

REVELATION CHAPTER 1

1:1-8. JESUS CHRIST IS THE AUTHOR OF REVELATION

PART 1. Revelation 1:1-3. THE TITLE: THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

(1) Explanation of the symbols

1:1 Revelation¹ of Jesus Christ, which God gave (*Greek: didomi, doso, edoka, dedoka*)(*aorist*) him. The word “revelation” means *unveiling* by taking away the veil over things that were hidden. The hidden things are not only *what* will happen in the future, but also *why* and *to what purpose* they happen. Christ reveals his plan to establish “the kingdom” (or *kingship* of God) until its final phase throughout the universe and thus to enable his elect (God’s people) to live in full salvation. *The purpose of Revelation is to show Christians where God’s history of salvation within the world history is leading to!*

to show (*Greek: deiknumi*)(*aorist*) his servants. Christ shows every Christian who reads the book that in everything that happens in the history of this world and in their personal history they will recognise God’s eternal plan and hand and recognise Christ’s work and coming. Consequently *you will be able to trust Jesus Christ amidst all the crises and anxieties and look with unshakeable faith forward to his coming which will inaugurate God’s kingdom in its final phase.*

what must (*present*) take place (*Greek: ginomai*)(*aorist*) soon (*Greek: en tachei*). God’s eternal plan *must* take place and shall be carried out. *Everything that happens in the world and in history happens either by God’s decision or by his permission! This is an encouragement for Christians!* The time these events will happen is “soon” (1:1), “because the time is near” (1:3). The events are predicting the future, but are realised in the present! The events revealed in the book of Revelation begin to be realised from the first coming of Christ and continue to beyond his second coming – thus take place during the whole New Testament period. That is why the words must not be sealed up (22:10).

He made it known (*Greek: semaino*)(*aorist*)². The book of Revelation is made known in visions that make use of signs (Greek: semaion)(symbols and numbers) (figurative language or imagery)! That is why we find so many symbols and numbers in the book and why we must understand what each symbol and number refers to.

by sending (*Greek: apostello*)(*aorist*) his angel to his servant John. After the death of the apostles Paul and Peter in about A.D. 64-67, the Lord provided the apostle John as leader for the churches (congregations) in Asia Minor. Probably shortly after the beginning of the Jewish War against Rome in A.D. 66, when the Christians in Jerusalem moved to Pella (25 km below Sea of Galilee), the apostle John and other people who had seen and heard Jesus moved to Ephesus in Asia Minor. The church father Irenaeus (A.D. 170 in France) and the church father Clement (A.D. 190 in Egypt) wrote that John was the main leader of the churches (congregations in western Turkey). He wrote the book of Revelation about A.D. 95-96 towards the end of the reign of the 11th Caesar, Domitian (A.D. 81-96) and lived till the beginning of the reign of Caesar Trajan (A.D. 98-117). At that time the early fervour of the Christian Church had already waned (2:4; 3:15).

John was exiled on the isle of Patmos (opposite Miletus, below Ephesus) where Jesus gave him visions about the present and the future of the Christian Church. John summarises the words of Jesus as the introduction of the book. The origin of the book is God (Christ), who via an angel and the apostle John made its contents known to its readers and its hearers. The book of Revelation is especially a message to Christ’s servants, to Christ’s congregations in every century and in every country and to every individual that reads and hears the book. Christ speaks directly to John in Revelation 1:8 and 22:7, but in the rest of the book via an angel.

1:2 who testifies (*Greek: martureo*)(*aorist*) to the word of God and the testimony (*Greek: marturian*) of Jesus Christ, what he saw (*Greek: horao, opsomai, eidon, heoraka*)(*aorist*). Jesus and not John is the author of this book. John testified to the objectivity of what he saw and heard. That is why he calls it “the word of God”. *If you do not want to be seriously punished, do not change the contents of the book by adding material to it or by removing material from (22:18-19)!*

The testimony of Jesus is not what John testified about Jesus, but rather what Jesus Christ had revealed to John (cf. Revelation 19:10).

1:3 Blessed the one who reads (*Greek: anaginosko*)(*present continuous tense*) and listens (*Greek: akouo*)(*present continuous tense*) the words of this prophecy and take to heart (*present continuous tense*) what is written (*Greek: grapho*)(*perfect*) in it. Read it personally and publically so that others can hear. The church father Justin Martyr (A.D. 140) said that from the beginning the Gospels were read publicly. One of the earliest tests for canonicity was the public reading of a Bible book. Only Bible books that were regarded as inspired and authoritative were read publicly in the congregation as basis for exposition (of teachings) and exhortation (with respect to behaviour).

¹ The Greek word “apokalupsis” means *unveiling (revelation)*.

² The Greek word “semaino” means *to make known* by way of signs or symbols and is derived from “semaion” (sign).

If you desire to be blessed by God, you must “take to heart” (pay attention to) and “keep” (obey) the contents of the book!

“Prophecy” is not simply *prediction* of future events which has no bearing on the personal lives of the readers, but proclamation of the meaning of events in the past, present and future for every generation of Christians. The book is a *Christian philosophy of history until its end-time* which must be lived out within every decade of history! It reveals God’s will for his Church which is struggling in the world and encourages it to persevere, because *Christians are struggling together with Christ and will conquer*. Such reading and taking to heart is a blessing indeed!

because the time (*Greek: kairos*) is near (*Greek: eggus*). God’s appointed time to bring his revelation to fulfilment is near. The contents of this whole book are about to be realised, even if it will take centuries before the complete fulfilment has been reached! The things, which Jesus revealed to the Church, began to happen from his first coming and will continue to happen until his second coming! That is why every generation of Christians must read the book of Revelation and take it to heart! They must take serious notice of it and let themselves be determined by its message. The content of the book of Revelation is relevant for every congregation in the world at any time between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming!

(2) Different views about the words ‘revelation’ and ‘prophecy’ (1:1,3)

A futurist view. The revelation is the unveiling of (only) those events that shall precede and accompany Christ’s so-called future second return (his ‘revelation’). It is a prophecy (prediction) of events in the future end-time (Larkin).

The correct explanation. *The revelation is the unveiling of God’s plan (decree, decision) for Church history within world history throughout the whole New Testament period, from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming*. The book of Revelation is the proclamation (prophecy) of God’s plan with regard to the past, present and future of God’s Church within world history.

(3) Different views about the words ‘soon’ and ‘near’ (1:1,3)

A futurist view. The events described in the book of Revelation are for the greater part future and only begin to be realised after the Church has been removed from the earth (after the so-called ‘rapture’).

The correct explanation. The events described in the book of Revelation begin to be realised from the time they were revealed in the first century A.D. – thus throughout the whole New Testament period. The translation ‘soon’, ‘shortly’, ‘not a very distant future’ is correct, because the immediate context says that ‘the time is near’, ‘the time is at hand’ (1:3). The symbols began to be realised when they were revealed. This is confirmed by Revelation 22:10, which says that the words of the prophecy of this book “must *not* be sealed up”, because the time is near. God’s plan had already begun to be realised!

PART 2. Revelation 1:4-6. THE RECIPIENTS, GREETING AND WORDS OF PRAISE.

(1) Explanation of the symbols

1:4 John. To the seven churches (congregations) in (the province of) Asia. These historical churches were located in the province of Asia (in Turkey) and formed an irregular circle. They represent all the churches in the world and in history. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations (churches)(plural)(2:7).”

The persecution and sufferings to which the Christian Church in the days of John were subjected are typical of the persecution and sufferings of Christian congregations throughout the New Testament period (2 Timothy 3:12) and will be typical of the future persecution and sufferings just before Christ’s second coming (Matthew 24:1-31).

Jesus Christ addresses himself to “every one who reads and hears the words of this prophecy of this book”, that is, to all people in every age between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming. All people of all congregations in the world who read and listen to this book in any age are called “blessed”!

Grace and peace to you. “Grace” is God’s favour bestowed on people who do not deserve it. “Peace” is God’s wholeness of what was broken before.

from him who is (*present continuous tense*), who was (*imperfect tense*), who is to come (*Greek: erchomai*)(*present continuous tense*), and from the seven spirits before his throne,

1:5 and from Jesus Christ, who (is) the faithful witness (*Greek: martus*), the firstborn (*Greek: protokos*) from the dead (*Greek: nekros*), and the ruler (*Greek: archon*) of the kings of the earth. This greeting is unusual. The usual greeting is “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 1:2). In the book Revelation, God’s heavenly dwelling is symbolised by a heavenly temple (7:15). The three divisions of the temple (the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place and the Court) symbolise the Triune God. God was enthroned above the ark in the Most Holy Place, the lampstand with seven lamps representing the Holy Spirit (Zachariah 4:3) stood in the Holy Place and the altar of burnt-offerings representing Christ’s sacrifice of atonement stood in the inner fore court (Exodus 40:21-30). The greeting is pictured as follows: God’s grace and peace (the greeting) is flowing from his heavenly holy temple via the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ to his Church and the believers.

God's name "I am who I am" or "I will be who I am" (Exodus 3:14) expresses that God is the eternal Unchangeable One and will always remain faithful to his covenant (i.e. his promises and threats). He is the Origin, the Creator, the continual Present and Active One and the time and again unexpected Coming One until his final second coming.

The Spirit has the "seven" (the perfect number) qualities of the human nature of Christ (Isaiah 11:2) and is "God with and in us" in the present time (John 1:16-17).

Jesus Christ was "God with us" at his first coming; the faithful witness of God and God's plan which continues throughout this book; the first in history to be raised from the dead and now has "all power over the dead" (1:18); the King of all kings on earth. He does not become King at his second coming, but is already King on earth since his first coming (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-11). Everyone should serve and honour him as such! Jesus Christ is described in terms of his humiliation and his exaltation (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). His *humiliation* was his birth, ministry and death on earth. His *exaltation* was his resurrection from the dead, his ascension to heaven and his enthronement in heaven above all the kings and their kingdoms on earth (Ephesians 1:20-23)!

To him who loves (*Greek: agapao*)(*present*) us and has freed (*Greek: luo*)(*aorist*) us from our sins by his blood. His work of salvation is perfect and now complete. His "blood" is a symbol and represents all his suffering on earth while he lived, including his death on the cross, thus satisfying God's holy and righteous anger against our sins. *As a Christian, you have been freed from the guilt (because he forgave all your sins), shame (because he restored your name) and slavery (because he plucked you from the grasp of Satan and this evil world).*

1:6 and has made (*Greek: poio*)(*aorist*) us to be a kingdom (*Greek: basileia*) and priests (*Greek: hierous*)(to serve) God and his Father. *The description which was formerly applied to God's Old Testament people (Israel) (Exodus 19:6) is now applicable to God's New Testament people!*³ What God *began* with his Old Testament people he *continued* on a higher plane and *extended* to include all Christians from all the nations in the world. *Israel was the beginning of the Church (Psalm 107:32) and the Church is the continuation and extension of Israel on a higher plane (Galatians 6:14-16).*

Believers among all Gentile nations are now heirs together with Israel, members together of one body and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Eph 3:2-6)! All God's promises made to Israel during the Old Testament period are also made to all Jews and Gentiles who have become Christians during the New Testament period (2 Cor 1:20)! Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ are "God's people" (1 Pet 2:9-10), "God's temple" (2 Cor 6:16), "God's priests" (Rev 1:6), "God's kingdom" (Rev 1:6).

"The kingdom" is God's sovereign rule through Christ that is recognised in the hearts of Christians and is operative in their lives. God's sovereign rule effects their salvation from beginning to end, their constitution as the one Church consisting of all Christians in the world, their influence in every society on earth and finally their complete and perfect salvation and the redemption of the whole universe in the new heaven and the new earth at Christ's second coming! *As a Christian, you are already now sharing the kingdom with Christ, just as you are already now sharing affliction with Christ (1:9).*

to him be glory (*Greek: doxa*) and power (*Greek: kratos*) for ever. Amen.

(2) Different views about the seven churches (congregations) (1:4)

A futurist view. The seven churches are the literal congregations of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea during the first century A.D.

A second futurist view. The seven churches represent seven consecutive periods of Church History that can be clearly identified in history between the first coming of Christ and the rapture of the Church⁴ (Larkin).

The correct explanation. The seven churches were historical congregations during the first century A.D., but their conditions and characteristics represent conditions and characteristics that may be found in all congregations in the world at different times throughout the New Testament period.

(3) Different views about the words 'the ruler of the kings of the world' and 'the kingdom' (1:5-6)

A futurist view. Christ will only become the ruler of the kings of the earth (1:5) when he takes the throne in the future millennial kingdom at his future second return (Larkin)⁵.

³ Names for God's people in the Old and the New Testaments. God's firstborn son (Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9; Hebrews 12:23); God's sons and daughters (Isaiah 43:6-7; 2 Corinthians 6:18); a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6; Revelation 1:6); a holy nation (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9); God's chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6; 1 Peter 2:9); Jews (Zachariah 8:22-23; Romans 2:28-29); Zion (Isaiah 51:16; 52:7; Hebrews 12:22-24); the twelve tribes (Revelation 21:12; James 1:1); Israel (1 Samuel 7:23; Galatians 6:14-16; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:18); Church (Psalm 107:32; Matthew 16:18); strangers in the Diaspora (wanderers) (Psalm 105:10-13; 1 Peter 1:1); Christians (anointed ones) (Hebrew: meshichi; Greek: christoi) (Psalm 105:15) (Acts 11:26) (Greek: christianous)!

⁴ Larkin, Revelation p.13

⁵ Larkin, Revelation p. 6

The correct explanation. Christ is already the ruler of the kings of the earth at his first coming. His enthronement is symbolised in Revelation chapter 5. He has made Christians a kingdom from his first coming (1:6; Matthew 12:28; Mark 1:15). And John cannot be ‘a companion in the kingdom’ if it does not exist on earth (1:9).

PART 3. Revelation 1:7. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

(1) Explanation of the symbols

1:7 Look, he is coming (*Greek: erchomai*)(*present*) with the clouds. This is an announcement of his second coming. But the dominant or main theme of the book of Revelation is NOT Christ's second coming. *The dominant and main theme of the book of Revelation is the revelation of God's history of his Church within the history of the world! Revelation chapter 1 to 11 reveals the Church indwelt by Christ and persecuted by the world from his first coming to his second coming. The Church is avenged, protected and victorious! Revelation chapter 12 to 22 reveals the deeper spiritual background of this struggle from his first coming to his second coming. It is a conflict between the Christ and the dragon and in this conflict Christ and his Church are victorious!*

Christ's second coming will be sudden and unexpected! There will only be *one second coming*. There will not be two second comings, no first invisible, secret “rapture” of the Church, because it will be very *visible* and very *audible* to all people on earth, including all Christians (Matthew 24:27-31)! *After the one and only second coming of Christ, there will be no second change to repent (2 Corinthians 6:2)!*

and every eye (*Greek: ophthalmos*) will see (*Greek: horao, opsomai, eidon, heoraka*)(*future*) him, even those who pierced (*Greek: ekkenteo*)(*aorist*) him. (Zachariah 12:10). This is a reference to the Gentiles (Romans) who pierced his side with a spear (John 19:34,37) and who nailed his hands and feet with spikes to the cross (Psalm 22:16; Isaiah 53:5; John 19:18,37; John 20:25,27). It is also a reference to the Jews who deliberately plotted to kill him and called for his crucifixion (Matthew 12:14; Matthew 27:20-26). Both Jews and non-Jews literally pierced him! All the people in the history of this world caused his death by their sins (1 Peter 2:24; 1 Peter 3:18). They pierced him by living a disobedient life (Hebrews 6:6; Hebrews 10:26-31). This is a fit symbol for the complete condemnation and rejection of Jesus Christ.

and all the tribes (*Greek: phule*) of the earth will mourn (*Greek: koptomai*)(*future*) over him. All nations and peoples will mourn (Matthew 24:30). Some will mourn in brokenness of heart due to their sins which brought Christ to the cross and death. Others will mourn in deep despair due to their foolish rejection of Christ, whom they now see coming to judge them (this is emphasised here).

Revelation 6:12-17 describes the one great catastrophe at the end of this present New Testament period of time. The whole universe will crash and the human race will be thoroughly frightened! There will be a great earthquake, the sun will turn black, the stars will fall out of the sky onto the earth, and mountains and islands will be removed from their places. The political and military leaders of every country, the rich and the influential people as well as all other unbelievers will try to hide from the presence of Jesus Christ and his anger against all the injustice and wickedness they have done on earth! They will see Jesus Christ “whom they have pierced” and they will mourn, because it will be too late to repent (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:9-11). *Examine yourself to see whether you are in the (Christian) faith, test yourself whether you are born-again, that Christ lives in you, that you will not be one of those who try to hide themselves at Christ's second coming, because you had refused to repent and had put it off to accept Christ!*

So shall it be! Amen. The Greek word “yes” affirms this message. The Hebrew word “amen” expresses an unshakeable trust and strong expectation that justice on a cosmic scale will finally be done (Romans 2:5-11). This is a great encouragement for Christians!

(2) Different views about the second coming (1:7)

A futurist view. There will be two second comings of Christ. The first return (coming or parousia) would take place at the removal of the Church from the earth (the rapture) and would be invisible and inaudible (secret). The second return (the revelation) would take place at the end of the seven year long tribulation period and before the establishment of the one thousand year long kingdom on earth. The second return would be visible and audible. Futurists believe that Revelation 1:7 speaks of the second return of Jesus. Every eye, not of everyone that ever lived, but only of those coming out of the great tribulation would see Jesus coming on the clouds. Then the Jews would mourn because they had crucified Jesus and the Gentile nations would mourn because Jesus had returned to judge them for their treatment of the Jews (Larkin)⁶.

The correct explanation. There will be only one second coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the history of this present world and it will be very visible and very audible. Because everyone will be resurrected at that time, everyone who ever lived will see him coming on the clouds (John 5:28-29; John 6:40). All non-believers (Jews and Gentiles) will mourn, because the time of grace and forgiveness had passed and the final judgement of their sins had arrived.

⁶ Larkin, Revelation p 6

PART 4. Revelation 1:8. CHRIST'S SELF-DESIGNATION.

(1) Explanation of the symbols

1:8 "I am *always (present continuous tense)* the Alpha and the Omega (*the beginning and the end*)", says (*Greek: lego*)(*present*) the Lord God, "who is (*present*), and who was (*imperfect*), and who is to come (*present*), the Almighty." In Revelation 1:4 God the Father is introduced as the One who is, and who was, and who is to come. This is the essential meaning of the name "LORD" in the Old Testament. He is the eternal Unchangeable One and will always remain faithful to his character, promises and threats (cf. 2 Timothy 2:11-13). As he shows himself to be in the past and present, so he will be in the future!

In Revelation 1:8 Jesus Christ makes the same claim! The One speaking here is Jesus Christ, because the immediate previous and following context speaks of Jesus Christ. In verse 7, John saw the Lord Jesus Christ coming and in verse 8 he hears him speaking. Revelation 1:13 says that the voice that was speaking belonged to one like a son of man. Verse 8 is therefore a self-description of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ makes this same claim again in Revelation 1:17, Revelation 21:6-8 and Revelation 22:12-13. In verse 8 Jesus Christ calls himself "the Lord God". By comparing verse 4 and verse 8, we can see that Jesus Christ claims that he and God the Father are One (cf. John 10:30), that he is fully equal to God the Father, and that he is the complete, perfect and eternal *visible* revelation of the *invisible* God to people (John 14:9; Romans 9:5; Colossians 1:15; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:3,8-9)!

Jesus Christ is *the Alpha*, the origin of everything (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16a). Jesus Christ is also *the Omega*, the final goal of everything (Colossians 1:16b-17). He is from "the very beginning" (Genesis 1:1; Jn 1:1) to the very end, that is, he is the Eternal God. He is the One who embraces all (Psalm 139:5; Acts 17:28), bears all (Hebrews 1:3) and determines all in the created universe (Isaiah 9:5-6; Isaiah 14:24,27). There is only one God, the God who revealed himself in the Bible (Isaiah 43:10-11) and especially in Jesus Christ (John 5:22-23,26).

In the Old Testament the LORD is called "the LORD God of hosts (the armies of angels)" (Amos 4:13). Here the words "who is and who was and who is to come" (4:8; 11:17) are added in between to explain the essential meaning of the name "LORD", namely, the eternal, unchangeable and faithful God. The Roman emperor called himself "autokrator" (self + power: he himself exercises all power), but Christ is the "pantokrator" (all + power: the One who has all power in heaven and on earth, forever)! "The Almighty" means that nothing can stop him. He breaks every opposition and all who oppose him have to bend. He rules and overrules.

In Isaiah 9:6, the Messiah (Jesus Christ) is called "Mighty God" and in Isaiah 10:20-22, the LORD is also called "the Mighty God" and "the Lord LORD Almighty"! Thus also the Old Testament teaches that Christ and God are fully equal in nature and in power (John 5:18).

The purpose of Christ's self-designation is to encourage Christians. He says to all Christians throughout the period from his first coming to his second coming (the whole New Testament period), "Take courage! Your enemies cannot destroy your Christ!"

1:9-20. JESUS CHRIST IS PRESENT AND ACTIVE AMIDST ALL THE CHURCHES IN THE WORLD

PART 5. Revelation 1:9-11. JOHN'S COMMISSION.

(1) Explanation of the symbols

1:9 I John, your brother (*Greek: adelphos*) and companion (*Greek: sugkoinonos*) in the suffering (*Greek: thlipsis*) and kingdom (*Greek: basileia*) and patient endurance (*Greek: hupomone*) (that are ours) in Jesus. John writes to other suffering Christians, as one who shares their sufferings (negative experience), as well as one who shares their position in the kingdom and their persistent expectation (patient endurance) of Christ's second coming (positive experience).

was (*Greek: ginomai*)(*aorist*)(*a substitute for eimi*) on the island called (*Greek: kaleo*)(*present*) Patmos. The verb indicates that he began recording the book of Revelation while on the island Patmos, fourteen hours sailing from Ephesus. He was exiled to Patmos probably after having refused to burn incense on the altar of a pagan priest as a token of worshipping the Roman emperor.

because of the word (*Greek: logos*) of God and the testimony (*Greek: maturia*) of Jesus. "The word of God" means the truth of the Bible. And "the testimony of Jesus" in the first place means what Jesus Christ testified about God, himself and all the truth. John believed in the truth of the Bible and in the truth of the testimony of Jesus Christ! John was exiled to Patmos because he also witnessed (preached and taught) this truth.

1:10 On the Lord's (*Greek: kuriaos*) day (*Greek: hemera*). It refers to the first day of the week⁷ on which the Lord Jesus Christ was resurrected and Christians celebrate the completion of his work of salvation for everyone who believes in him (Acts 20:7).

⁷ The 1st day of the week is called 'the Lord's day' in Didache 14.2 and Ignatius ad Magn. 9.1 about 20 years later.

I was (*Greek: ginomai*)(*ao*rist) in the Spirit i. This condition is also called falling into a trance (ecstasy) or seeing in a trance (Acts 10:10; Acts 11:5). It is a state brought about by God in which consciousness is wholly or partially suspended. It is seeing and hearing what is happening in the spiritual world without the physical organs of eye and ear (Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 1:4; Daniel 8:2,15-18). Through the Holy Spirit his human spirit was in direct, spiritual contact with Jesus Christ and open to direct communication from Christ. While Daniel was in a deep sleep, John was wide awake and well aware of what he saw and heard. The changing visions (groups of symbols and numbers) were not something he made up with his own imagination (human mind, feelings, intuition) but were given to him by divine inspiration (by the Spirit). The interpretation of the symbols was often given to him (1:19-20).

and I heard (*Greek: akouo*)(*ao*rist) behind (*Greek: hopiso*) me a loud sound (voice)(*Greek: phone*) like a trumpet (*Greek: salpiggos*). Whenever God wanted to speak to his people in the Old Testament he gathered them by means of a trumpet sound (Exodus 19:16,19).

1:11 which said (*present*), "Write (*Greek: grapho*)(*imperative, aorist*) on a scroll (*Greek: biblion*) what you see (*Greek: blepo*)(*present*) and send (*Greek: pempo*)(*imperative, aorist*) it to the seven (*Greek: hepta*) churches (congregations)(*Greek: ekklesia*): to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea". The seven congregations lay more or less in a circle in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). John probably travelled along that circle later to deliver the letters.

(2) Different views about the Lord's day (1:10)

A futurist view. The Lord's day is 'the Day of the Lord', the final 'day' in this present age, which will last a very long period of time (cf. 2 Peter 3:8) and include the future tribulation period, the future second return of Christ, the future millennial kingdom and the events that lead up to the new heaven and new earth (Larkin)⁸.

The correct explanation. The Lord's day is the first day of the week (the Sunday), the day on which Christians come together to celebrate the resurrection of their Lord Jesus Christ and the completion of his work of salvation for everyone who believes in him.

PART 6. Revelation 1:12-16. THE VISION OF THE SON OF MAN.

(1) Explanation of the symbols

1:12 I turned (*Greek: epistrepho*)(*ao*rist) around to see (*present*) the voice that was speaking (*Greek: laleo*)(*imperfect*) to me. And when I turned ((*Greek: epistrepho*)(*ao*rist), I saw (*ao*rist) seven golden (*Greek: chrusos*) lampstands (*Greek: luchnia*). "A lampstand" was a kind of lamp containing oil with a wick protruding from a hole in the lamp that was placed on or hung from a stand. It was not a candlestick. "The one seven-armed lampstand of the Old Testament temple" represented God's Old Testament people forming *an organisational unity*. But "the seven single lampstands in the New Testament standing in a circle around Christ" represent God's New Testament people – independent congregations connected to one another only through Jesus Christ and thus forming *an organic unity*. The "golden colour" symbolises the glory and high status God has accorded to the congregations.

The number "seven" in the Bible and especially in the Book of Revelation is a symbol of *divine perfection and completeness* (1:4) in his acts towards people in the world and in history. Here it is a symbol of all the congregations in the world and in history. Therefore, the seven letters in Revelation chapter 2 and 3 are letters of Jesus Christ addressed to all the churches in the world and in history. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7). The word "churches" is plural and means that these letters are not limited to seven churches and also not limited to *these* seven churches.

1:13 and among the lampstands (was someone) 'like (*Greek: homoios*) a (rather: the) son of man' (*Greek: uion anthropou*). "Son of Man" is an Old Testament type of Jesus Christ (Daniel 7:13) and is how Christ calls himself. The proper name does not need the definite article in Greek. He resembled Jesus Christ whom John had known on earth, but now had a heavenly-glorious appearance! *He stood in the midst of the lampstands, symbolising his presence and activity in all the congregations in the world!*

dressed (*Greek: enduo*)(*perfect*) in a robe (reaching down to his feet)(*Greek: poderes*) and a golden sash (belt, girdle)(*Greek: zone*) tied around (*Greek: perizonnumi*)(*perfect*) his chest(*Greek: mastos*). His appearance inspired awe and terror and it hurt the eyes to look at him. His robe was that of a king (Ezekiel 26:16) or a high-priest (Exodus 28:39-41), probably of the high-priest-king (Zachariah 6:13; Psalm 110:1,4). The sash was not bound high around his waist as a sign of service (cf. Luke 22:27), but around his chest as a sign of authority to judge (cf. John 5:22) like the 7 angels with the bowls of God's wrath (cf. 15:6).

1:14 His head and hair (*Greek: trix, trichos*) (were) white (*Greek: leukos*) like wool (*Greek: erion*), as white as snow (*Greek: chion*). This is a reference to his hair and beard. In Daniel 7:13 it characterises God, the Ancient of Days. But in Revelation it characterises *Christ appearing as the eternal God*. "White" symbolises heaven (Matthew 28:3), purity (7:13f) and victory (19:11f). Jesus Christ is the Rider on the white horse who throughout the period

In the New Testament the word 'kuriakon' always means 'belonging to the Lord'.

⁸ Larkin, Revelation p 8-9

between his first coming and his second coming is riding out as a conqueror bent on conquest” (6:2) and who at his second coming is going to strike down the nations with the sharp sword coming out of his mouth and to rule (meaning: to punish)(cf. 2:27) them with an iron sceptre (19:15).

and his eyes (*Greek: ophthalmos*) (were) like a flame (*Greek: phlox*) of fire (*Greek: pur*). He reads every heart and penetrates every hidden thing. He is omniscient. His eyes are a warning: “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13). And his eyes are a great encouragement: “The eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him” (2 Chronicles 16:9). That is why a true Christian says, “I have set the LORD always before me. Because he (with his eyes on me) is at my right hand. I will not be shaken” (Psalm 16:8).

1:15 His feet (*Greek: pous, podos*) (were) like bronze (*Greek: chalkolibanon*) glowing (burning)(*Greek: puroo*)(*perfect*) in a furnace (*Greek: kaminos*). He consumes all impurity and everything that is unholy. He destroys (trample under foot) everyone and everything that opposes him. Like God, he is “a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29)!

and his voice (was) like the sound of many waters. His loud voice reverberates like the sound of the crashing waves against the rocks of Patmos (Ezekiel 43:2). He speaks with heavenly power and authority and not like merely human religious teachers (Matthew 7:28-29).

1:16 and having (*Greek: echo*)(*present*) in his right (*Greek: dexios*) hand (*Greek: cheir*) seven stars (*Greek: aster*). “The right hand” is the hand of power and honour. “The seven stars” symbolise the seven angels or messengers (e.g. ministers that serve)(Hebrews 1:14) of the seven congregations. Christ accords them great value and completely controls them. They are completely dependent on Christ. Outside Christ’s hand they would not be able to do anything that lasts. Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The fact that Christ holds the ministers (leaders) of the churches together in one hand symbolises that the leaders are connected to one another in Christ’s hand and *not in any earthly organisation (with its human policies and rules) or over-arching ecclesiastical body (like a synod or council)*! Every congregation in the Bible is independent and should eventually have a council of elders that are chosen on the basis of biblical requirements and biblical tasks. However, the members and the leaders of every congregation function in dependence first on Christ and then on one another as the members of one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

“True biblical leaders” do not speak their own thoughts, feelings or intuition, but the word of God and set an example of faith that is imitated by the followers (Hebrews 13:7). Only such leaders may hold on to God’s promise with confidence that “no one can snatch them out of Christ’s hand” (John 10:28)! And that “no one can turn Christ’s hand back (Isaiah 14:27)!

and out of his mouth (*Greek: stoma*) came (*Greek: ekporeuo*)(*perfect*) a sharp (*Greek: oxus*) double-edged (*Greek: distomos*) sword (*Greek: romphaia*). “A sharpened sword” symbolise spoken words that have great effect on people (Isaiah 49:2). “The long (heavy and great) sword” here is *the sword of war and judgement*. With it David cut off Goliath’s head. With it Christ makes war with his enemies (those who do not repent of their false teachings). “The double-edged sword” especially symbolises Christ’s words of judgement of the sins of the Church (2:16), of the nations that oppose him (19:15) and of his enemies in the final war (battle) (19:21; Isaiah 11:4). Its sharp double-edges symbolise that it always hits the mark, always cuts to both sides, in this or that way, but never misses to accomplish its purpose (Isaiah 55:11). No one can ward it off.

Another kind of sword is mentioned in Revelation 6:4, “the short sword (knife, dagger)”, which is used to slaughter. That is *the sword of persecution*.

His face (appearance)(*Greek: opsis*) (was) like the sun (*Greek: helios*) shining (*phaino*)(*present*) in all its brilliance (*Greek: dunamis*). In the Old Testament God is called “a Sun” (Psalm 84:11) and Christ the Sun of righteousness” (Malachi 4:2). Christ is “the Light of the world” (John 8:12) and “the lamp in the New Jerusalem” (21:23). He is always transparent. He never pretends.

The message of this vision in chapter 1 is that the Almighty Jesus Christ is present and active among all the congregations on earth and in the history of the world! Jesus Christ is the High Priest King and Judge, the Holy One, who comes to purge his congregations on earth and to punish all those who are persecuting his people. Jesus Christ comes to fight against false teachers and preachers in the Church (2:16) and against the wicked and persecuting political and religious powers in the world (19:15; cf. 8:5f)

(2) Different views about the Son of Man (1:13).

A futurist view. The Son of Man is Jesus Christ as Judge at the beginning of the tribulation period.

The correct explanation. The Son of Man is Jesus Christ as the Prophet, the High priest, the King and the Judge throughout the whole New Testament period. He is present to purge the congregations and to punish all those who are persecuting his people on earth. He has come to fight against false teachers and preachers in the Church (2:16) and against the wicked and persecuting political and religious powers in the world (19:15; cf. 8:5f).

(1) Explanation of the symbols

1:17 When I saw ((Greek: horao)(aorist) him, I fell (Greek: pipto)(aorist) at his feet as though dead (Greek: vekros). And (then) he placed (Greek: tithemi)(aorist) his right hand on me. The vision had an enormous effect on the apostle John. In his visionary condition he felt as if he fell dead at Christ's feet (cf. Daniel 10:8). This was due to Christ's holiness and heavenly majesty, which no man can see and live (Exodus 33:20) and from which angels hide their faces (Isaiah 6:2). But Christ placed his right hand on John as a sign of acceptance and favour and poured life and power into John. The real purpose of this vision was not to terrify, but to comfort and encourage John!

and said (present): (literally:) *Stop being afraid* (Greek: phobeomai)(imperative, present), I am *always* (Greek: eimi)(present) the First (Greek: protos) and the Last (Greek: eschatos). What is said of the LORD in the Old Testament (Isaiah 44:6) is said of Christ in the New Testament (1:8). It expresses the absolute Godhead. Although Christians may now be banned, exiled or imprisoned, in the end Christians will triumph together with Christ (17:14; Philippians 2:9-11).

Christ has no beginning and no end. He is the Eternal God. Everything that exists outside him has been created by him, belongs to him and is determined by him. The whole created existence and the whole course of world-history will either find their goal and final destination in Christ or face the final condemnation by Christ. Nothing has a purpose or even a final goal or destiny in itself (Col 1:15-20). Everyone and everything will stand or fall because of their relationship to Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:43-44; Luke 2:34)! No one can remain neutral in his relationship to Jesus Christ!

1:18 and the ever Living One (Greek: zao)(present); I (literally) became (Greek: ginomai)(aorist) dead, and behold, I am (literally) the Living One (Greek: zao)(present) for ever and ever! Christ in his divine nature never died. Christ's essential nature is life just as that of God the Father (John 5:26; John 14:6). The text literally says that Jesus Christ is for ever and ever "the Living One"! Christ is also the Source of eternal life for everyone who believes in him (John 1:4; John 3:16; John 10:28; John 11:25-26).

But Christ in his human nature died. The text literally says, "Christ became dead" – Christ, the God-Man, the Living One, succumbed to physical death, but not in his divine nature, only in his human nature! He died in his human nature in order to atone for the sins of people who believe in him (1:5; 5:9; 7:14). From a purely human point of view, Jesus Christ was indeed put to death by his enemies when he was on earth (Mark 8:31; Acts 2:23; Acts 3:13,15). But from the divine point of view, Jesus Christ freely gave his human life as a ransom, as an atonement sacrifice for sins (Mark 10:45; John 10:17-18; Romans 3:25; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 Peter 3:18).

Christ in his human nature did not remain dead, but his human nature was resurrected from the dead and he lives forever also in his human nature. The fact that Jesus Christ had been resurrected from the dead is a wonderful comfort for all Christians who are persecuted unto death or who face death at the end of their lives.

and I continually hold (have)(Greek: echo) (present) the keys (Greek: kleis) of death (Greek: thanatos) and Hades. Christ himself was dead and in Hades (Acts 2:27,31). The term "Hades" here cannot mean the hell or the grave. It means "the state of death", that is, the state of the soul or spirit being separated from the body. Hence Hades always follows Death (6:8) and will together with Death be thrown into the lake of fire at the second coming of Christ (20:13-14).

Ephesians 4:9 ("he descended to the lower, earthly regions") and 1 Peter 3:19 ("he went and preached to the spirits in prison") do not refer to Christ descending into hell to preach the gospel in hell in order to give people in hell a second chance to choose eternal life. Like Isaiah 52:13-15 they speak about the state of humiliation (suffering and death) of Jesus Christ on earth and the state of exaltation (resurrection, ascension and enthronement) of Jesus Christ! People who do not believe, stand condemned already, because they did not believe in Jesus Christ (John 3:18). And people who procrastinate (put repentance and conversion off to a later date) are exhorted: "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). "Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2)! No one will ever receive a second chance after his death to be saved!

"Keys" symbolise sovereign authority and power to close and to open a particular domain and to exercise absolute authority over that domain (3:7; Matthew 16:19). Christ has full power over all the dead and over the state of death. And Christ has been authorised to raise all the dead (John 5:21).

This is a great encouragement for Christians, because their death will not be the final event in their lives! The message to a persecuted congregation is that Death and Hades could not hold Jesus Christ captive and cannot and will not hold Christians captive! When a Christian dies, his body will decay in the grave, but Christ will immediately welcome his spirit (soul) in heaven where he is (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23)!

At the resurrection from the dead at Christ's second coming, all the dead (their dead bodies) will rise from death at his command (20:11-15; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). The resurrected or transformed body of Christians will be incomparably more glorious than their present lowly bodies – they will be Christ like, imperishable, glorious, powerful and 100% Spirit controlled (Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Corinthians 15:42-57). Their resurrected bodies will be united with

their spirits (souls) that accompany Christ at his second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:14-16)! Thus, for the Christian, “dying” means a deliverance from this wicked world and a deliverance from the weaknesses and suffering of his present body. Dying and the state of being dead hold no more terror for those who believe in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:14-15)!

1:19 Write (*Greek: grapho*)(imperative, aorist), therefore, what you have seen (*Greek: horao*)(aorist), (literally:) both (*Greek: kai*) that is (*Greek: eisin*)(present), as well as (*Greek: kai*) the things that are about (*Greek: mello*)(present) to happen (*Greek: ginomai*)(aorist) after these things. The connective word here is not an addition (“and”), but explicative (“that is” (both ... and...)). Jesus Christ commanded John to write on a scroll what was shown to him in revelation and to send it to the seven congregations. The two Greek words ‘kai ... kai’ ... mean ‘both ... as well as ...’. The scroll therefore contains:

- both the things that are (already happening in the present). What John had already seen was the vision of Christ present and active in the midst of the seven congregations (1:12-18).
- as well as the things that are about to happen (in the near future).

These words only make sense when they effect the congregations during the first century A.D.! What John is about to hear is the present condition of each of the seven congregations (2:1 to 3:22). What John is about to see is visions about events at the time of these seven historical congregations and would happen again and again to other congregations throughout the whole New Testament period from Christ’s first coming to his second coming (4:1 ff.).

As we read the book of Revelation we will see that these things are “God’s decrees (decisions)” that operate in history and have definite effects, not only on the world, but also on the Church from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming. Revelation 1:3 makes very clear that these things are about to happen, “soon” after they were revealed to John on Patmos.

Therefore, the book of Revelation does NOT teach “Premillennial Eschatology”, a “mainly Future Eschatology”. It does not mainly refer to future events that are limited to the time just before and after the so-called future second return of Christ. It does not refer to events that all lie in our future. Premillennial eschatology is the view of futurists or dispensationalists⁹. This view follows a chronological division of the book of Revelation.

The book of Revelation rather teaches “Realized Eschatology”, a “Present Eschatology”. It refers to the important events throughout the period from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ. It refers to events that have happened since the first coming of Christ, to events that are happening right now in the present time and to events that will happen again and again until the second coming of Christ! This view follows a reduplicating or parallel division of the book of Revelation. Due to the many repetitions of main events throughout the book, it is the only tenable view of the book of Revelation¹⁰.

The word “eschatology” means “the doctrine about the end-time events”. “The end time” (or “the last days”) began at the first coming of Christ: his incarnation (1 Peter 1:20), his speaking in the New Testament (Hebrews 1:3), his sacrifice of atonement (Hebrews 9:26), the outpouring of his Spirit (Acts 2:17). And “the end time” ends (will be fulfilled) at the second coming of Christ: the resurrection of the dead (John 6:39-40) and the final judgement (John 12:48). Christians today are therefore living “in the end-time”! The last two chapters of the book of Revelation even refer to the new heaven and new earth after the second coming of Christ.

The book of Revelation is therefore since the first century a book of encouragement to Christians of all ages in New Testament history and in all places on earth. The message is that in the struggle between Christ and the dragon, Jesus Christ and his Church will be victorious! No matter what happens on earth, Jesus Christ is the Ruler of the kings of the earth (1:5).

1:20 The mystery (*Greek: musterion*) of the seven stars that you saw (*Greek: horao*)(aorist) in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands (*Greek: luchnia*) (is this): The word “mystery” (*Greek: musterion*) means “what was hidden before, has now been revealed” (cf. Ephesians 3:6). Christ explains what the symbols in the book of Revelation represent. This fact therefore shows that John could not have understood these symbols by simply looking at the Old Testament. *These symbols in the Old Testament and the New Testament were a hidden secret and allusive as long as they had not been explained by Jesus Christ! The New Testament revelation is therefore absolutely necessary to understand the Old Testament revelation (2 Corinthians 3:14-16)!*

⁹ The chronological division of the book of Revelation is taught by futurists or dispensationalists: John Darby (1800-1882), C.I. Scofield in the Scofield Reference Bible (1909), Clarence Larkin in “The Greatest Book on Dispensational Truth in the World” (1918) and the professors of Dallas Theological Seminary: Lewis Sperry Chafer, John F. Walvoord, C. Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost and writers like Hal Lindsey. They make Revelation 1:19 the key to divide the book of Revelation into three chronological periods of time that follow one another: 1:10-20; 2:1 to 3:22; and 4:1 to 22:5.

¹⁰ The Bible teaches the reduplicating or parallel division of the book of Revelation as can be clearly seen by the repetition of important themes:

- “the tribulation” (3:10; 6:9-11; 11:7-10; 13:7-10,14-18; 17:10-11),
 - “the final battle” (16:12-16; 19:11-21; 20:7-10);
 - “the fall of Babylon” (14:8; 16:19; 17:5,15-18; 18:2,10),
 - “the final judgement” (6:12-17; 11:11-19; 14:14-20; 16:17-21; chapter 18; 20:11-15); and
 - “the final state after Christ’s second coming” (2:7,11,17,26-28; 3:5,12,21; 7:9-17; 14:1-5; 15:2-4; 19:1-10; chapter 21-22).
- These facts refute the chronological division of the book and point to a reduplicating or parallel division of the book!

The seven stars are (*Greek: eisin*)(*present*) angels (*Greek: angelos*) of the seven churches (congregations). Angels are ministering spirits sent to serve Christians (Hebrews 1:14). The ministering leaders of the congregations are *symbolically called* “angels”, because in the Bible all ministering leaders must be servants and not rulers (Matthew 20:25-28; Luke 22:26; 1 Peter 5:2-3)! Thus the stars probably refer to the representatives or ministering leaders of the congregations: the elders who are the overseers and shepherds of the congregations. The council of elders are appointed by God’s Spirit and are held responsible and accountable to Christ for the things happening in the congregation (Acts 20:28; cf. Hebrews 13:17; Ezekiel 3:17-19). They are in Christ’s hand and therefore completely dependent on him for their ministries and the results of their ministries. The fact that they are represented by “stars” points to their high calling to radiate heavenly light and give heavenly guidance to Christians on earth (1 Timothy 5:17; cf. Matthew 5:16).

The seven stars that are in the right hand of Jesus Christ cannot refer to seven messengers sent by the seven congregations to meet John, because John had to write a letter to each of them! They are also not THE seven angels of THE seven historical congregations, because Christ simply says that they are “angels of seven churches (congregations)”. Thus, the reference is not only to those seven historical leaders of the congregations, but also to all ministering leaders of the congregations in the world and throughout history.

This is a wonderful assurance for all ministering leaders of Christian congregations in the world: Jesus Christ is holding them in his hand! Jesus Christ exercises absolute authority over them and they are only his ambassadors. He protects them and they are save only when they proclaim and teach the Bible, obey Jesus Christ and are faithful in his service (Hebrews 13:7)!

and the seven lampstands (*Greek: luchnia*) are (*Greek: eisin*)(*present*) seven churches (congregations). Throughout the Bible the number “seven” is “the number of divine perfection and completion”. “The seven lampstands” with Christ in their midst (1:12) symbolise seven congregations (1:20), who in turn symbolise all congregations in the world and in history (2:7).

Christian congregations have a divine origin, have Christ as Head and are destined to share in God’s perfection. The “golden colour” symbolises the glory and high status which God has accorded to each congregation.

Christians are “the light (*Greek: fōs*) of the world” (Matthew 5:16) and Christian congregations (churches) are “lampstands” (*Greek: luchnia*) (lightbearers), the institutions that bear the lights in this dark world. Jesus says that Christians must put the lamp (*Greek: luchnon*) on a lampstand so that it can give light (*Greek: lampō*) to everyone in the house (Mt 5:14-16). *Christians should not simply function as individuals without a congregation (as lamps without a lampstand)*, but as “members of the one Body of Christ” (the worldwide Church).

Because “the seven spirits” (the fullness of the Holy Spirit) is represented by seven “lamps or burning torches” (*Greek: lampas*) that blaze light throughout the universe (4:5), Christians supported by Christian congregations are called to spread God’s light (cf. Jn 1:4-5), that is, to preach God’s divine attributes and God’s truth (1 Pet 2:9-10; Isa 43:21).

(2) Different views about the things that are and the things that are about to happen (1:19).

The futurist view. Revelation 1:19 suggest a division of the book of Revelation into three chronological sections (Larkin)¹¹

- the things that happened in the past (1:10-20)
- and the things that happen in the present (2:1 to 3:22)
- and the things that will happen in the future (4:1 to 22:5).

The futurist view regards the greatest part of the book of Revelation to be predictions about future history, that is, the future of people living today.

The correct explanation. Revelation 1:19 speaks of the things Christ had just revealed to John and which includes two categories:

- both the things that are already a present reality (like Christ amidst the congregations and the condition of the seven historical congregations)(chapters 1 to 3)
- as well as the things that are about to happen ‘soon’ (like the proclamation of the gospel, the slaughtering and oppressing of Christians, the onslaught of demons on the world, the destruction of wars in the world, the warning judgements of God and eventually the great tribulation and the final judgement) (chapters 4 to 19).

¹¹ Larkin, Revelation pp. 13-16