

# "The Things Which Must Shortly Come To Pass"

Revelation 1 Notes

## ***Prologue (vss. 1-3)***

- The first three verses form an introduction to the book. They tell how and for what purpose the revelation was given and pronounce a blessing on both reader and obedient listener. The work is a revelation mediated by Jesus Christ rather than a revelation of Christ Himself.
- The "things which must shortly come to pass" clearly refutes the futurist view that John was writing about events to transpire immediately prior to Jesus' second coming. On the contrary, he is writing of events in the near future -- the crisis through which the saints were soon to pass. History is not a haphazard sequence of unrelated events but a divinely-decreed ordering of that which must come to pass.
- "Signified it" means that the revelation was to be delivered as expressed by signs. The reader must interpret the signs and determine the divine message intended for the people to whom it was addressed, and the meaning for us today.
- A blessing is pronounced upon the one who reads the revelation to the churches and upon those who heard the prophecy and obey it. This is the first of seven beatitudes in the book (14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).

## ***Greetings And Doxology (vss. 4-8)***

- John chooses seven of the churches to indicate that his message is really addressed to the church at large. The "seven Spirits" represent the Spirit of God in the fulness of His activity and power (cf. Isaiah 11:2; Zechariah 4:1-6).
- John's readers are called to bear the costly witness of martyrdom, trusting that in His death Christ has been a "faithful witness" to God's way of overcoming evil; to look into the open jaws of death, remembering that He has risen as "the firstborn" of many brethren; and to defy the authority of Rome in the name of a "prince" to whom Caesar himself must bow.
- Some versions read "washed" and some read "loosed," based upon which manuscript was used for the version. "Loosed" is the better translation because the word is used in the Hebraic sense of denoting

a price. The ransom paid to redeem the faithful was the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (cf. 5:9).

- Based on later manuscript evidence, the word "kingdom" is preferable to "kings." Collectively, the redeemed are a kingdom (which stresses their royal standing in connection with the exaltation of Christ as ruler of all earthly kings); individually, they are priests (which emphasizes their immediate access to God as a result of Christ's sacrificial death). The kingdom of Old Testament prophecy and of Jesus' preaching was now a reality.
- "Pierced" is a reference to John 19:37 (which is quoting Zechariah 12:10). It is not limited to that incident or to the tribes of Israel, but extends to all those of every age whose careless indifference to Jesus is typified in the act of piercing. The mourning is the remorse accompanying the disclosure of divine judgment at the coming of Christ (cf. 16:9, 11, 21).
- Only here and in 21:5-8 does God Himself speak. His self-designation means that He is the sovereign Lord of all that takes place in the entire course of human history. This would have been an encouragement for those about to suffer.

### ***The Son Of Man Among The Lampstands (vss. 9-20)***

- John writes to the churches as one who has paid the price of exile for his faithfulness in proclaiming the word of God. He can fully understand the difficulty in which they find themselves in that he is a partaker with them in the tribulation that accompanies being a Christian.
- "In the Spirit" refers to a state of spiritual exaltation best described as a trance. Peter at Joppa (Acts 10:10; 11:5) and Paul at Jerusalem (Acts 22:17; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:24) had similar experiences. The "Lord's day" is the first day of the week because it is the day which Christ rose victorious from the grave. As paganism had set aside a day on which to honor their emperor, so also Christians chose the first day of each week to honor Christ.
- It is quite plausible that the seven cities named by John were chosen because they were the distribution centers for the seven postal districts of west-central Asia Minor. The cities were located roughly thirty to fifty miles apart along a circular road.
- From Revelation 1:20 we learn that the lampstands signify the seven churches to whom the letters are addressed. The purpose of the church is to bear the light of the presence of God in a darkened world (Matthew 5:14-16). Failing this, its reason for existence has disappeared (cf. Revelation 2:5).
- In the midst of the lampstands was "one like unto the Son of man." The background of the phrase is Daniel 7:13, which describes the

presentation to the Ancient of Days of "one like the Son of man" who had come with the clouds of heaven. The One who speaks is no other than the exalted Christ, for in subsequent verses (17-18) He identifies Himself in terms of preexistence, death and resurrection.

- The first characteristic of Christ revealed to John in his vision is that He is present among the earthly congregations of His people, and whatever John has later to say about the coming of Christ must be interpreted in the light of this important fact.
- The description of the Son of man is full of Old Testament phrases, which we may track to their various sources. The figure bears a general resemblance to the angel of Daniel's vision (Daniel 10:5-6). The robe and girdle are the garb of the high priest (Exodus 28:4; 39:29), the white hair is the mark of the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9), the bronze feet remind us of Ezekiel's cherubim (Ezekiel 1:7) and the voice of the returning glory (Ezekiel 43:2). John uses his allusion not as a code in which each symbol requires separate and exact translation, but rather for their vivid power.
- That Christ has the full complement of stars in His right hand indicates His sovereign control over the churches. The sword symbolizes the irresistible power of divine judgment. The authoritative word of Christ is to be understood over against the fraudulent demands of the imperial cult. It is the word of Christ which will ultimately prevail.
- More than once John had heard the familiar "Fear not" (Matthew 14:27; 17:7). By the resurrection, Christ had not just resumed the eternal life which He had with the Father before the world began; He had entered upon a new, victorious life in which death was forever conquered. Not only had He burst out of the prison, He had carried away the keys. This was in sharp contrast to the dead gods of paganism.
- In vs. 20, Christ supplies the interpretation of the seven stars and seven candlesticks. The most satisfactory answer to "angel" is that it is a way to personify the prevailing spirit of the church. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that all seven letters are addressed to separate angels, a strange phenomenon if they refer to anything but the church since the contents are obviously intended for the congregation as a whole.