

LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

By

H. A. Ironside, Litt.D.

*Author of Notes On Jeremiah and Lamentations; Notes On Ezekiel the Prophet;
Lectures On Daniel the Prophet; Notes On the Minor Prophets. etc., etc.*

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CHAPTER ONE

THE INTRODUCTION

(Lecture 1:1-8)

http://www.blueletterbible.org/images/charts/Bible/revelation_chart.html

IT is certainly cause for deep regret that to so many Christians the Book of Revelation seems to be what God never intended it should be - *a sealed book*. The book of Daniel was to be sealed till the time of the end (Daniel 12:9), but of Revelation it is written: “**Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand**” (Chap. 22:10). It is clearly evident that this portion of Holy Scripture was given for our instruction and edification, but thousands of the Lord’s people permit themselves to be robbed of blessing by ignoring it.

Significantly enough, it is the one book of the Bible which begins and ends with a blessing pronounced on those who read and keep what is written therein (Chap. 1:3; 2:7). Surely God did not mean to mock us by promising a blessing on all who keep what they cannot hope to understand! It is only unbelief that would so reason. Faith delights to appropriate every part of the sacred record, and finds that “they are all clear to him that understandeth.”

The true title is given us in the opening verse.

It is, “**The Revelation of Jesus Christ**” not “The Revelation of St. John the Divine.” There is no authority for this latter designation, and it shows all too plainly how far some early editor had slipped away from first principles. John was a saint as all believers are saints. He was not a divine! Such a title would have amazed him beyond measure. Nor is the book the revelation of John or of any other servant of God. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ Himself.

The word rendered “**revelation**,” and sometimes “*apocalypse*,” means literally *an unveiling, or manifestation*. So this book is the unveiling of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is its one great theme.

It presents Him as the Son of Man in the midst of the churches during the present dispensation: and as the Judge and the King in the dispensations to come. If you would learn to appreciate Christ more, read this book, frequently and prayerfully. It reveals Him as the Lamb rejected, soon to reign in glory the Lamb on the throne!

And observe the title is not in the plural. People often speak of the book of Revelations. There is no such book in the Bible. It is the Revelation - one blessed, continuous manifestation of God's unique Son, the anointed Prophet, Priest and King. Revelation is the crowning book of the Bible. It is like the Head-stone of Zechariah 4:7 that completes and crowns the whole wondrous pyramid of truth.

Of this vast pyramid the Pentateuch of Moses forms the broad, solid foundation. Upon this is built up the Covenant History. Then the Psalms and Poetical Books. Then the Prophetic Series of the Old Testament. Higher up we have the Gospels and the Acts. Then the Epistles with their deep spiritual instruction; and to complete the glorious structure, this last, solemn, but exceedingly precious book, the Revelation, linking all the rest with the soon-to-be-manifested glory of God.

Or if you think of Holy Scripture as forming a great golden circle of truth, we start with Genesis, the book of beginnings, and go on through the Testaments until we come to Revelation - the book of the last things; and, lo, we find it dovetails exactly into the book of Genesis, and thus perfects the inspired ring! The Word of God is one absolutely perfect, unbroken, and unbreakable circle.

A comparison of Genesis and Revelation will readily make this plain, and show how we have the types in Genesis and the completion of the truth in Revelation: - in the one book the beginning, in the other the consummation.

Genesis gives us the creation of the heavens and the earth. Revelation presents a new heaven and a new earth.

Genesis shows us the earthly paradise, with the tree of life and the river of blessing, lost through sin. Revelation gives us the Paradise of God with the Tree of Life and the pure river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb - Paradise regained through Christ's atonement.

In Genesis we see the first man and his wife set over all God's creation. In Revelation we behold the Second Man and His Bride ruling over a redeemed world.

In Genesis we are told of the first typical sacrificial lamb. In Revelation the Lamb once slain is in the midst of the throne.

In Genesis we learn of the beginning of sin, when the serpent first entered the garden of delight to beguile Adam and Eve with his sophistries. In Revelation that old Serpent called the devil and Satan is cast into the lake of fire.

In Genesis we have the first murderer, the first polygamist, the first rebel, the first drunkard. etc. In Revelation all such, who refuse to accept God's grace in Christ Jesus, are banished from His presence forever.

In Genesis we view the rise of Babel, or Babylon. In Revelation we are called to contemplate its doom.

In Genesis we see man's city; in Revelation the city of God.

Genesis shows us how sorrow, death, pain and tears, the inevitable accompaniments of sin and rebellion, came into the world. Revelation does not close until we have seen God wiping away all tears, and welcoming His redeemed into a home where sin, death, pain and sorrow never come.

And so we might go on for an hour, contrasting and comparing these two books, but enough has been cited, I trust, to stir each interested believer to study for himself. What we get ourselves out of our Bibles in the presence of God is worth far more than all that another passes on to us. We may learn from each other, but it is best to take nothing for granted; but, like Ruth the Moabitess, to **"beat out that she had gleaned"** through meditation and prayer.

But before we examine with some degree of care the opening verses of this remarkable book, it may be well to point out that there are three very distinct views of Revelation presented by those who seek to comment upon, or expound it. They are generally known as the Preterist, Historical, and Futurist. Each of the three systems of interpretation might be subdivided into various, conflicting schools, but the names give the main point of view in each case.

As a rule, *the preterists* see very little in the book beyond a weird religio-political document supposedly written by some unknown person who took the name of John in order to give acceptance to his writings, or else some other John than the apostle of that name, whose real object was to comfort his Christian brethren in a time of great persecution under one of the Roman Emperors by portraying the final outcome of the stern conflict as a great victory for the saints, resulting in the overthrow of paganism and the recognition of a glorious city of God in its place.

The historical school believe they see in the momentous events of the last nineteen hundred years, the fulfillment of the seals, trumpets and vials, and the other special visions of the book. According to this, there can be no possible understanding of Revelation apart from a thorough knowledge of the history of the nations comprising Christendom - the sphere where Christ's authority is nominally owned. Many and varied are the schools of interpretation founded on this supposition or hypothesis.

The futurists as a rule consider that the largest part of the book applies to a period still future, and that only the first three chapters refer to the present Church dispensation. Some extreme futurists even relegate these chapters to the end-times also, and so do not see the Church in Revelation at all.

As we go on with our attempt to expound the book, our own position will be seen to coincide with that of the futurists first mentioned, but we reserve for a later lecture the ground upon which this view is based.

Turning again to the text, we note, in verse one, that the Revelation of Jesus Christ was given by the Father to the Son, as David revealed to Solomon All his plans in connection with the building of the future temple. God is represented as being in counsel with our Lord Jesus Christ concerning “**things which must shortly come to pass,**” and which it is the joy of His heart to communicate to His servants. An angel becomes the medium to make all known to the beloved apostle John, who, in this sense, is to tarry in the Church till the coming of the Lord - that is, his line of ministry carries us on to that blessed event. Note then the order through which the revelation came down to us. God gave it to Jesus Christ, who sent it by His angel to His servant John to show unto His servants the coming things.

He is said to have signified it; that is, He made it known by signs or symbols.

It is important to bear this in mind. This book is a book of symbols. But the careful student of the Word need not exercise his own ingenuity in order to think out the meanings of the symbols. It may be laid down as a principle of first importance that every *symbol used in Revelation is explained or alluded to somewhere else in the Bible*. Therefore, he who would get God’s mind as to this portion of His Word must study with earnest and prayerful attention every other part of Holy Scripture. Undoubtedly this is why so great a blessing is in store for those who read and hear the words of this prophecy, and keep the things written therein (ver. 3).

Verses 4 to 8 comprise the salutation. The book is particularly addressed, as a great general epistle, to “**the seven churches in Asia.**” By the term Asia we are not to understand the continent that now bears that name, nor yet what we speak of as Asia Minor, but a Roman proconsular province which of old was distinctively denominated “Asia.”

In John’s day there were many Christian churches already established in that province, and of these, seven are selected to be especially addressed. If any ask why these seven were selected in preference to others (as for instance Colosse and Hierapolis, in both of which were important churches), my answer is that the geographical position of these churches was in keeping with the vision presented in verses 12 to 18. They formed a rough circle in the midst of which Christ was beheld by the seer, standing in His priestly garb, taking note of all that was going on.

But there was more than this: the internal conditions prevailing in these churches were suited to portray the state of the whole sphere of Christian profession in seven distinct periods, from the apostolic days to the close of the church’s testimony on earth. Even the very names of the seven cities, when interpreted, help to make this plain; they become, so to speak, keys to the different periods to which they apply. But the proof of this must be reserved for the next three addresses.

Observe how the three Persons of the Holy Trinity are linked together in the salutation.

“**He who is, and who was, and who is to come,**” is the Lord Jehovah. This is the literal meaning of the mystic name communicated to Moses.

“Jehovah” is a compound formed from three words:

- The first meaning *He is*,
- The second, *He was*,
- The third, *He will be*, or *He will come*.

Jehovah is the triune God, hence the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are alike called by this name. But in the present passage it is clearly God the Father who is in view. The Spirit comes before us in the next clause, “**and from the seven Spirits that are before His throne.**” If it is hard to understand how the one, eternal Holy Spirit can be so pictured, turn to Isaiah 11:1, 2. There we read of the seven Spirits who rest upon the Branch of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Note the order given.

1. The Spirit of the Lord.
2. The Spirit of Wisdom.
3. The Spirit of Understanding.
4. The Spirit of Counsel.
5. The Spirit of Might.
6. The Spirit of Knowledge.
7. The Spirit of Fear of the Lord.

There you have the one Spirit in the seven-fold plenitude of His power. Seven, mentioned so frequently in this book, is the number of perfection, and is so used here.

Then, with the Father and the Spirit, we have Jesus Christ as “**the faithful Witness**” when here on earth, “**the First-begotten of the dead**” in resurrection glory, and “**the Prince of the kings of the earth**” when He comes again to reign.

No wonder an outburst of praise and worship follows at this full revelation of His glories:

“Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

John’s heart was full and could hold in no longer. Adoration and praise were the spontaneous result of contemplation of Christ’s person and offices as Prophet, Priest and King.

Then he heralds the glad news of His coming again. He is going to return - not as a babe, born of woman, but the glorified One descending from heaven; and by a stupendous miracle, every eye shall see Him, while “**all the tribes of the earth shall mourn**” because of Him. This, I am persuaded, is the true meaning, and refers to Zechariah 12, where all the tribes of restored Israel are seen by the prophet mourning over their past rejection of Christ, and lament their folly, while awaiting His return. John speaks for all the church when he cries with rapture, “**Even so. Amen!**”

Does your heart take up the same glad welcoming shout; or can it be that you are unready to meet Him, and would dread His return?

In the 8th. verse it is the Son who speaks, and now He declares Himself to be Jehovah also, One eternally with the Father. He is the Alpha and Omega - the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet - the beginning and the ending: He created all things; He will wind up all things, and bring in the new heavens and the new earth. He is, and was, and is the coming One, El Shaddai who of old appeared to Abraham - the Almighty. May our hearts be occupied with Himself, and His return be ever for us “**that blessed Hope!**”

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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