

No.31, Revelation

Over time this book has been given various interpretations which have in turn yielded a number of views on the question of the meaning of the 1000 years in view in ch 20. While men have liberty to hold their views on these issues yet the great danger is that they would miss the clear theme of the book; and in many cases that is exactly what has happened – they have failed to see that the theme of *Revelation* is Christ just as He is the theme of any part of Scripture. In one of the first studies on this subject of *An Introduction to the New Testament* it was laid down that Christ is the key to the understanding of Scripture; and that is no less true when one comes to study this book. If we keep this in mind then we will be kept from getting bogged down in vainly trying to explain all of the metaphors, symbols and mysterious figures in the book.

Some basic facts about the book are clear.

**1. It is addressed to the seven churches of Asia Minor, ch 1: 4.**

The locations of those churches are given in chs 2 & 3. They were actual churches that existed in the day when this book was written. Why seven for there were other churches in the same region? For one thing, 7 is a number frequently employed in the book, thus the Lord chose to single out seven churches to be the recipient of *Revelation*. The number is significant of completeness, thus we would see the seven churches addressed as being representative of all the churches of those days and even of the visible church in any generation.

As we read through the seven letters it will be seen that the spiritual state of these churches varied from one to another. This is significant, for these were seven sister churches all interlinked and interdependent yet so different the one from the other with regard to spiritual matters. The thought is that the spiritual state of Christ's Church at any given time can vary very widely as is reflected in these seven churches of Asia.

**2. It is Christ's final word in Scripture to His Church and it is an unveiling of Himself.**

Note ch 1: 1 – the revelation given in this book was given by God to Christ and was delivered then to John to be recorded by him as the penman. It is an undisputable fact that *Revelation* was written by John the Apostle; and that it was written toward the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century marking the closing of the canon of Scripture. But the vital matter is its theme. As noted already the theme is Christ; and here in the opening verse this point is emphasised most powerfully – “*the Revelation of Jesus Christ.*” The word “revelation” in the original Greek is *apokalupsis* – giving us the English ‘apocalyptic’. The word literally means *unveiling*; thus, in this book there is given an unveiling of Christ and this fact must be uppermost in our minds as we approach the book. Therefore, *Revelation* is not some kind of a prophetic handbook to bolster wild speculations and theories about end-time events. To a great degree it does deal with future events but its purpose is to point the Lord's people to Christ at all times. Thus, it had a message for the saints of that 1<sup>st</sup> century in the midst of all their tribulation, ch 1: 9. But equally it has a message for us today – and that message is *the unveiling of Christ*. Keep that in mind and you will be blessed as you read & study this book, ch 1: 3.

**3. But there is a specific view of Christ given in this book.**

The *Revelation* is not some general unveiling of Christ but is very specific. The book presents the great fact that Christ is reigning & ruling in heaven and from heaven, exercising & executing the purpose of God in all of the affairs of all time, that purpose being the outworking of the great victory of Calvary. See ch 4 – it is comprised of a vision of God's throne in heaven with the Lord reigning on & from that throne. Then in ch 5 the one on the throne is seen with a seven-sealed book that Christ takes and then He proceeds to open the seven seals, vs. 1 & 5. This book with its seven seals represents God's great purpose for this world; and the opening of it by Christ is proof of His authority as the reigning King of glory. But note that He opens the seals as *the Lamb*, v.6 & ch 6: 1 – indeed as “the newly slain Lamb”. The point is clear – Christ has all authority to reign because of the victory of Calvary; and the book shows that He will continue to reign throughout all time with the consummation of that reign being His triumphant return at the end of the age. A number of points in the book develop this central theme.

**I. CHRIST IS REIGNING IN HEAVEN**

The first part of the unveiling of Christ in this book is to show that He who was dead is alive and that forevermore and is presently reigning in glory. This is essentially the view of Him presented in ch 1 with His resurrection being prominent. Thus, since Christ is risen He is glorified. Note how the marvellous vision of the glorified Christ in vs. 12-16 rests on the great statement of the resurrection in v.18. What a message for a people facing martyrdom – ch 2: 10-11. Only the glorified Christ on the throne could assure His people in this way, telling them that those who die for Him die in Him and are truly blessed, ch 14: 13; for they live and reign with Christ, ch 20: 4. Such a view of Christ gave fire & courage to the early church; and such a view alone will do so today.

**II. CHRIST IS RULING FROM HEAVEN**

One day Christ will come and be recognised as King but that fact must not detract from the reality that He is presently reigning over this world from heaven. This point is seen in two ways.

First, from heaven He rules over His church on this earth, the great message of chs 2 & 3 where are shown so clearly that Christ knows each church, has a particular word of command for each church, and holds out a promise to each church. All the details show that Christ is reigning from heaven over His church.

Second, from heaven He reigns for the sake of His church. All that transpires on earth is under Christ's control. From the throne He presides over all that takes place on earth, something that is always true – especially when it *seems* that Satan is victorious. The persecution, the calamities that are visible are to be seen as Christ opening the seals and allowing all these things to come to pass.

**III. CHRIST IS RETURNING FROM HEAVEN**

The Christ who presently reigns & rules will come again, ch 1: 7. Indeed this is a fact that is constantly brought before us and is designed to be a comfort to the Church, ch 22: 20. Thus, let us not turn it into a mere debating point as to particulars but draw from the comfort it holds for us in that with the return of the Lord His people will reign with Him forever.