

# CONCERNING THE WAY

June 2, 2009

## LESSON 60: THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST



Liberal theologians interpret chapters 4-22 as John describing things that were happening to the early church. This interpretation just will not fly. You pretty much have to tear the book apart to try to fit that interpretation, you have to torture the text to death. They have to play games with the words to make the book fit their preconceived theories. We must take this book as it is written, and when you do that, you can't escape the conclusion that John is writing about world-wide future events.

Another view of Revelation is that it is telling us what church history will be like from the time of John. This also will not fly at all. Chapters 4-22 are about history beyond the Church, the very end of things. You cannot really understand this book unless you take it at face value. This is why it is rarely taught in churches any more, most pastors won't touch it. If you do hear it taught, it is usually in some allegorical or other weird way, instead of taking it at face value. This is because they are taught this way in most seminaries these days, if they are taught Revelation at all.

Now don't take me wrong here, the book definitely contains signs, symbols, figures of speech, and illustrations, but that does not take away from the literal future events being described.

Many people in the past have come to the book of Revelation thinking it was just some kind of poetic discourse on church history, or just an allegory. But when they studied it and researched it for themselves they came to the honest conclusion that John was telling us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit about events that will happen in the end times. One pastor like this was George Peters, a Lutheran pastor. He was taught that it was just an allegory of church history, and that just didn't ring true with him, so he began a research project like no one had done before or since. He must have gone to a hundred libraries, finding many books you can't even find any more, documenting everything he found. As he studied and researched, he became pre-millennial in his convictions, that is he took the book of Revelation as being literal prophecy about the future, that there was coming a literal seven year Tribulation and a literal one thousand year reign of Christ. Of course, the rest of his church, the Lutheran denomination, thought he was crazy, but his scholarship was impeccable.

Another man like this that bucked the trend of taking Revelation allegorically was John Darby, who lived in the 1840's. He also was taught that God was through with the Jews, and that there was no real coming Kingdom of Christ on earth. But he could not get past all of the prophecies of Israel that had not been fulfilled yet. His research and study turned him into a pre-millennialist.

The early church was pre-millennial! If you read the writings of the apostles, they clearly believed that Christ was literally coming back to earth to establish His Kingdom. They clearly taught that there would be a time that God's judgment would finally be poured out on a sinful world. But as the church became more and more filled with Gentiles and they grew tired of waiting for Christ to come back, the idea developed that God was through with the Jews, that they (the Church) were now the true Israel. And as the Catholic Church grew and consolidated their power, they began to believe that they were the Kingdom of Christ on earth. So the literal prophecies throughout the Bible were reduced to allegorical poetry, and relegated to the bottom, as far as the priority of teaching those sections were concerned.

You must take the words of this book at face value, and let it speak to you. Don't impose what you think it means. This book is the only book of the Bible that promises a special blessing if you read it. Yet, it is the least read book of the entire Bible.

## Chapter 1

**Revelation 1:1** The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must happen very soon. He made it clear by sending his angel to his servant John,

Verse 1 is very unique, and one of the most complicated verses in the Bible. Notice the progression here:

1. God the Father gave the message to His Son Jesus
2. Jesus is to show this revelation to His servants, and the servants will receive this message by:
3. Jesus sending an angel to John

Other books of the Bible may have been communicated this way to us, but it's never stated this way. God is telling us this to tell us how important this revelation is. It comes straight from the throne room of God, through Jesus, an angel, and through John, to us.

"What must happen very soon" – remember that God's definition of "very soon" can be a lot different than ours. God's delaying these events just tells us that He is merciful, He does not want to bring judgment on the world, He wants to give us more time.

**Revelation 1:2** who then testified to everything that he saw concerning the word of God and the testimony about Jesus Christ.

John tells us here he was a "special witness" to Jesus Christ, the "logos", the Word. He basically repeats this idea both in the gospel of John, and the epistle of 1 John 1:1-3. John is the most respected and long lived of Jesus' disciples. When he spoke, everyone listened. If John said he was there, and he saw it, then we can trust what he said.

This is a verse that is evidence that it was John the apostle that wrote the book, because he liked to use the phrase "word of God" (John 1:1; 1 John 1:1, 1:14; Revelation 1:2, 19:13).

**Revelation 1:3** Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy aloud, and blessed are those who hear and obey the things written in it, because the time is near!

This is a special blessing for you! No other book in the Bible says this. If you are reading and studying this book with me, you will receive a special blessing from God. Notice, though, it is not enough to just read it, but to hear and obey the things in it.

We are expected to be able to understand this book, otherwise there wouldn't be a blessing promised or be able to obey it. Trying to allegorize and spiritualize Revelation destroys the meaning of this passage. God didn't give this message to John so that it would be ignored by us. He wants us to read it and understand it. And the fact that He wants us to be able to obey it means that He will help us understand it.

In Biblical days, not everyone, in fact, most people could not read. In the churches you would have the pastor or elder read the scripture, and the congregation would listen. Most of us are fortunate because we can both read and hear it. We have Bibles at our fingertips that we can read and study over and over any time we like. This was not true in times past. The way this country is moving, there may come a day that we will not have that freedom any more. Let's pray that it won't get to that point, but things are certainly moving in that direction.

How can we obey the words of this book? By putting the message of this book into our theology. Most

churches do not do that; they leave this book out. God is telling us here we need to put this into our everyday Christian walk. This is why most churches are asleep. They teach basically the same messages over and over. In liberal churches, they just teach positive messages that have some good jokes in them and maybe have a good practical theme you can take home with you and feel good about. In Arminian churches you will hear basically the same message about the gospel and about sin, week after week. These are not wrong in themselves, but they are missing huge chunks of the Bible. The Bible is not just about salvation, about the gospel. It is about many things. It is about history, about the Jews, about future events, and about what God is like, about His sovereignty. It is about all of these things and more.

Here an example. Most people that go to church have no idea what's happening in the Middle East and how it fits in to their Christian life, their witness, their testimony, how they should be living. It all ties together. So, how do I obey the things written in this book? By studying it, putting it into your Christian life along with the mix of everything you believe, and living by what you see in this book. And that is the blessing. It adds so much to your Christian walk to have this understanding of the full message of Jesus Christ. It helps you understand so much more your place in the plan of God and what your role is.

**“The message of God is not conveyed by an existential encounter with the believer. God caused Scripture to be recorded and carefully preserved using words. Not ideas, not concepts, but words. Scripture itself emphasizes the reliability and importance of the individual words in the text (Joshua 8:34-35; Matthew 5:18).” Tony Garland**

The Jews did an astounding job and went to extreme lengths to preserve the text entrusted by God to them (Romans 3:2). The least we can do is care about the details of the text too! This takes focus, energy, and watchfulness. Christians are not to be passive about the teachings in this book! "Pan-millennialism" is not honoring to God (The often-heard line "I just believe it will all pan out in the end").

At the end of this verse you have the phrase "the time is near". Every translation that I have found misses the mark on this phrase, and it has caused many to think, well, maybe this book was written to tell us about church history from the time of John. But the Greek words translated "near" mean literally "in the hand". And "the time" is more accurately "the season". What this actually is saying is that these things are certain to happen, and the season draws near. John was not saying these things were going to happen in his time necessarily, but that they were certain to happen.

**Revelation 1:4 From John, to the seven churches that are in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from "he who is," and who was, and who is still to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,**

This message is written to the seven churches in Asia, from John, and from God, and from the seven spirits before His throne. We'll discuss these churches much more in chapter 2.

The phrase "who is still to come" uses *ho ercho'menos*, "the one presently coming" (present tense), rather than the expected *ho eso'menos*, "the one who shall be" (future tense). He is already on His way and may arrive at any moment. His arrival is imminent!

Who are the seven spirits? Some interpret this as seven angels that minister around God's throne. You can get the seven angels idea from two other places in Revelation – Revelation 3:1, and 5:6. Others believe these are the seven manifestations of the Holy Spirit, not that the Holy Spirit is seven separate spirits, but that He has seven manifestations. You can get this from Isaiah:

**Isaiah 11:1-2** Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. (2) The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

Isaiah here lists the seven manifestations of the Spirit, if you count the Spirit of the Lord as one of them.

1. The Spirit of the Lord – the nature of the Lord Jesus
2. The Spirit of Wisdom – the ability to make the right decisions
3. The Spirit of Understanding – the ability to understand everything
4. The Spirit of Counsel – the ability to give sound advice
5. The Spirit of Strength – the power to do what God wants
6. The Spirit of Knowledge – the ability to know beyond human comprehension
7. The Spirit of the Fear of the Lord – the ability to respect God's will

**Revelation 1:5** and from Jesus Christ – the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth. To the one who loves us and has set us free from our sins at the cost of his own blood

The message is also from Jesus Christ, so the message is coming from all three persons of the Trinity. This is a powerful statement about Jesus Christ. He is a faithful witness, He is the firstborn among the dead, in other words the pre-eminent offspring (the Greek word does not mean the first in order) from God who rose from the dead. He was the first to die and be resurrected and never die again. Others were resurrected before Him, but they eventually died again.

And He is the ruler over the kings of the earth, but He is not yet exercising that authority. He rules now by divine providence, but He will rule physically on earth during the Millennial Kingdom. "The one who loves us" – the full Greek sense of this is that He is continually loving us because it is part of His nature, it is ongoing. And the sense of the Greek words behind "has set us free" is that it is a one time thing – bang, we have been released from our sins! And without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins, He set us free at the cost of His own blood.

God has chosen to atone for sin by the spilling of blood (Hebrews 9:22). The "life of the flesh is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:11). Examples of Atoning by Blood:

- 1) Skins to cover Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21).
- 2) Cain and Abel: blood sacrifice to approach God (Genesis 4:4).
- 3) Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 15:9-21).
- 4) Passover (Exodus 12:23).
- 5) Mosaic Law accepted as binding by Israel (Exodus 24:8).

Whew! John is pounding us with powerful doctrine verse after verse. He is setting us up so we can understand the truth of what is coming. These are huge doctrinal statements, and things which we might easily pass over. Don't miss the importance and greatness of this message.

**Revelation 1:6** and has appointed us as a kingdom, as priests serving his God and Father – to him be the glory and the power for ever and ever! Amen.

"Kingdom" here is not The Kingdom, but it has the meaning of "he appointed us (to be or function) as a kingdom of priests". We as believers are all priests in this age (1 Peter 2:9). A terrible mistake was made in the Middle Ages, an idea came about in the Roman Catholic church that was completely unbiblical, that of creating hierarchies in the church. They created bishops that controlled certain areas of churches. They created a priesthood class in the church. This has created all kinds of problems, which we won't go into

here. The New Testament clearly teaches that we believers are all priests. Our task as priests is to introduce others to God, to teach them about Him.

This was the original calling of the nation Israel (Exodus 19:6; 1Peter 2:9). Here, it is broadened to include believers from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:10). Our priestly role will be expanded when we reign with God in the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 20:4-6).

**Revelation 1:7 (Look! He is returning with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes on the earth will mourn because of him. This will certainly come to pass! Amen.)**

Jesus went away in the clouds, and He will come back in the clouds. It will not be a secret – everyone will see Him, and everyone will know who He is. This verse is an allusion to Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10. Those who pierced Him is the Jews, of course, and "all the tribes on the earth" are all the unbelieving Gentiles on the earth at the time of Christ's coming. Jesus described His coming in the same way in Matthew 24:30. The Jews will be mourning because they will realize that Jesus was their Messiah and they crucified Him, and they will repent. The idea seems to be that the Gentiles will also mourn with regret because they realize that Jesus is God, not just a good teacher or philosopher, and they are doomed. Will some of them repent at that time, like the Jews, or will it be too late?

**Matthew 24:30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.**

**Zechariah 12:10 "I will pour out on the kingship of David and the population of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look to me, the one they have pierced. They will lament for him as one laments for an only son, and there will be a bitter cry for him like the bitter cry for a firstborn.**

These are just a few of the hundreds of prophecies in the Bible of the 2nd coming of Christ. It is mentioned more frequently than any other subject except salvation itself. Back to Revelation...

**Revelation 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God – the one who is, and who was, and who is still to come – the All-Powerful!**

This tells us the nature and character of God. These words could be said in this way: Who exists right now, who always was in the past, and who still will be existing tomorrow. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and He is saying that He is The First and The Last, He is everything from start to finish, from A to Z. He is the Creator of all things, and He will be the final judge of all things. Here's another verse that speaks of Him in this way, and this is just one of many we could quote:

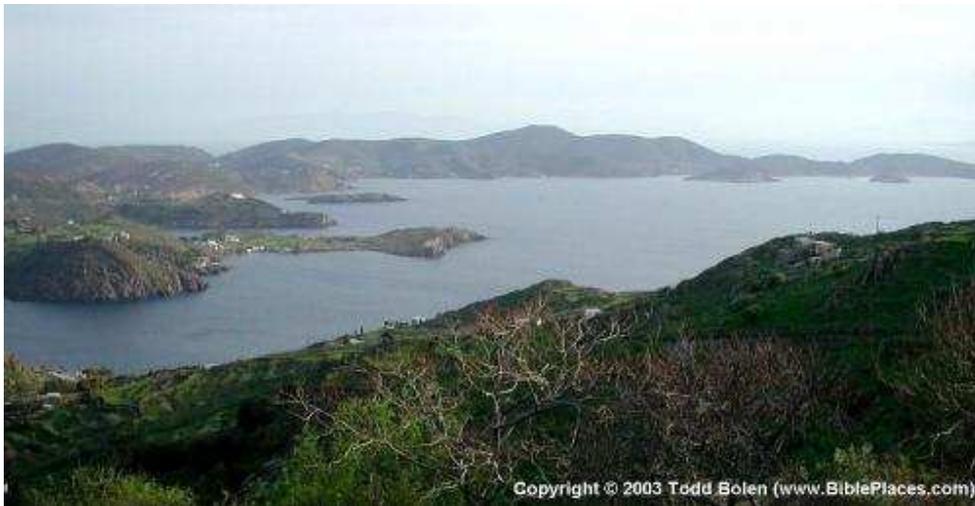
**Isaiah 41:4 Who acts and carries out decrees? Who summons the successive generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, am present at the very beginning, and at the very end – I am the one.**

And Christ repeats this about Himself in Revelation 21:6. Verse 1:8 is about the Father, but Christ says the same thing about Himself. So guess what? Jesus Christ is God.

**Revelation 1:9 I, John, your brother and the one who shares with you in the persecution, kingdom, and endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos**

**because of the word of God and the testimony about Jesus.**

John was exiled to this island because of his preaching of the gospel of Jesus by the Roman emperor Domitian (81 – 96 A.D.). External evidence shows that this was where John wrote Revelation. Evidence has been found on Patmos that it was used to hold prisoners at this time, and they were made to work in mines there. Patmos is a small island in the Mediterranean Sea southwest of present day Turkey, east of Greece. John was imprisoned because He would not deny the truth of the Bible, and he would not deny the witness of Jesus Christ. Church tradition says that John was able to return to Ephesus after Domitian died.

*The Island of Patmos*

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Notice that John sees that the persecution he is going through is part of God's design. And he identifies with his fellow believers in three ways:

1. Persecution
2. Kingdom
3. Endurance

And all three of these are “in Jesus”, things we share with Christ. Because we are in Christ, we will experience persecution. We are part of a spiritual kingdom – the Church. And being in Christ will help us endure faithfully until the end. Being a servant of God will not keep us out of trouble in this life. We're not here to stay out of trouble! We will be persecuted because our Lord was persecuted. But we also have His endurance.

*Patmos near Asia Minor*

**Revelation 1:10-11** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day when I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, (11) saying: "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches — to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

These are seven churches in Asia Minor, which had become part of Greece. These cities were all about 50 miles apart. "The Lord's Day" is thought by most to be referring to Sunday, but it doesn't have to be. The Greek here literally means "a Lordy-like day". In other words, the Lord took over that day in John's life. The Lord, through the Holy Spirit, took over John and communicated these things to Him. It could have been any day of the week, we don't know.

**The Holy Spirit is how God reveals truth to His prophets (1Peter 1:20-21). What is revealed cannot be known by man apart from God (Galatians 1:12-2:2). Prophecy was often revealed in visions, and often when the prophet was outside of the land of Israel (Ezekiel 8:3; 11:24; 37:1; Daniel 8:2; 2 Corinthians 12:2; Revelation 4:2; 17:3; 21:10).**

And notice the "voice like a trumpet". We have seen this description of the Lord's voice before, this would certainly get your attention! John was told to write what he sees in a book and send it to seven churches.

By this time in history there were probably hundreds, if not thousands of churches, but Jesus chose these seven to write to as a representation of the Church as a whole.

A popular view of the seven churches is that they represent seven different periods of church history. I researched this theory years ago because I liked that idea, but I found that it really doesn't hold water. You just can't fit each one of these into a period of history with any believable accuracy. These are real churches in John's time.

Another view is that these churches represent seven kinds of churches that may represent modern day churches. I also liked this idea for a time, because it makes some sense, and it is pretty popular, but I don't think you can make this fit, either. These churches had problems that we don't face today, like actual idolatry.

Christ ascended in 33-34 AD, most of our New Testament was written around 65 AD, revelation was written about 95 AD. So what happened between 65 and 95? The churches fell apart. Paul predicted this would happen in some of his letters. Most of these were Gentile churches (it is estimated that only one in ten were Jewish Christians in those days), and they had reverted back to evil in many ways, things like idolatry. They had gone back to paganism, and there were many unbelievers in them. There was only one of the seven that had not, as we'll see.

I believe that the churches in our day may be becoming like these churches, and will be more and more as we draw close to the end. We'll speak more of these letters when we get to them in the next chapter.

**Revelation 1:12-13** I turned to see whose voice was speaking to me, and when I did so, I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands was one like a son of man. He was dressed in a robe extending down to his feet and he wore a wide golden belt around his chest.

In verse 20 we're told that the golden lampstands represent the seven churches of Asia Minor, which were to be lights to the pagan world. In the Roman world these were actually bowls of oil that were set on stands, and when they were lit, they would light up the whole room. The symbolism of the Church bringing light to the world is obvious. It's important to understand, though, that the Church is not the source of the light. It is the bearer of it. The true light is Jesus (John 1:4-9). Believers are to actively expose darkness (Ephesians 5:11-14).

"Son of man" is one of the most important Messianic titles of Christ, and it comes from Daniel 7:13. The son who relates to mankind, and the son who relates to God. What is the significance of this? That Christ stands in the middle of the churches throughout the Church age, as the Great High Priest who is always with us, interceding for us. And He is dressed as a conquering, kingly warrior, standing in heaven as a guard over His people.

Jesus referred to himself as the "Son of Man" throughout the gospels. Stephen saw Jesus just before he was killed in Acts 7:

**Acts 7:55-56** But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently toward heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (56) "Look!" he said. "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Now John continues to describe Jesus:

**Revelation 1:14-16 His head and hair were as white as wool, even as white as snow, and his eyes were like a fiery flame. (15) His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. (16) He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword extended out of his mouth. His face shone like the sun shining at full strength.**

There are ten descriptive details about Christ given in verses 13-16. Let's go through them one by one:

1. One like the Son of Man – In other words, this is not some weird supernatural creature, He looks human. Jesus referred to Himself this way in all four gospels, and the term is used for the Messiah in Daniel 7:13 and Acts 7:56.
2. Dressed in a robe down to his feet – High priests wore long robes as they ministered in the Holy Place in the temple. Jesus is our Great High Priest (Hebrews 2:17, 3:1).
3. Wide golden belt around his chest – this was a symbol in the ancient world of strength and authority. The average person wore a short tunic that was loose fitting, only those in authority wore bands. This pictures Jesus' complete authority on heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18).
4. Head and hair as white as wool, white as snow – This recalls the description of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9-13. The whiteness also represent the righteousness of God. This similar description of Christ speaks of His deity.
5. Eyes like a fiery flame – the Greek here literally means his eyes shot fire. This is believed to show his indignation with some of these churches. Nothing escapes His gaze, he could see every good deed and bad deed, and continues to this day.
6. Feet like polished bronze refined in a furnace – The bronze speaks to us of judgment – the brazen altar of the tabernacle was where sin was judged. The refinement process removes all impurities from the metal, so that speaks of the strength, stability, and purity of the Messiah, and the immutable nature of God.
7. Voice like the roar of many waters – if you've ever heard the deafening roar of a large waterfall or heard the crash of huge ocean waves on the seashore, you can get the sense of what this is speaking of. This description seems to speak of the attitude of the Lord Jesus when He returns in judgment in the Day of the Lord. At that time, all other voices will be stilled by His commanding voice. This is not the "meek and mild" Jesus of His first coming that we read about in the gospels.
8. Seven stars in his right hand – Jesus tells us about this in verse 20 – these stars are the angels ("messengers") of the seven churches. This could mean that all churches have guardian angels, just as Jesus said that children have guardian angels (Matthew 18:10). Whatever they are, it is their responsibility to look after the churches, and the fact that Jesus holds them in His hand shows that they belong to Him, and they have His protection and favor.
9. Sharp double-edged sword extending out of His mouth – this speaks of the Bible, the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is "sharper than any two-edged sword". Jesus deals with His church through His Word. This also seems to say that the spoken word of Christ will go forward like a sharp sword, and there will be no defense against it in the day of judgment. Isaiah also speaks of the Messiah in this way (Isaiah 49:2). No evil will be able to hide from Him.
10. Face shining like the sun – This is the Shekinah Glory, as Jesus was seen on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2). This is His true divine nature.

This description is very similar to the description given by Daniel in Daniel 10:

**Daniel 10:5-6** I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen; around his waist was a belt made of gold from Upaz. (6) His body resembled yellow jasper, and his face had an appearance like lightning. His eyes were like blazing torches; his arms and feet had the gleam of polished bronze. His voice thundered forth like the sound of a large crowd.

So this is why we think that this appearance in Daniel could have been Jesus in His pre-incarnate form. Here are some of the other verses that relate to this description of Jesus:

**Hebrews 4:12** For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart.

The Word of God convicts us, it opens us up and cuts deep. Then, the phrase “His face shown like the sun shining” recalls another passage about Christ:

**Matthew 17:1-2** Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John the brother of James, and led them privately up a high mountain. (2) And he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

On to the next verses in Revelation:

**Revelation 1:17-18** When I saw him I fell down at his feet as though I were dead, but he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid! I am the first and the last, (18) and the one who lives! I was dead, but look, now I am alive — forever and ever — and I hold the keys of death and of Hades!

When did God die? At the crucifixion of Jesus. This is a declaration by Jesus that He is God. This should put to rest any cults that try to say Jesus is not God. He was dead but now he is alive, His crucifixion will not be repeated, He is alive forevermore. He conquered death and hell by rising from the dead, and this is why we don't need to fear death or hell!

**John 11:25-26** Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even if he dies, (26) and the one who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Do you?

Do you see why I say that Revelation is meant to be a book of comfort to the believer? Jesus has removed the sting of death and hell for those who follow Him. Jesus holds the keys!

John had walked with Jesus 60 years prior to this, but now, when he saw Him in all His resurrected heavenly glory, he fainted dead away. I imagine you and I will react the same way as John did when we see Jesus face to face! Similar reactions to the appearance of God and being restored happened to Daniel (Daniel 10:8-12), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:1-2), and John himself at Christ's transfiguration in Matthew 17:5-7.

The word “Hades” is used ten times in the New Testament. It is often translated “hell” – the place of torment for the lost (Luke 16:23). It basically means death, the grave. (I Corinthians 15:55, Acts 2:27). Hades itself will end at the final judgment (Revelation 20:13-14) when it is thrown into the Lake of Fire.

**Revelation 1:19** Therefore write what you saw, what is, and what will be after these things.

John is commanded to write 14 times in this book. He is an observer and a scribe, not an author creating a literary work!

This is the outline of the book, as we mentioned in our introduction last time.

1. What you saw - what John has already seen is in the past, the vision of the glorified Lord Jesus.
2. What is - the letters to the churches and their struggles and victories in chapters 2 and 3, and could refer to all churches in the church age.
3. What will be after these things - chapters 4-22 which take place in the future. The “after these things” could be another clue for a pre-trib rapture, as in “after the churches are gone, then the events in chapters 4-22 will happen.

**Revelation 1:20** The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Here you see the Bible interpreting itself. Jesus tells us what the stars and the lampstands represent. The Bible always uses the word “mystery” to describe something not previously revealed, or something that was not clearly understood. Until it is revealed, it is meaningless to us. After it is revealed it is no longer a mystery, but becomes a revelation!

“Angels” here is actually the Greek word for “messengers”. There is a difference of opinion among scholars on who these angels are. Here are the different views in this chart, made by Tony Garland:

<b>The Identity of the Angels</b>		
Identity	For	Against
Heavenly guardian angels of the churches	The term “angel” describes heavenly beings elsewhere in the book of Revelation.	The angels are charged, <i>as individuals</i> , with various sins. Elect angels do not sin. The complexity of communication: why would the revelation be given from God to Jesus to a heavenly angel to John (a man) to another heavenly angel (the star) and then to the church? Why would elect angels, known for their steadfast service and power, be said to be protected in the right hand of the Son of Man? The awards for the overcomer correspond to those promised to redeemed <i>humans</i> . Angels do not partake of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7), cannot be imprisoned by men or killed (Rev. 2:10-11), are not written in the Book of Life (Rev. 3:5), nor will they reign over the nations (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21).
Human messengers from the churches	The term “angels” is occasionally used of human messengers. Human messengers may have been sent to Patmos for the purpose of meeting with John and carrying a copy of the letter back to each church.	Human messengers are never called “stars” (but see Gen. 37:9 cf. Rev. 12:1; Dan. 12:3). Why would secondary human messengers be held personally responsible as individuals for the sins of the church?

<p>A Human leader of the church in each city (elder or bishop)</p>	<p>The messengers are individually responsible for the spiritual welfare of the churches and are protected in the right hand of the Son of Man.<sup>14</sup></p>	<p>There is no precedent within Scripture or church history for referring to church leaders as “angels.” Even apostles with great authority, such as Peter and John, refer to themselves merely as “elder” (1Pe. 5:1; 2Jn. 1:1; 3Jn. 1:1). NT church leadership consists of a plurality of elders. The individual leader could not be personally responsible for the character of the entire church. Cities such as Ephesus probably had multiple house churches.</p>
<p>Personifications of the churches</p>	<p>The close identification between each “angel” and the character of the church. Christ speaks to the churches both in the singular and plural.</p>	<p>Lack of scriptural evidence for the personification of congregations of believers. “Stars” or “angels” are not used this way anywhere else. In assigning sin to a personification, who is truly responsible? This view would make the stars and lampstands identical.</p>

**Throughout its history, the Church, although sometimes in a stumbling, imperfect way, has served as the lampstand of God in a dark and depraved world.**

Questions:

1. How did Jesus make His message known to John?
2. Should we be afraid or avoid Revelation?
3. Who will see Jesus when He returns?
4. What is the relevance of the seven churches today?
5. What is the importance of the high priest?