

Seven Churches 2020

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, August 16, 2020

INTRODUCTION PT. 1

Thank you for joining us today. Whether you are here IN PERSON or watching via the LIVESTREAM, you are most WELCOME. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. Let us turn to the Book of Revelation (i.e., Revelation 1).

INTRODUCTION PT. 2

NOTE – Before we dive into the Word, allow me to extend a word of THANKS to Taran and the team for their service last week. Misty and I enjoyed a restful time away, and we are more than EXCITED to be back worshipping with you. Thus said...

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

This morning I want to begin a NEW multi-part series drawn from Jesus' words to the seven churches of the Book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 2–3). This is a topic I have NOT touched upon in detail since 2010, and these timeless words seem particularly timely in this season.

NOTE 1 – Many Christians are INTIMIDATED by anything related to the Book of Revelation. Many believe that the prophetic utterances and visions of that ancient text are well BEYOND their capacity to rightly interpret or understand. Fear not! It is my desire to help you UNLOCK the meaning of select portions of this work.

NOTE 2 – If you are UNFAMILIAR with Christ's words to the seven churches of Revelation, that is perfectly fine! We will take things slowly, delving into an array of passages one piece at a time. If you deem yourself to be an EXPERT on this topic, listen afresh and anew as to what the Spirit of God is saying in his hour!

KEY – As we come to consider Jesus' words to these ancient churches, we discern His message for US today!

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

FYI 1 – Our study necessarily begins in chapter 1 of the Book of Revelation. This chapter sets the STAGE and provides vital context for the main themes we will explore in this series. Thus said, much of this opening session will center upon laying a suitable FOUNDATION for this ongoing series.

FYI 2 – Today we are going to systematically READ and ANALYZE the whole of Revelation 1.

REVELATION 1 PT. A

Revelation 1:1–3 (NIV)

1 The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

FYI – These verses form the introduction/prologue of this book. Let us consider a FEW noteworthy items...

NOTE 1 – The word REVELATION (v. 1) comes from the Greek “apokalypsis” (i.e., from which we get our word “Apocalypse”). This is why some translations of the Bible call the Book of Revelation by that name! This term refers to an UNVEILING or DISCLOSURE—i.e., specifically of Christ and God’s program of salvation through Him.

NOTE 2 – In this book, Christ brings revelation to the author regarding the culmination of God’s plan for the earth and the final establishment of His kingdom. The revelation is both FROM Christ (i.e., as He initiated it) and ABOUT Christ (i.e., as He is the centerpiece of God’s program for man).

NOTE 3 – Jesus is set to unveil plans and purposes which would SOON take place (v. 1b). This is NOT to say that the things revealed would occur immediately. Rather, it emphasizes that the events described in this work would occur SUDDENLY.

NOTE 4 – Lastly, note that there is a BLESSING associated with this book (cf. v. 3)...

Revelation 1:3 (Emphasis Mine)

3 **Blessed** is the one who **reads** aloud the words of this prophecy, and **blessed** are those who **hear** it and **take to heart** what is written in it, because the time is near.

KEY – Herein Christ PROMISES blessing for those who read, hear, and take to heart His prophetic utterances! May the Lord bless you—i.e., BLESS us—as we set our hearts to read, hear and take to heart what He has to say to us through this study and beyond!

REVELATION 1 PT. B

Revelation 1:4–8

4 John,

To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

7 “Look, he is coming with the clouds,”
and “every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him”;
and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”
So shall it be! Amen.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

FYI – There is MUCH to consider from this selection. However, for the sake of time, let us note the following...

NOTE 1 – The author identifies himself in v. 4 as JOHN. This John was one of the TWELVE apostles. In fact, he was a member of the inner band of THREE (i.e., Peter, James and John). He is believed to be the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (i.e., a UNIQUE moniker for a figure who appears in the Gospel of John). He AUTHORED the Gospel of John and 1, 2 and 3 John—along with the Book of Revelation.

This is QUITE a spiritual resume! Moreover...

NOTE 2 – Tradition records that John became the LEADER of the church at EPHESUS in his later years (i.e., this was the church to whom Paul addressed the Book of Ephesians many years prior). The church at Ephesus had established a number of DAUGHTER churches throughout the province of Asia (i.e., modern-day Turkey) throughout the decades. The apostle John oversaw these churches for some time...

KEY – This is WHY Jesus’ words and/or remarks are ultimately addressed to these seven churches in particular.

Q. What else do we know of John? Let’s read on...

REVELATION 1 PT. C

Revelation 1:9

9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

NOTE 1 – Herein, John notes that he was on the island of PATMOS “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (cf. v. 9b). Tradition records that when John was an older man, his enemies TRIED to kill him for preaching the gospel—by boiling him in oil...

NOTE 2 – This attempt at his life failed (i.e., he SURVIVED the execution), and he was thus BANISHED to the small, rocky, barren island of Patmos (app. 60 miles from Ephesus and 35 miles off the coast of Asia Minor). Scholars believe that the events of this book and the writing thereof took place c. A.D. 95–96.

KEY 1 – It is VITAL that you understand that at the time of this revelation of Jesus Christ...

- a)** The apostle John was an old man (i.e., exceedingly old)
- b)** The ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ had taken place app. 60-years earlier
- c)** The other apostles—including the apostle Paul—were long dead by this point (i.e., all martyred for Christ)
- d)** This makes John the Revelator the sole remaining and final apostolic voice of his generation

KEY 2 – And it is IN this context that the following takes place...

REVELATION 1 PT. D

Revelation 1:10–11

10 On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, 11 which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

NOTE 1 – In the MIDST of spiritual COMMUNION with the Lord (i.e., on a Sunday), John heard a voice utter the following command (v. 11): "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

NOTE 2 – Once again, each of these were REAL churches (i.e., daughter churches of the church at Ephesus), spread throughout the region of modern-day western Turkey. It is clear that the Lord has a message for each of these seven churches. As we shall note, He ongoingly has a message for the Church in ALL generations!

Q. What takes place next?

REVELATION 1 PT. E1

Revelation 1:12–20

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. 20 The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Q. What did John experience herein?

A. Nothing less than a REVELATION of the Risen Christ Himself!

KEY – Let us consider the MANNER in which Christ revealed Himself (i.e., a highly SYMBOLIC manifestation)...

REVELATION 1 PT. E2

Q. How—PRECISELY—did Christ unveil Himself? Lengthy set of responses...

A1. As One who Walks Among the Seven Lampstands (v. 12–13a)

Revelation 1:12–13a (Emphasis Mine)

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven **golden lampstands**, 13 and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man . . .

NOTE – John sees Christ amidst the golden LAMPSTANDS (i.e., which symbolize the seven CHURCHES cf. v. 20b). Christ is present amongst the churches, but for what PURPOSE? This is something John will touch upon shortly.

A2. Christ is likened unto a Son of Man (v. 13a)

Revelation 1:13a (Emphasis Mine)

13 and among the lampstands was someone like a **son of man** . . .

NOTE – The title Son of Man was Jesus' FAVORITE self-designation during His earthly ministry. Ultimately, this is a MESSIANIC title that comes from Daniel 7:13 (i.e., a portion of Scripture that emphasizes the coming of a King who would establish and preside over the universal and eternal kingdom of God)...

Daniel 7:13–14

13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

A3. Jesus' garment is described in v. 13

Revelation 1:12–13 (Emphasis Mine)

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a **robe** reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.

NOTE – This is the garment of a JUDGE – we BEGIN to see the posture Jesus is assuming over the churches. Christ is NOT present among them as a friend or a Savior (though He is those things). He is amongst them as JUDGE.

A4. He is described as having white hair (v. 14a)

Revelation 1:14a (Emphasis Mine)

14 The **hair** on his head was **white** like wool, as **white** as snow . . .

NOTE – This is NOT meant to signify old age and stress (though I am sure that I have given the Lord a few grey hairs)! Rather, this is meant to symbolize purity, justice, majesty, unmatched/unrivalled glory and inherent wisdom. He is a sufficiently RIGHTEOUS and WISE judge!

A5. He is described as having eyes of fire (lit. “blazing fire” – v. 14b)

Revelation 1:14 (Emphasis Mine)

14 The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his **eyes** were like **blazing fire**.

NOTE – Fire is commonly used in Scripture as a symbol of JUDGMENT (i.e., piercing, penetrating and probing).

A6. His feet are described as being brazen (v. 15a)

Revelation 1:15a (Emphasis Mine)

15 His feet were like **bronze glowing** in a **furnace** . . .

NOTE – This also relates to the JUDGMENT of sin. Bronze ALWAYS ties back to the bronze altar in the Tabernacle and Temple. This was the place where sacrifice for sin was made. Jesus is presenting Himself in a CLEAR way to the apostle John—i.e., as One who has come to ASSESS His people!

A7. His voice was as “many waters”—having the “sound of rushing waters” (v. 15b)

Revelation 1:15b (Emphasis Mine)

15 . . . and his **voice** was like the sound of **rushing waters**.

NOTE – This was meant to CONVEY power, dominion and authority. Can you hear the sound!

A8. His face shone like the sun (v. 16b)

Revelation 1:16b (Emphasis Mine)

16 . . . His face was like the **sun shining** in **all** its **brilliance**.

NOTE – This emphasizes His UTTER radiance, brilliance and glory! Whereas Moses the Lawgiver REFLECTED the light of God’s glory before the people, Jesus RADIATES that glory (i.e., being its very source). After all, He is the Light of the World! This is a dramatic manifestation of Jesus—i.e., one that we do well to consider often.

A9. His right hand contained “seven stars” (16a)

Revelation 1:16a (Emphasis Mine)

16 In his right hand he held **seven stars** . . .

NOTE – According to v. 20b, the seven stars represent the “ANGELS of the seven churches”

Q. What does this mean? What is the meaning of this phrase?

A. The word “angel” literally means MESSENGER. Either Christ is referring to heavenly angels who served as guardians over the seven churches or this refers to the leaders (pastors) of the seven churches. To me the latter is more probable in this context—but both could true!

KEY – Being in His RIGHT hand, Jesus is demonstrating HIS sovereign dominion and mastery over these figures!

A10. Out of his mouth came a sharp, two-edge sword (16b)

Revelation 1:16 (Emphasis Mine)

16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his **mouth** was a **sharp, double-edged sword**.

NOTE 1 – This type of SWORD—based upon the underlying GREEK word—was used by the Romans in a stabbing action designed to KILL. Once again, this seems to indicate that this manifestation or unveiling of Christ is deeply connected with the idea of JUDGMENT.

NOTE 2 – Interestingly the Word of God (JESUS) shall wield the Word of God (SCRIPTURE) in judgment! i.e., He shall ASSESS His people based upon the penetrating principles of the Word of God and shall issue REWARD or PENALTY in kind. Remember...

Hebrews 4:12

12 . . . the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Q. How is Christ presenting Himself?

A. As the sovereign Judge over His people (i.e., He who had come to try, measure and weigh them sp.)

KEY – To what degree are WE familiar with this manifestation of Christ? Consider the remarks of Paul...

Romans 11:22 (KJV, Emphasis Mine)

Behold therefore the **goodness** and **severity** of God . . . [ELABORATE]

REVELATION 1 PT. E3

FYI – It would seem that John was NOT prepared to handle this revelation of Jesus' kingly glory!

Revelation 1:17 (NIV)

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

KEY – Keep in mind that John walked with Jesus and LONG served Him. Yet this was BEYOND prior experience!

Q. How does Jesus react to the reaction of John the apostle?

A1. With Tender Comfort (v. 17b–18)

Revelation 1:17b–18

. . . Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

A2. With Commissioning (v. 19–20)

Revelation 1:19–20

19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. 20 The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

REVELATION 1 PT. F

KEY – It is clear that Jesus has a specific MESSAGE for EACH of the seven churches of Asia Minor. We do well to deeply consider His remarks and how they speak to us in 2020 and beyond. We also do well to recognize that there is a consistent PATTERN for each of these seven messages of Christ...

FYI – Thus said, I want to provide you with that pattern now! Thus, when you read over the course of the week ahead, you will be far more equipped to contend with the prophetic remarks of the Lord. Though there may be some exceptions here and there, the following outline should serve you quite well...

1) Initial Address

...Unto the angel of the church at _____, write...

2) Self-Description

Christ will detail some unique feature re: Himself to the readers—a feature demonstrating glory and authority.

3) Commendation

Christ will delineate what the church has done well (i.e., those areas that please Him—if applicable).

4) Rebuke

Christ will then delineate with stinging clarity how they have grieved Him (i.e., if applicable).

5) Call to Repentance

Christ will call them to remedy the stated rebuke through some repentance-oriented command/mandate.

6) Promise

Christ will offer a word of encouragement re: what lies ahead and/or could be theirs if they obey.

7) Conclusion

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

REVELATION 2 (PRACTICE)

KEY – Let us take a moment to PRACTICE using this outline (i.e., without going to great detail)...

1) Initial Address

Revelation 2:1a

1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: . . .

2) Self-Description

Revelation 2:1b

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

3) Commendation

Revelation 2:2–3

2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

4) Rebuke

Revelation 2:4

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.

5) Call to Repentance

Revelation 2:5–6

5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. 6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

6 & 7) Promise and Conclusion

Revelation 2:7

7 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

HOMEWORK – Read through and consider Revelation 2–3 (i.e., using this pattern as a guide)!

CONCLUSIONS

KEY – Thank you for taking the time to join us today. Should those of you who have joined us online wish to give, please do so through the giving portal of our church WEBSITE (www.NewLifeBarre.org). For those who are present, you may place your donation in the OFFERING BOXES in this Sanctuary.

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.