadelphia and Sardis) that were destroyed by an earthquake in AD 17. The Roman government had given huge sums of money in aid but Laodicea had rejected the aid, because it was such a wealthy city. They had not needed the aid! Philip was martyred in the city of Hierapolis not far away.

This is the Church that has often been taken as the picture of the western Church in the 21st century. It is a Church that has wealth but no zeal. There is a terrible condemnation in that there is neither coldness nor zeal and Jesus declares that He will vomit the Church as tasteless out of His mouth. Christ states that if there were coldness in the Church He could do something, because souls would realise their need, but lukewarmness produces just those sleepy conditions which allows the Christians to have enough religion not to fear eternity, but not enough to flee the world. Christ found nothing to praise in this Church.

Jesus counsels this Church to be zealous! How can one find zeal if that is precisely what is lacking? The answer is obedience. Jesus is declaring that it lies within the response of His people to be zealous and not just to wait for something to happen. There are three aspects to His advice:

1. To buy gold, this is godly character and enduring faith.
2. To buy white clothing. This is purity and inner holiness.
3. To buy eye-salve to anoint their eyes. This is revelation from God.

The Church needs to transact with God on these things. But what is the currency of heaven? How can we buy them? The answer is the currency of the heart: humility, faith, love, repentance and zeal. This is a currency that every person has to hand, but cannot be used without giving up things that compete with the goal of faith.

2. Chapters 4 - 5

Chapter 4 shows us Heaven, the throne room: the centre of all history.

John hears the voice of Jesus calling him to come up into heaven. There is no indication here that this could be the rapture. Rather John is taken up to see the scene in heaven before and during the cross. The throne is mentioned 34 times in the book of Revelation out of a total of 45 times in the New Testament. This is a book about the throne, the centre of all things. John is immediately conscious of being in the Presence of God, which was ministered to him by the voice of Jesus. In the Spirit the first thing that he sense is the nearness and glory of the throne. This was true of the tabernacle. When the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies, he stood immediately before the mercy seat.

God Himself appears like a shimmering diamond with unknowable depths.

The elders are crowned with victors' crowns (Greek "stephanos") contrasting with the diadems worn by the Antichrist in chapter 13. These are the crowns won by athletes who win the race. They are clothed in white, the colour of purity. The elders are the great men of the faith, the fathers, listed in Hebrews 11.

The four living beings (wrongly translated "beasts" in the King James Version) are four great angels revealed in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1. They are the Seraphim who worship God since the day of their creation, and still are unable to uncover their faces as they gaze on God. Their cry is "Holy, holy, holy" which is the response of their being to the impact of the presence of God.

The rainbow is one colour – green the colour of life. It represents the covenant of life. From the throne proceed a variety of utterances, thunder, lightning. Before the throne are the seven spirits of God, the perfection of God's being, the spirit of faith, wisdom, power, love, a sound mind, power, grace and supplication. The list is longer than seven, but the number seven signifies the perfection of the Godhead.

The sea of glass is the lake that is at perfect rest, and still. In this state it is a perfect mirror. The human heart is to be a mirror, but it is like a sea, and if troubled it reflects nothing. Only as we still our hearts do we see the reflection of heaven in our spirits.

The song is a song of worship to the Creator in chapter 4, and the scene full about turns in chapter 5 to the song of the Redeemed. The Lamb of God appears slain on the throne, and the blood presented in heaven unleashes the song of the redeemed.

Chapter 5. Christ is the protagonist – the main actor on the stage of world history. He is the one from whom all things begin. He has: 7 horns – perfect power 7 eyes – perfect knowledge and seven spirits – perfect presence.

The voice cries “behold the lion” but as he looks he sees a lamb. This is the secret of God’s power. The false prophet in chapter 13 has the face of a lamb and the voice of a dragon. “Lamb” is the chief title of Jesus in heaven.

The song of chapter 5 is the song of redemption. The lamb opens the seals and by His blood He makes the gospel age possible. The song is to the lamb, and all things are poured out onto Him. God is a fountain of living water, and everything that is poured out on Him is multiplied, whether it be wisdom, power, riches, honour or strength. All that is given to Him increases and does so in an exponential manner.

3. Chapters 6 – 11

The opening of seven seals and the sounding of the seven trumpets. The history of the world from the cross to the return of Christ is recounted. History is punctuated by the opening of seven seals.

Seal 1 - The White Horse.

The colour white is consistently and uniquely used about God and His people in the Bible. Moreover the rider wears a “stephanos” crown not a diadem. This indicates that this is the gospel going forth in the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no need to argue since this is definitely what happened in response to the death of Christ, though interpreters may argue whether this is the right interpretation of this verse at this point. Whatever the case, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has changed the course of world history more than any other event, or personality. God is first and “one” is the number of God.

Seal 2 - The Red Horse.

This is the colour of the dragon. It is the colour of Adam whose name means “red.” It is the colour of the Edomites who were the supplanters of the throne of Judah (Herod was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau). The devil is always second and “two” is his number, indicating that he is the divider, the separator. The greatest opposition to the work of the Spirit came through the false Church, which arose in AD330 through Constantine. In 630AD the great

Antichrist system of Islam was unleashed upon the world through the false prophet Mohammed. Mohammed did not invent a new religion, but revised some confused knowledge of the Bible that he learned from Christians and Jews. The Koran is an "Anti-Bible" changing Isaac for Ishmael.

Seal 3 - The Black Horse

This refers to famine, with the strange conditions prevailing which are often found during famines: while some starve, others are still able to indulge in luxury goods (the oil and the wine). The inflation is so high that a whole day's wage is needed to buy a quart (roughly 600g) of wheat or 3 quarts of barley. But the price of the oil and wine remains unaffected. So while some are starving, there will be rich people still living in different parts of the world as if nothing were wrong.

Seal 4 - The Pale Horse

Representing death and hell, which indicate a terrible period when the average life expectancy will be 35 (as in present day Zimbabwe). People die through violence, famine, disease and wild animals.

Seal 5 – Souls under the Altar

This is indicating a period of terrible persecution when great multitudes die for their faith. In the dark ages of the Inquisition, some 130 million believers died at the hands of the Catholic Church. The cry for vengeance may seem strange, but it is not a bitter cry, it is the cry of those who are perfected in love and understanding. God has said that He will forgive those who repent, but that He will take vengeance on those who harden their hearts in opposition to Him and His ways. The saints cry for forgiveness and for justice, and both will be perfectly fulfilled.

Seal 6 – Earthquake and signs

Judgment begins and the powers of earth and heaven are shaken, with earthquakes, signs in outer space (perhaps comets, meteors, asteroids hitting earth?)

Seal 7 - Silence – then the seven trumpets

The seven last judgments are poured out on the earth. These seven last plagues are described twice. Though there are differences between chapters 8 and 16 there are significant similarities as a quick comparison shows.

Trumpet	Ch 8 Strikes:	Vial	Ch 16 Strikes:
Trumpet 1	Earth	Vial 1	Earth

Trumpet 2	Sea	Vial 2	Sea
Trumpet 3	Rivers	Vial 3	Rivers
Trumpet 4	Sun	Vial 4	Sun
Trumpet 5	Release of demons	Vial 5	Torment
Trumpet 6	Euphrates	Vial 6	Euphrates
Trumpet 7	The Return of Christ	Vial 7	The End

Why do we believe they describe the same events from different perspective?

- The first four trumpets/vials are disasters in the same areas of planet earth. There are some differences that are difficult to reconcile but these can be understood as seeing the same event from different perspectives.
- The fifth trumpet describes the opening of the bottomless pit and a cloud of demons being released. The fifth vial complements this description showing the torment of the demons as they afflict the kingdom of Antichrist. This event is difficult to imagine since it is described from the spiritual unseen world. Demons have been bound since they overstepped their permitted realm of operation in the pre-flood days. Their effect is torment. What this event would look like in history is difficult to imagine. In the sixties there was a flood of drugs and sexual liberation that destroyed a generation. Was this a flood of demons?
- The sixth trumpet describes a major event centred on the river Euphrates opening the way for the kings of the East to march with an enormous army of 200 million. The sixth vial also describes an event centred on the river Euphrates that opens the door for Armageddon. The normal geographical boundaries of earth are changed.
- The seventh trumpet describes the coming of Christ and the beginning of the millennium (the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of Christ and He shall reign for ever and ever.) The seventh vial declares that "it is done (or finished)."

4. Chapter 7

This chapter comes between the sixth seal and the seventh seal and indicates a sealing of 144,000 from Israel and then an innumerable number from the nations. This probably indicates a tremendous worldwide revival near the end of the age, both in Israel and then in all the nations. These multitudes were saved in the midst of *the* great tribulation (the King James Version leaves out the definite article, thus leaving the impression it could be general persecution not the final wave).

5. Chapter 10

Ask, Take, and Eat!

The Bible is the little book that triggers prophecy. This chapter is an interlude in the teaching of Revelation and is a personal impartation of God to John to renew His prophetic ministry. It is an example to all ministers how they can renew their ministry. The angel is not Christ, since He is nowhere else called an angel in the New Testament. This is "a mighty angel" but Jesus is "Almighty God." The steps in the process are as follows:

- The Bible is open – it is freely available.
- John is commanded to take the little book out of the angel's hand (10:8). Bible reading is not an option; it is obedience to a command.
- John asks for the book (10:9). Believers must ask for the Bible in prayer. Owning a copy is not enough.
- The angel commands John to take the Book and eat it (10:9). We must not merely read, we must take Bible truth into our spiritual hearts so that it will become part of our lives.
- The Bible is sweet to the taste, but bitter in its effects (10:10). This is because the Bible is incredibly beautiful and sweet to the soul, but has the power to convict, and to bring the believer into the groanings which are the fruit of the Spirit in us.
- The Bible in John unlocks ever more prophetic utterance (10:11). Where the Bible drops into believing hearts, the effect is to beget ministry, utterance and understanding of unseen things and of the future. The result is supernatural or prophetic understanding. This prophetic dimension is to be part of God's people at all times. Revival is preceded by the rediscovery of the power of the little book.

5. Chapter 11.

The two courts of the temple indicate a true Church and a worldly formal Church existing side by side. Could they indicate a rebuilt temple? Very difficult to interpret here in that way, but it is possible that the temple will be rebuilt.

The two witnesses are the two fold branch of the Church – Jew and Gentile, Joshua and Caleb, Moses and Elijah. There will perhaps be great witnesses, prophets, men of faith like Moses and Elijah,, but in the spirit of the New Testament.

These two witnesses represent the state of the Church in the end times:

- Filled with the spirit – burning bright.
- Fire proceeds from their mouths – the power of their word
- Power in prayer like Moses and Elijah
- Clothed in sack cloth – having deep compassion and anguish – self humbling before God intercession.
- The beast makes war upon them, (see what communism and Islam have done to Christian witness in their nations.
- The Church always rises triumphant from the ashes of persecution