

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 3 - Chapter 1 Continued

We'll continue our study of Revelation chapter 1 with a quick review. First and most significant of anything we can say about this book is that John insists that his visions are from God. In fact, so there can be no mistake, the exact chain of the vision messages is given to us. It is this: from God, to Christ, to angels, to John, to us. This is vital because the underlying assumption of many popular commentaries on Revelation is that John created a story about visions as a platform for him to put forth his own prophecies concerning the future. Even more, several commentators claim that he peppered his visions with various pagan myths that Jews in his day (especially Jews living in the Diaspora) would have been familiar with.

However the words of Revelation claim that his visions are authentic **divine** visions and that John's only job was to record them. If this is not true, then Revelation is a fraud beginning with the very first verse and ought to be removed from our Bibles. Assuming John's words are indeed a true record of his divine visions, then the Book of Revelation carries as much weight of authority as the OT Prophets. And (even though this might seem like a radical thought to many Christians) Revelation carries MORE weight than the other books of the New Testament because those other books fall under the classification of divinely inspired, as opposed to the higher classification of authority of divinely given. The only other words of the New Testament that are of equal authority as the Book of Revelation are Christ's direct words in the Gospels. Not the entire Gospels themselves; just His words. The remainder of the Gospels are also divinely inspired but not divinely given.

Then there is the issue of when John thought these visions of the seal, bowl, and trumpet judgments, which would more or less coincide with the return of Messiah Yeshua, might occur. And he steadfastly believed (as Paul had) that they would probably happen in his lifetime and not in some distant future. So John fully expected to personally experience the content of the visions he was given.

We also find that when reading chapter 1 in a straightforward and honest way, without pre-existing manmade doctrines clouding our minds, John has a little different version of the composition of the Godhead, and the juxtaposition of the various personages that comprise it, than the most popular version of the several Trinity Doctrines; the version that demands a co-equal status of the 3 personages that much of Western Christianity accepts. While John indeed sees the Godhead as primarily the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he also sees the Father as preeminent with the Son and Holy Spirit in some way subordinate to Him. And since the Holy Spirit empowers Yeshua and not the other way around, it is not surprising that in Revelation 1:4, 5 we find John list the Father, Holy Spirit and Son in that order.

The truth is, however, that in those verses the words "the Father" do not appear. Rather, the well known biblical attribute of the Father as the One "who was, is, and will be" is used to indicate Him. And yet, those are not the precise words used, either. Rather the words are:

“the One who is, who was, and who **is coming**.” Some commentators say this must be referring to Christ since Christ is coming back. Yet if that's the case, then John is using a description that up to then was exclusively used for the Father, and so John's words skip the Father entirely but provides two different descriptions of Christ; something that is illogical and highly unlikely. As I demonstrated from our reading of Zechariah 14 last week, this Old Testament Prophet says precisely that Yehoveh (the biblical name of God the Father) is indeed coming. At the End of Days He will be touching down on the Mt. of Olives and when He does the mountain will split apart. This event is typically connected with Yeshua as the one touching down on the Mt. of Olives causing it to split; yet clearly that is not what Zechariah said. Zechariah said YHWH will come and touch down on the Mt. of Olives. And when we read John in light of Zechariah, then we understand that John clearly thinks that while Christ is indeed returning to earth, soon, Yehoveh the Father is coming as well in some mysterious capacity. Let me state emphatically that my goal is in no way to diminish the role of Christ in our lives today or in the End Times; rather my intent is to show you that first, the New Testament continues to make the Father the preeminent power in Heaven and He also retains a powerful and personal role in the End Times. And second that the uncompromising descriptions and expectations that are often present in Church doctrines about the role and form of Christ in the End Times are not as Scripturally straightforward and tidy as commentators make them out to be.

Last time we also discussed the issue of Believers becoming a new priesthood that replaces the Levite priesthood. It is said in a few places in the New Testament such as 1Peter 2 and Hebrews 4 that Believers are to be seen as priests or a kingdom of priests or a new priesthood. The question, however, is priests in what sense and in what capacity? Last week we examined Ezekiel 44, which looks ahead to the time of the Millennial Kingdom (also known as the Thousand Year Reign of Christ) and Ezekiel gives us painstaking details of a new Temple. But he also gives us painstaking details of the priesthood that is to serve God at this new Temple. We learn that Levite workers are to do their traditional and typical Temple blue collar duties and that there is to be a strictly **Levite** priesthood, taken solely from the line of **Tzadok** (a descendant of Aaron), and **ONLY** they may perform all the Temple duties and form the Temple priesthood.

^{CJB} **Ezekiel 44: ¹⁵ *“However, the cohanim, who are L'vi'im and descendants of Tzadok, who took care of my sanctuary when the people of Isra'el went astray from me- they are the ones who will approach me and serve me; it is they who will attend me and offer me the fat and the blood,” says Adonai ELOHIM.***

¹⁶ ***‘They will enter my sanctuary, approach my table to minister to me and perform my service.***

So for certain it will not be gentile Believers (the Church) who run the Millennial Temple as the new priesthood. In exactly what ways ALL Believers will be priests during that time is not clear. Very likely the terms priest and priesthood are metaphorical as it concerns Believers and it simply means that we can serve the Lord in a closer way than we could before because, similar to the Levites, we have been separated and set apart from all others on earth to serve God. But any notion that the Levite Priesthood is abolished and replaced in the Millennium is

dashed by Ezekiel in an unambiguous and unmistakable way.

So, with all of the aforementioned in mind as our context, let's move further into Revelation chapter 1.

READ REVELATION CHAPTER 1:7 – end

Verse 7 alludes to two Old Testament prophecies: Daniel 7 and Zechariah 12. In some ways this verse represents the theme that the Book of Revelation is truly all about: the 2nd coming of Messiah Yeshua. What we're told is that the entire world is going to be aware of His return; no one will be able to claim they don't know about it because it will involve Him returning in the clouds, meaning it will be a global celestial event. Every eye seeing Him doesn't actually equate to 100% of all humans personally witnessing it; but it does mean all of humanity with only a few exceptions. So while not every last person will witness His dramatic return, the vast majority of people on planet earth will and those few who don't personally see it will quickly find out about it because it will be the greatest news story of all time and will spread like wildfire.

Something quite sad makes up the final few words of this verse (also an allusion to an Old Testament passage); it says that the tribes of the Land will mourn Him. This is direct reference to the 12 tribes of Israel. History has made it clear that only a relative few Israelites in the past or present have accepted their own Messiah. Most have rejected Him and await another and different Messiah who, of course, never seems to come. Thus the mourning will be because they now realize the enormity of their error, and because they will acknowledge that their ancestors had much to do with, and some even celebrated, Christ's gruesome death on the cross.

As promised, let's go to the Prophets that John alluded to and see exactly the context that he wants his readers and hearers to recall. While these verses are not very known or familiar within the world of Christianity because they come from the Old Testament, they were well known among Jews of John's day because the Old Testament was their Bible and because they were so full of Messianic expectation. So because we are going to frequent the words of the Prophets, this will be perhaps the primary reason that our study of Revelation is going to go on for quite some time. Open your Bibles to Daniel chapter 7.

READ DANIEL CHAPTER 7 all

Notice the context for this chapter; it speaks of symbols that represent 4 Kingdoms (all gentile of course) that will rule the known world. Three of the 4 Kingdoms come after Daniel's day with the first Kingdom representing Babylon (Daniel was in Babylon as a captive at the time of his visions). As with the Book of Revelation we have to be cautious of assuming that either the precise order of Daniel's visions and/or the sequences of events spoken of in his visions will actually happen in the chronological order that they are presented to us. That is to say that the appearance of these 4 Kingdoms and then the appearance of the horns on one of them, and then the appearance of a little horn, etc., in the order we find them listed in Daniel 7 aren't necessarily going to happen in the rapid succession that his vision seems to suggest.

Historically we know, for instance, that those 4 Kingdoms came and went over many centuries. Thus we need to be careful in assuming some precise order or time frame from Daniel's vision for the things that by all appearances are still in our future.

So while we'll revisit Daniel 7 again in our study of Revelation, here is what I want for us to take from it for now. Notice in verse 9 the mention of the Ancient One. We are told that thrones (plural) were set in place and the Ancient One took His seat FIRST. Immediately we notice the preeminent position of the one called the Ancient One. Throughout the Old Testament the mention of the Ancient One refers to The Father; Yehoveh. His hair was described as brilliant white as were His garments. This represents not only ageless antiquity but also wisdom and purity; it is the standard biblical representation of God the Father.

Next in verse 13 we read this: ***"I kept watching the night visions, when I saw, coming with the clouds of heaven, someone like a son of man. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. (Dan 7:13 CJB)*** So here are the words that John used to draw his readers towards Daniel. And of course, John assigns the one who is "like a son of man" to Yeshua. But notice something else: the "one like the son of man" was led (by someone) into the presence, and before the throne, of the Ancient One. As we see in the next verse, the Ancient One delegated the rulership of God's Kingdom on earth to the one like the son of man. This is a vision of something going on in Heaven and this verse, among so many others, makes it clear that there is NO equality as we might think of it between the Ancient One (the Father) and the one like the son of man (the Son). Modern Believers.....Christians....hear me. The part of the Trinity Doctrine (a purely manmade tradition) that claims co-equal status and authority among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit completely defies Holy Scripture...Old and New Testaments...and especially what we read in Revelation. And there is a reason that this doctrinal claim exists; it was created by gentiles in order to minimize and even to discard the ongoing role and/or authority of the Father. Why? Because mainstream Christianity tends to want Jesus Christ to be the God of Christianity while the Father is the God of the Jews. Or, it is sometimes taught that the Father handed all of His authority.....lock, stock, and barrel.... over to Christ and then the Father departed the scene (much like a King on his death bed finally hands all his authority over to the crown prince, and then dies). No such thing occurs in the Bible and we need to grasp that there is more to the Father's authority and rulership than what happens in the Kingdom that Christ will rule over.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that the Father is El-Olam, eternal, and His presence is eternal, and His existence or influence doesn't come and go. As I said earlier: this in no way diminishes the importance, role or divinity of ***Yeshua HaMashiach*** (Jesus the Messiah) in the lives of Believers. Rather it better defines Christ's role both in Heaven and on Earth and puts it in perspective of the supreme nature of the Father. John's Book of Revelation is constructed with The Father as fully preeminent. This is John's mindset and therefore is a crucial part of the context for interpreting Revelation. Yeshua is indeed coming back (Halleluyah!) to rule the Kingdom, but the Father remains above all. It is God's Kingdom, but He has placed Yeshua in full charge over it. We are to continue to revere the Father above all else just as Christ told us to in Matthew 6, something that is familiar to nearly every Believer.

Matthew 6:5-10 CJB ⁵ *"When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites, who love to pray*

standing in the synagogues and on street corners, so that people can see them. Yes! I tell you, they have their reward already!

⁶ But you, when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

⁷ "And when you pray, don't babble on and on like the pagans, who think God will hear them better if they talk a lot.

⁸ Don't be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ You, therefore, pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven! May your Name be kept holy.

¹⁰ May your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Remember what I told you earlier; Christ's words have more authority than the words of the merely human writers of the New Testament because while their words are divinely inspired, Yeshua's words are directly given to us as divine oracle. And for those who might say, 'but what about Christ saying in **John 14:9** that whoever has seen Me has seen the Father'? Christ was referring to the Father's character and nature; not that Christ and the Father were interchangeable or indistinguishable persons or that Christ had assumed co-equal status with the Father in all respects. In fact, in verses **15** and **16** Christ continues: ¹⁵ ***"If you love me, you will keep my commands;*** ¹⁶ ***and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another comforting Counselor like me, the Spirit of Truth, to be with you forever.***

"I will ask the Father and He will give you...." Again Yeshua subordinates Himself to the Father. Enough said for now. Whether you accept this or not isn't the point; the point is that John did. And that is the perspective he is coming from all throughout the Book of Revelation. It greatly distorts and compromises the truth of this book when we insist on reading our thoughts and beliefs and traditions back into it.

Verse 8 offers further perspective on not just what John believed, but what he was directly told. The Lord says to him, "I am the A and the Z". Or better, the Alpha and Omega. Another way of saying it is "the beginning and the end". Then the speaker goes further to identify Himself as the God of heaven's armies. This is expressed in the Old Testament as **Yehoveh Tzava'ot**; Yehoveh of the hosts (although nearly every Bible will incorrectly translate the Hebrew into "the **Lord** of Hosts"). And the divine speaker repeats another attribute of Yehoveh (the Father) from verse 4, when He says He is the One who is, who was and is coming. Here's the crux; the first words of the Book of Revelation are: "This is the revelation that God gave to Yeshua the Messiah". Thus at this moment, the true author of this vision is setting about to identify Himself to John. He is Yehoveh, God the Father.

Verse 9 shifts gears. These words are not part of the Revelation vision but rather is John explaining some of the circumstances surrounding his receiving of the visions. By his saying that he is a brother of yours and a fellow sufferer who is united with Yeshua, we understand that John is writing this revelation to Believers. Let me leave no doubt: if you are a firm non-

Believer, perhaps even a seeker who is yet to know Christ, you can gain something (no doubt) from reading Revelation. But you will not get from it what a Believer can and hopefully will. For one thing you will not get the promised blessing. But for another I'll guarantee you that the underlying spiritual meaning will evade you. Only Believers have the Holy Spirit, and only the Holy Spirit can help us accept the deep mysteries of Revelation even though our senses may not be able to fully comprehend them.

John says he was exiled to the island of Patmos when he received his visions and so had plenty of time to write them down. In verse 10 John says that in some difficult to explain way he came to be in the spirit. This is the language that Old Testament Prophets sometimes used to explain the ecstatic state they were in when God spoke to them or sent them His oracle through angel messengers. For example, in **Ezekiel 3:12** we read: ***A spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a very loud sound- blessed be the glory of ADONAI from his place!*** Then in the same chapter, **verse 14: *So a spirit lifted me up and took me away. I went in bitterness and the heat of my spirit, with the hand of ADONAI strong on me.*** Again in the same chapter Ezekiel says in **verse 24: *A spirit entered me and put me on my feet. Then he spoke with me and said to me, "Go, shut yourself inside your house.***

There are good arguments on both sides to say that this "spirit" John speaks of is the Holy Spirit (and thus ought to be capital "S" Spirit), or it is something that more means a heightened state of spiritual awareness and is NOT the Holy Spirit per se and so ought to be little "s" spirit. Various Bible versions interpret it differently. I believe it ought to be little "s" spirit because that is what the Old Testament Prophets usually meant and there is little doubt in my mind that John places himself on that same level as the Old Testament Prophets. The key is that what we are reading is about John's spiritual state; it is not about the authority of what it is that he heard and saw. But then John says either that this happened on the Lord's Day or that it was about the Day of the Lord. Again, good arguments can be made both ways. The Greek can be translated to mean "the Lord's Day" (Sunday). And it can equally well be translated "The Day of the Lord". The first way is referring to the day of the week that Christ arose from the tomb. The second way is probably referring to Judgment Day; the End of Days. Why John would want to tell us that this happened on a Sunday doesn't make much sense. Prophets didn't communicate that kind of information to us, in general, because it had no bearing on the message (just as it wouldn't here). Considering the entire subject matter of the Book of Revelation, it fits far better to see John saying that God was showing him about the End Times: the Day of the Lord. And, also similar to the Old Testament Prophets, God's voice is said to sound like a trumpet....or God's oracle is announced by the sound of the trumpet. Either way, make no mistake: John is presenting us with his credentials so that we know that he is an authentic Prophet along the lines of Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel.

The voice like a trumpet now says: "Write down what you see". Let those words sink in. This is critical information for the interpretation and authentication of the Book of Revelation. Although at the moment this most directly pertains to the letters he will send to the 7 believing congregations in Asia, it also defines the nature and authority for the remainder of Revelation because it is coming to John in divine visions. Except for some minor personal commentary that John gives us time to time (such as where he was when he got the visions), all else in this book is of the highest spiritual authority....beyond divinely inspired...because John is instructed

to record what he hears and sees. And the heavenly command John receives is to send what John sees in a vision that is written on a scroll to 7 specific congregations: those of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

Although there is no universal agreement among Bible commentators, I believe that these letters to these 7 specific congregations were real letters meant to address the specific conditions of those 7 congregations. There is no indication that John is using them as symbols or allegory. There were both practical and spiritual reasons that those particular congregations were chosen because there were many more congregations in Asia than only those particular 7. And yet, there is much to be learned from those letters than can and do apply to us, the modern congregations of Believers in Yeshua. Let us also not let the use of the number 7 go unnoticed. Revelation is full of sevens because in addition to the number 7 speaking of divine completion and fullness, it can also speak of finality. Revelation is all about the ultimate finality: judgment and the End of Days.

When we look on a map it becomes evident why those 7 churches might be singled out. They exist along major routes that connected the major cities of Asia. In fact, the congregations are named in the order that messengers would carry letters going from the northwest to the northeast and then south. Further, the spiritual condition of each congregation in the order they are given allows John to present them in a rather standard Jewish literary technique called chiasm. This is not to say that chiasm is unique to Hebrew; but it is used extensively in the Old Testament especially. The New Testament Greek and then the translations to English rather mask this. Briefly chiasm is a type of grammatical pattern. So if A, B, and C each represent certain characteristics, then in chiasm the next thing we read are those same characteristics applied a bit differently and given back in the reverse order of C, B, A. So if 6 things are said about a person or event, then if they are presented as a chiasm then they would be written: A, B, C, C, B, A. So the 1st thing and the last thing would be similar. The 2nd thing and the next to last thing would be similar. And the two middle things (the 3rd and 4th things) would be similar. The reader or hearer, if Jewish, would instantly know to make the association and it worked well as a memory device.

Interestingly we can say that of the 7 letters, the 1st and the 7th speak of the congregations being in the gravest spiritual danger. The 2nd and the 6th are the ones that are deemed as the most faithful and true. And the middle 3 are a mix of faithfulness with having some identified faults that need to be addressed. This has all the characteristics of Jewish literary thought using chiasm. Why is this? John was a Jew! The 7 so-called churches he was writing to weren't "churches" at all, but rather they were synagogues led by Believers. So even if the gentile members might not have understood such things as chiasm, there were plenty of Jewish Believers to explain John's letter to them.

Verse 12 says that John got a glimpse of who was talking to him. He saw someone standing in the midst of 7 gold menorahs. If you don't have a CJB, then your Bible will say 7 gold lamp stands or 7 gold candlesticks. This is where knowing the Torah helps because a lamp stand or candlestick sounds so ordinary. Why would this divine being stand among a bunch of ordinary candles or candelabras? Menorah is the correct word. The Menorah that is used in the Temple is made of gold, just as the ones mentioned here. And since we also are told that it was

someone like the son of man who was standing there, then we understand the reference is to Christ. Like John, Yeshua was also a Jew and so the thought was of course of the Temple Menorah and not a bunch of ordinary candles.

It is John's further description of what at first would seem to be Christ that throws us a curveball. The son of man is NEVER a title assigned to the Father; only to Yeshua. But then in verse 14 we read that His head and hair were as white as snow-white wool, His eyes like a fiery flame, and his feet like burnished brass. This alludes to the words of a couple of Prophets, the first being Daniel. In **Daniel 7:9** we read: ⁹ ***"As I watched, thrones were set in place; and the Ancient One took his seat. His clothing was white as snow, the hair on his head was like pure wool. His throne was fiery flames, with wheels of burning fire.*** But John also calls to mind **Daniel 10:5, 6**: ⁵ ***when I looked up, and there before me was a man dressed in linen wearing a belt made of fine Ufaz gold.*** ⁶ ***His body was like beryl, his face looked like lightning and his eyes like fiery torches; his arms and feet were the color of burnished bronze; and when he spoke, it sounded like the roar of a crowd.*** And then in verse 15 John adds that His voice was like the sound of rushing waters; the same as Ezekiel describes in **Ezekiel 43**: ² ***There I saw the glory of the God of Isra'el approaching from the east. His voice was like the sound of rushing water, and the earth shone with his glory.***

So all these descriptions that John uses to tell us about the one standing among the menorahs are mostly Old Testament descriptions of the Father. The only description that seems to indicate Jesus Christ is the son of man implication. So there is real mystery here. John seems to be intentionally conflating Father characteristics with Son characteristics. Here is another mysterious element to me: if John, who sat at the knee of Christ as one of the 12 original disciples, absolutely thought that this person standing among the menorahs and having those particular characteristics was Messiah Yeshua, why didn't he just say so? In fact, this divine being never directly identifies Himself, and John doesn't identify Him either. Rather, it is just more characteristics and descriptions.

In His right hand this being held 7 stars. More sevens. And out of his mouth came a double-edged sword. Clearly John not only wasn't certain who this being was (except that He was divine) he also didn't understand the meaning of the 7 stars or the double-edged sword. But it was enough for John to do what you are supposed to do when attacked by a Bear; fall on your face and act like you're dead! We hear of this same reaction in the Bible to those who encounter angels; so at this point John was seriously confused and frightened. While some of his confusion will be answered, not all will be set aside (nor will it be for us).

The sword has imagery in a few places in the Old Testament but it is generally not applied to God except in a couple of instances. The **double-edged** sword seems unique to John. Many commentators want to connect this with Paul and Ephesians 6:17: ***And take the helmet of deliverance; along with the sword given by the Spirit, that is, the Word of God.*** While it can't be absolutely discounted that John would have borrowed the thought from Paul, and thus the reference to "double edged sword" in Revelation is to the Word of God, we encounter the same problem; the word "sword" is used but the "double-edged" modifier used by John is not found in the Ephesians passage.

So what is the answer to this interesting dilemma? What is John referring to with his double-edged sword? We'll see if we can answer that next week as we'll finish chapter 1 and get well into chapter 2.