

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Over the next few weeks we are going to look at some key chapters in the book of Revelation, that is the Revelation of Jesus Christ that is found at the end of our bibles. Now 6 years ago I preached through every chapter of this book over a year and because so many of you have really good memories and so many of you know the Word well I thought we would just take a minute and try to fill out this KEY to the understanding the book of Revelation before we start. So on your own have a go at filling in the spaces in your newsletter.

KEYS TO INTERPRETING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

1. Chapter 1 is a revelation of Jesus Christ
2. Chapters 2 & 3 are the 7 letters to the 7 church's in Turkey. These Churches are real church's historically and also represent all of church *history*. The word angel simply means messenger.
3. Chapters 4 & 5 The Church is seen in heaven for 7 years represented by 12 elders (OT forefathers) and 12 elders (NT apostles).
4. Chapters 6-19 meanwhile back on earth 7 years of Tribulation. The purpose of which is to;
 - A) Shake up the unbeliever and many will come to saving faith.
 - B) Wake up the nation of Israel.
 - C) Make up the full number of believers in the kingdom.
5. Chapter 20 Millennium and judgement (begins end of chapter 19)
6. Chapters 21 & 22 There will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Hebrew numerology:

7 is the number for Completion and Perfection

6 is the number for In-completion and Imperfection

12 is the number for the family of faith or government

The unholy Trinity are the:

False Prophet

The Beast and

The Antichrist

The Book of Revelation cannot be understood apart from the Old Testament. There are 800 allusions/ images in this book to the OT. So much in Revelation is a direct opposite of what takes place in the book of Genesis.

Proposition: When we look at Jesus in Rev 1 we understand how the Lord is with his churches now. His very appearance describes his works and His character.

As we open the Word and look at the last book in this 66 book library consider for a moment, the disciple that Jesus loved, the apostle John. At this point in world history he is around 100 years of age. His bones ache and he's not so stable on his legs any more. He is the apostle that is overseeing 7 churches in Turkey at a time when Christians are losing their jobs because they are Christian, woman are getting taken away and raped because they are Christian, families are being torn apart by the Roman authorities and quite literally by lions. And old John, the apostle of love is the big kahuna in charge.

Titus Flavius Domitian had a particular hate for Christians and a particular hate for John. Eusebus the church historian says that Domitian sent his soldiers to get John, and that Domitian had him boiled alive in a cauldron of oil to try and kill the old guy. Eusebus says that amazingly John wouldn't die and so Domitian had him sent to a virtually barren, treeless, foodless island about 50 miles out to sea to starve to death.

While he was on this Island , this Island of Patmos, on a Sunday that is 'The Lord's day' the Holy Spirit takes control of John and in the book of Revelation we see recorded what he heard and saw about the things that have been, the things that are and the things that are to come (vs19). All of the previous 65 books find their full fulfilment in the book of Revelation. Here the big cosmic picture comes together and Pastor John communicates what he sees and hears in such a way that the early, severely persecuted church can see and realize that Jesus is with them, he is standing amongst the candle sticks and even his appearance describes his grace, his power and all sufficiency.

The book of Revelation is primarily a revelation about Jesus and we are told that those who read it will be blessed; why? Because I believe though this final chapter, this final book we get to receive a fresh revelation of who Jesus is and how close He is really. It's a comforting book. It's an encouraging book.

Would you please stand with me as we look at a Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1:8-20

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

8The Lord God says, "I am Alpha and Omega, the one who is and was and is coming. I am God All-Powerful!"

A Vision of the Risen Lord

9I am John, a follower together with all of you. We suffer because Jesus is our king, but he gives us the strength to endure. I was sent to Patmos Island, because I had preached God's message and had told about Jesus. 10On the Lord's day the Spirit took control of me, and behind me I heard a loud voice that sounded like a trumpet. 11The voice said, "Write in a book what you see. Then send it to the seven churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea." 12When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lamp stands. 13There with the lamp stands was someone who seemed to be the Son of Man. He was wearing a robe that reached down to his feet, and a gold cloth was wrapped around his

chest. 14His head and his hair were white as wool or snow, and his eyes looked like flames of fire. 15His feet were glowing like bronze being heated in a furnace, and his voice sounded like the roar of a waterfall. 16He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword was coming from his mouth. His face was shining as bright as the sun at noon. 17When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead person. But he put his right hand on me and said:

Don't be afraid! I am the first, the last, 18and the living one. I died, but now I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys to death and the world of the dead. 19Write what you have seen and what is and what will happen after these things. 20I will explain the mystery of the seven stars that you saw at my right side and the seven gold lamp stands. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the lamp stands are the seven churches.

First and foremost I want to help you see and hear what John would have seen and heard and what it would have meant to those first Christians who knew the OT so very well.

Before I do that I want you to quickly notice the process of receiving revelation for John.

He hears a voice (just like you and I feel a tug at our hearts towards the Lord through a friend or an experience etc)

He turns to see who it is (there is a seeking a questioning)

When he sees Jesus he falls at his feet

Then as he is bowed before Jesus, Jesus says don't be afraid I have a job for you to do, write this down.

There is a hearing, a tugging at our hearts, a seeking in us to enquire, then there is a revelation of who Jesus is and a falling at His feet in worship, following that comes a commissioning for ministry.

It just seems to me to be a very normal sequence of events preceding God giving us our commissioning.

Every cult will tell you that Jesus isn't the Jesus of the bible.

The JW's will say Jesus is a created being and equal with Michael the Archangel, Christian scientists will say that Jesus is just a good example and a great teacher, Mormans will say that Jesus is satan's brother and again a created being.

In our passage vs 8 Jesus says that he is the first and the last. Vs 18 that he is the first and the last and he died and is alive again, and in Rev 2: 8 that he is the first and the last. I died but now I am alive." The bible is filled with references to the God who is the Alpha and the Omega and the beginning and end of the Revelation of John tells us that this is Jesus, always co-existing with the rest of the Godhead.

Remember as we look at what John saw, this revelation of Jesus is to help us understand the past, the present persecutions and the future victory of the church.

Every image we are going to look at was first used in the OT and makes no sense unless interpreted by the time it was first used in the OT.

12When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands.

What image would have come to the mind of these first hearers of the Revelation when they hear of 7 golden lampstands?

Exodus 25:31-32

31Make a lampstand of pure gold. The whole lampstand, including its decorative flowers, must

be made from a single piece of hammered gold with three branches on each of its two sides.

What did they call this lampstand which was a symbol of the vines being attached to the true branch the Lord? Minora



This minora with 7 gold lampstands was a picture of God and his people being joined. It's a symbol of the community of faith. God the centre lamp is joined to the other six lamps in the same way that the vine and the branches are linked in the NT.

Jesus the Alpha and the Omega is walking amongst His people, His church. He is there in the lampstands.

Why 7 lamp stands? 7 is the number of completion.

As we shall see in Revelation 2 & 3 each specific candle stick speaks of a specific church and a specific period in church history.

Its the complete body of faith.

13 There with the lampstands was someone who seemed to be the Son of Man

Jesus' favourite title He used of Himself was the Son of Man. It was His way of saying, "Hey you can relate to me. I understand what it is to be human." Daniel 7:13 & 14 use this title to describe Jesus coming at the second coming.

He was wearing a robe that reached down to his feet, and a gold cloth was wrapped around his chest

What imagery would spring to mind if you, being soaked in the OT were to picture someone with a robe completely covering his body and a golden sash around his chest?

A Priest has a robe that goes right down to his feet, just as Jesus has a robe of righteousness that covers his whole body completely. Who is the body of Christ? Us. We have been completely covered with his righteousness. Jesus is our high priest always interceding for us in heaven the book of Hebrews tells us.

14 His head and his hair were white as wool or snow,

Where have you heard this phrase as white as wool or snow before?

Isaiah 1:18

18I, the LORD, invite you to come and talk it over. Your sins are scarlet red, but they will be whiter than snow or wool.

What is this telling us about the way Jesus looks at us? His hair and his face reflect the fact that He sees you as forgiven, washed clean. What is in His mind? What is in His head? How does he perceive you and I? He looks upon us with forgiveness and mercy. His appearance declares that He knows who we are and where we have been and you and I are cleansed and forgiven, whiter than snow. If you are a Christian and you are walking by grace, keeping a short account with Him, then when He looks at you His very appearance; His hair and His face declare you are perfect from His

perspective. That is where His head is at.

14b and his eyes looked like flames of fire

Often people try to draw an image of what Jesus might look like with flames of fire and it's like a horror movie image. Jesus' eyes are not like that. Fire in the wrong place is dangerous and scary but fire in the right place, in a fireplace on a cold winter's evening is incredibly warm, calming and inviting. That's what I think these eyes of fire would look like. Jesus' eyes are different to normal eyes. Do remember when he met Simon whose name means shifting sand, Simon who always opened his mouth and spoke then thought later. When Jesus meets Simon He looks at him with His prophetic eyes and He sees what Simon, shifting sand can become and He says Simon I am going to call you Cephas/ Peter which means rock. Simon was a talk first think later kind of guy but Jesus looked at him and saw what He could become.

Several times in the bible a time is described where we individually will stand before the judgement seat of Christ and He will look at us with those eyes. The things we did for self or for wrong motives; the wood, the hay and the stubble will just disappear. The things we did for the Lord or the Lord did through us will be like gold and silver and precious stones. Meaning when He looks at us, the dross, the wood, hay and stubble will instantly disappear and He will just see the gold, silver and precious jewels in us and go wow. Awesome _____. Good for you son/ good for you daughter. Well done my good and faithful servant.

15His feet were glowing like bronze being heated in a furnace

Now put yourself in the sandals of these original hearers of this revelation. You are getting a letter from your pastor who like you is being persecuted terribly because of the gospel. Suddenly Pastor John sees Jesus and his feet are glowing like bronze being heated in a furnace. What OT story is going to spring to mind immediately?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These three guys who would not bow down to the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar were thrown into a furnace and when the king looked into the furnace he saw 4 not three in the flames moving about comfortably and the fourth one looked like the Son of Man – which is the title for Jesus.

Wow, the feet of Jesus aren't stamping on you in fact they have been through the furnace with you, they have been tested in every way just as you have but He did not sin. The Lord with His church is very familiar with suffering. He's been in the fire too.

and his voice sounded like the roar of a waterfall

Twenty years ago during a fast I heard the audible voice of God just say the one word to me 'disciple' and it did sound like a waterfall or a sound parting the clouds; Loud, clear and penetrating. I think though in our Christian experience we don't hear the Lord's voice loudly. Just as a waterfall is made up of many streams and tributaries I think the voice of the Lord might be something from our bibles we read this morning, something our spouse said as we left for work, something we saw or experienced in the world, an impression or an idea that popped into our heads and yet when you put all these tributaries together at the end of the day you have to say; there is no doubt – I have heard from God.

16. His face was shining as bright as the sun at noon and moon.

What OT blessing comes to mind when you think of the Lords face shining like the sun towards you? Numbers 6 The Lord bless you and Keep you, the Lord turn His face of favour towards you,

the Lord be gracious to you and give you peace.

17When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead person. But he put his right hand on me and said:

Don't be afraid! I am the first, the last, and the living one. I died, but now I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys to death and the world of the dead. 19Write what you have seen and what is and what will happen after these things. **20**I will explain the mystery of the seven stars that you saw at my right side and the seven gold lampstands. **The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the lampstands are the seven churches.**

Just two words to clarify; when we see Jesus with the **keys to death and the world of the dead** it is not a picture of our Lord running around locking people up. When this language is used in other places in the bible the keys are the truths, the power, the authority to set the captive free and to rescue them from hell and damnation. Those are the keys he holds. If some one is in addiction, stuck in sin, in a dark place The One best able to help them, The One with the keys to liberty and freedom is ... Jesus.

The **seven stars** that are in His hands represent angels. The greek word is *Angelos* which means messenger. It could be a divine angel, or a pastor or simply someone who is willing to share their faith. They are the messengers of the gospel. Seven being the number of ...completion so a figurative number not a literal number. The test that would most naturally come to the minds of those first listeners would have been

Daniel 12:3

3Everyone who has been wise will shine as bright as the sky above, and everyone who has led others to please God will shine like the stars.

Those stars in those nail pierced hands represent the people who have shared their faith with others, the *Angelos*, the messengers, the pastors, the evangelists, the ones who spoke about Jesus and helped others come to live an obedient life to Jesus. It's interesting to me that they shine in the heavenly realm because I believe they shine on earth as well. You can tell the people who speak about the Lord to pre-Christians. They are not boring or dry but full of life and the Holy Spirit. As they speak about the Lord he supercharges them and they radiate His life. If a person has not spoken of the Lord to a pre-Christian for a week or two or three they start to get comfortable and dry spiritually. If you give out as a witness the Lord will honour you and shine through you.

So would those original persecuted Christians in John's 7 churches have been hearing and understanding as they listened to the Revelation of Jesus? They would see the Lord standing amongst His Churches, all the churches of church history, He looks like one of them – the Son of man, He has the appearance of their high priest, His face tells them that from His perspective, from His way of thinking they are forgiven and cleansed, His eyes tell them that the rubbish in their lives has been burnt up and the Lord sees them as wonderful, good and faithful, His feet remind them that He too has been tested in every way just as they are being tested now as they go through a furnace experience, the double-edged sword : His powerful words are coming out of His mouth, and as He moves amongst His churches He has His witnesses shining in His right hand.

Early church Christian. Christians at the RBC mission station. Yes God saved you, yes He has prepared a place for you but know this; Your Lord is walking with you amongst you right now, today.