

The Facebook Commentary on Revelation



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Revelation Chapter 1

Rev 1 (Introduction)–

Today we begin studying the book of Revelation chapter by chapter and verse by verse from the very beginning of the book. It is helpful in understanding any book of the Bible to respect the author's original intention in ordering the content of the book in the way he or she has chosen to do. In this case the order of the content is determined by the visionary experience the author has had prior to writing. While there are many points in the book where it is helpful to scan back and forth and see how various images and themes are paralleled in other places, there is no substitute for a first reading in which each symbol and context receives weight as if reading for the first time. So there is no substitute for a verse by verse approach to the book.

The method applied to the study is that which is spelled out in the book *The Deep Things of God*, where I lay out an approach of careful reading, analysis of words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. But these normal processes of reading the Bible are augmented in this commentary with careful attention to the role each part plays in the structure of the book, allusions to the Old Testament, and the impact of the New Testament gospel on the way John would have read the Old Testament. I invite you to read and study along with me each day. It is the first-ever Facebook Commentary on Revelation.

Chapter one as a whole includes the Prologue to the book of Revelation (1:1-8) and the introductory vision to the seven letters of chapters two and three (1:9-20). In the Prologue the author introduces the book in relatively plain language, without the kind of strange symbolism that is so common later on. In verses 9-11 we learn that John receives visions on the Island of Patmos to share with the seven churches of Asia Minor. Verses 12-16 portray John's vision of Jesus and in verses 17 and 18 John interacts with the Jesus of the vision. The chapter ends (1:19-20) with a summary of the vision's purpose and a nutshell introduction to the whole book.

Rev 1:1-8 (Introduction)–

The interesting thing about the Prologue to the Book of Revelation (1:1-8) is that the language is fairly normal--the typical language of the New Testament. The rest of the book is in deep, visionary symbolism, easily misunderstood 1900 years later. But in the Prologue John uses clear, everyday language to point the reader to the central purpose and themes of the book. Whatever we do with the rest of Revelation needs to be compatible with what we find in the plain language right at the beginning. In this normal prose section of Revelation the tone is set for the themes that will carry on throughout the book. Challenging visions like the seals and the trumpets need to be interpreted in light of the Prologue, rather than the other way around. In the Prologue we find the key to the more difficult parts of the book.

The Prologue of Revelation has many parallels with the Epilogue (22:6-21). Together they form an envelope for the seven-part chiasm that makes up the bulk of the book. The major parallels between the Prologue and the Epilogue can be listed as follows: The Introduction (1:1) parallels 22:6: "To show to His servants things that must shortly come to pass." Revelation 1:7-8 portrays the second coming of Jesus followed by the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, as does 22:12-13. Revelation 1:3 offers a blessing on those who hear the words of the book with understanding, this blessing is echoed in 22:7. The reverse of that blessing is found in the warning of 22:18-19. The greeting to the churches in 1:4-6 is paralleled in 22:16. We will see that the structure of Revelation is grounded on many similar parallel passages.

The previous paragraph provides the opportunity to summary the seven-part chiasm (pyramid-style structure) grounded in multiple parallels between the first and second halves of the book. The resulting structure looks like this:

Prologue (1:1-8)
 Seven Churches (1:9 - 3:22)
 Seven Seals (4:1 - 8:1)
 Seven Trumpets (8:2 - 11:18)
 The Great War (11:19 - 15:4)
 Seven Bowls (15:5 - 18:24)
 The Millennium (19:1 - 20:15)
 The New Jerusalem (21:1 - 22:5)
Epilogue (22:6-21)

Since the messages to the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3) are written in letter format, it should not be surprising that the Prologue in many ways reads like an ancient letter. The opening phrase reads like the title of the Book, "The Apocalypse (Disclosure or Revelation) of Jesus Christ." In this title is summarized the origin and the content of the whole book (elaborated in the paragraphs that follow). The Prologue also provides information on the author, the location and the setting in which the book was written. The nature and purpose of the book is also summarized in plain language, and instruction is given as to how the book should be read. This is not the exact form and genre of an ancient letter opening, but it serves a similar purpose.

Rev 1:1–

The book begins with the "Revelation of Jesus Christ." It is not the revelation of Middle Eastern oil. It is not the revelation of the Papacy, it is the revelation of Jesus Christ. In the original language, revelation is "apokalupsis" (from which we get the English word "apocalypse") and that means "to take the cover off" something. If it were a pot, you would take the cover off in order to see and smell what is inside. It can also mean unveiling something, in this case unveiling Jesus Christ. In the rest of the New Testament, the word is used to express divine, prophetic revelation (see Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 14:6; Gal 1:12; Eph 3:3-5).

In what sense does Jesus need unveiling? When He was on the earth, He was a human being, in the flesh. He walked on this earth, talked in human language, dressed like the people around Him. He lived in a particular culture, time, and place. It would be easy to look at that Jesus and say, "Well, He was a great teacher, a great man, and a great prophet. But, surely, He's not the king of the universe, is He?" His heavenly status needed unveiling, it needed to be uncovered. In a real sense, as noted by Ranko Stefanovic, "The last book of the Bible begins where the four gospels end."

What the book of Revelation does is take the "cover off" of Jesus of Nazareth. He is no longer just Jesus of Nazareth, the great teacher, the great prophet, the greatest human being who ever lived. He is the one who sits on the throne in the heavenly sanctuary and who has rulership over the entire universe. While not acknowledged by most on earth, He is the true ruler of this world. The reality is that if we did not have the book of Revelation, we would have very little understanding of the cosmic Christ or of the heavenly war that affects everything that happens on this earth. So the book of Revelation is the unveiling of many aspects of Jesus Christ

that we would not otherwise know. The Book of Revelation is much more than just a revelation of future events, it is an indispensable component of the gospel. In a sense, this book begins where the four gospels end.

The phrase “the revelation of Jesus Christ” can be understood in two different ways in the Greek. Fortunately for us, the English is a very close equivalent and can help us in our understanding. This phrase is a Greek genitive, which is often expressed with “of” in the English. It can express relationship (“of”) or separation (“from”) in the Greek. But that doesn’t settle the question of whether this is an objective or subjective genitive. Is Jesus the object of the phrase (a revelation “about” Jesus Christ) or is he the subject of the phrase (a revelation “from” Jesus Christ). In other words, is John saying that this book is “about Jesus Christ” or that Jesus Christ is the true author of the book?

If John is the same person who wrote the Fourth Gospel, the answer to the question is likely “yes.” John the beloved disciple frequently uses double meanings to deepen the impact of the story of Jesus. Likewise, the book of Revelation is both a revelation “from” Jesus, a message to His disciples on earth from the throne in heaven, and a revelation “about” Jesus, who He truly is in glory. As Stefanovic puts it, Jesus is both the One who reveals and the One who is revealed. In the immediate context, however, the “from Jesus” is the primary emphasis, as the first three verses display a chain of revelation from God to Jesus to John to the church (see summary of 1:1-3 for the details). But in verses 4-7 and 12-20 Jesus is clearly the content of the narrative as well.

This book is “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him. . .” (My translation). The content of this book comes from Jesus, but it also represents the thinking of Jesus’ heavenly Father. There is no great gulf between them. Jesus said in John’s Gospel, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” Many have thought of the Father and Jesus in terms of “good cop, bad cop.” The Father is the terrifying, wrathful God of the Old Testament, but Jesus puts out the softer side of the godhead. Such a schizophrenic view may seem supported by a surface reading of the Bible, but in fact no such rift is warranted in the New Testament. In fact, Jesus is often portrayed as the God of the Old Testament (Phil 2:9-11, cf. Isa 45:23; Rev 1:17-18, cf. Isa 44:6, 48:12), while the Father is truly the God of the New (Jesus came to show us what the Father is truly like (John 1:14-18; 14:9; 17:1-5; Heb 1:3). They are truly “one” in character and purpose (John 17:21-23).

“To show to His servants what must soon take place. . .” is one of the most debated parts of the book of Revelation. Why is it that the events in Revelation “must” happen? In what sense must they happen “soon?” The crucial Greek word for “must” (*dei*) is found frequently in the gospels as well. Repeatedly in Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus tells His disciples that he “must” go to Jerusalem and He “must” suffer there, and He “must” be killed and rise again (Matt 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22, etc.). Why must all these things happen? Because they are part of Jesus’ destiny. They were marked out in Bible prophecy, and He must follow this path in order to achieve the goals God has for the world and the universe.

Similarly here the future events have to happen because they are part of God's plan. They too have been marked out in prophecy. They are the destiny of the world. The things portrayed in Revelation MUST happen because it's the only way God's plan can be completed,

God's plan to ultimately unite the entire universe in Christ (Eph 1:9-10).

"What must soon take place" is the second expression of the purpose of the Book of Revelation. First of all, as we have seen, Revelation is the unveiling of Jesus Christ in all His cosmic glory. But a second purpose of the book is an outline of future events from the perspective of the human author, John. So the prophecies of this book not only speak for God in their revelation of Jesus Christ, they also fore-tell; they offer predictions of significant events that will take place in the course of human history from John's day until the very End. As we will see, this language recalls Daniel 2, which contains a similar prediction of significant events between the time of the prophet and the End. That connection will prove important for understanding just how these future events in Revelation will be portrayed.

The language of "must take place" (*dei genesthai*) is found in slightly less exact form also at the heart of Jesus' Olivet discourse (Matt 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9). In many ways the book of Revelation parallels Jesus' predictions about the future in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. It offers information about the events that would occur from the time of John to the end of time. Just as Jesus on the Mount of Olives spoke about wars, earthquakes and other natural calamities, so does Revelation. Just as Jesus spoke about an final proclamation of the gospel (Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10), so does Revelation (10:7; 14:6-7). In both writings there are encouragements to readiness for the return of Jesus (compare Matt 24:42 and Rev 16:15). Jesus in Luke 21 even uses the method of historical sequence so clearly evident in Revelation 12. So in both places Jesus is involved in prophesying the events that would take place between His time and the End.

The combination of Jesus Christ and future events in this verse confirms a theme that is present throughout the New Testament. The initial coming of Jesus Christ was an eschatological (end-time) event. It was the fulfillment of prophecies made throughout the Old Testament. It was the coming of the Kingdom that had been foretold. It was the mighty inbreaking of God into human history that the prophets had longed for. But the New Testament shares all this with a sense of "now and not yet." While the prophecies of the OT have found an initial fulfillment in the life, death and resurrection of the earthly Jesus, they will march through history to a cosmic and final fulfillment at the second coming of Jesus (14:14; 19:11-21; 22:11-12). The book of Revelation does not separate salvation from eschatology or creation from redemption. Jesus Christ is at the center of all God's work in the earth from biblical times all the way to the End. Prophecy and its fulfillment will always be Christ-centered.

Rev 1:1 (Excursis on Christ-Centered Prophetic Interpretation)–

From a New Testament perspective, all prophecy is Christ-centered. In other words, if one's interpretation of prophecy does not deliver a clearer picture of Jesus, that prophecy has probably not been truly understood.

If we are not careful, we might get the impression that the beasts, the vultures, the darkness, the earthquakes and the hailstones are what the book of Revelation is all about. But they are more like the form in which the real message of the book is given. The true centerpiece of the book of Revelation is not war or catastrophe, it is not oil or the Middle East,

it is Jesus Christ and him crucified. His presence permeates the book even when He is not named. To read this book without gaining a clearer picture of Jesus is to miss the key point.

In the book of Revelation the symbols of the Old Testament are transformed because of what Christ has done. We have seen that Revelation is built on the Old Testament background and its major themes. But because of Jesus' earthly life, His death and resurrection, and His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, these Old Testament themes find fresh and creative meaning. Since the book of Revelation is a New Testament book, it picks up on the New Testament's understanding of Old Testament themes in the light of the Christ event.

The book of Revelation is "the Revelation of Jesus Christ", not that of Moses, Peter or Daniel. As you go through the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ is found everywhere. Almost every chapter has a reference to Him in one way or another. Besides the direct use of His name He is also observed in symbols like Son of Man, Lamb, and child of the woman. In addition to Christ, there are also references to churches and the cross (for example, Rev 1:5-6,11; 5:6; 11:11). All this evidence makes clear that the book of Revelation is a Christian book designed to teach us something about Jesus, life in the church, and the meaning of the cross.

This general picture (Revelation is a Christian book) is confirmed by an introductory statement in plain language near the beginning of the book, Revelation 1:5-6. There we are addressed with a minimum of symbolism, in language that cannot be misunderstood, as if John wanted to establish without question, right at the beginning, just what this book is about. It is about Jesus Christ, the "faithful martyr" (cross), "the firstborn from the dead" (resurrection), and the "ruler of the kings of the earth" (His ministry in heaven).

So no matter how strange the language of the book may seem, it is a deeply spiritual book, it unveils Jesus Christ and calls forth mighty songs of worship and praise. We **must** find out how Jesus Christ is the center and substance of each part of the book, even the seals and the trumpets. We **must** discover how He transforms the symbols and ideas drawn from the Old Testament. Truly in the book of Revelation "all the books of the Bible meet and end." (*Acts of the Apostles*, 585)

There is a basic insight that we need to keep in mind here. Throughout the New Testament, Christ is seen as the One Who fulfilled the whole experience of God's Old Testament people. The author of Revelation is constantly pointing to the New Testament Christ, but he is using Old Testament language to do it. God meets people where they are. John, as he is writing Revelation, sees the Christ of the New Testament in the Old. This leads to amazing depth when you dig behind the surface of the text, discover the Old Testament allusions, and see how the gospel transforms the Old Testament in the light of the doing and dying of Christ. For detailed study on how Christ fulfills the life and experience of God's Old Testament people, see my book *Meet God Again for the First Time*, published by Review and Herald, 2003.

Just as Christ fulfilled the history of Israel in His own experience, so in Revelation the experience of the church is also modeled on that history. When the New Testament talks about the church, it often does so in the language of Israel. In 1 Peter 2:4-10, the members of the church are living stones built up into a spiritual temple. Peter then quotes texts in Hosea that applied to OT Israel and applies them to the church, including Gentiles in this new Israel. In 1

Corinthians 10 Paul likens baptism into Christ as a new Exodus through a new Red Sea. The experience of the church is modeled on that of OT Israel.

So when Revelation introduces the 144,000, 12,000 come from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. (On the 144,000 as applying to the church rather than end-time literal Jews see Rev 7:4-8-- Excursus on the 144,000) It is talking about the church as twelve spiritual tribes descended from the witness of the twelve apostles (see also Matt 19:27-28). The letters to the seven churches (chapters two and three) contain many references to the people of God in the OT. They will have access to the tree of life (Rev 2:7; Gen 2:17), they will receive the hidden manna (Rev 2:17; Exod 16:33), and they have among them Balaam (Rev 2:14; Num 22-24) and Jezebel (Rev 2:20; 1 Kings 18-21). The church, in the book of Revelation and throughout the New Testament, is modeled on the experience of Old Testament Israel.

So the church really has two models for its behavior. On the one hand, it is modeled on the experience of Old Testament Israel. In the book of Revelation the church is dealing with Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon just as Old Testament Israel did. The experience of the church is described in the language of the past, the language of the Old Testament. But we have already seen that Jesus went through all the experiences of Old Testament Israel. So the church also models on Jesus Christ. "Where I am, there also will my servant be." (John 12:26)

Jesus' life, death and resurrection become models for the life, experience, and behavior of the church. In the book of Revelation, you can see it illustrated in some fascinating ways-- the church is pursued in to the wilderness (12:6,14), is put to death (6:9-10), endures suffering (13:9-10; 12:14), is made up of kings and priests (1:5-6; 5:9-10), serves 1260 days clothed in sackcloth (11:3-- Jesus ministry was 3 1/2 years long), is slain and mocked (11:7-10), but is also resurrected and ascends to heaven (11:11-12). So in the book of Revelation, the church is described in terms of both Jesus and Israel. But in what sense can the church be called Israel? Is it ethnic, geographical, or relational?

In ethnic terms, Israel started out as a birth family with twelve sons physically descended from Jacob. But "Israel" as a name was not ethnic to begin with, it was the spiritual name given to Jacob after his wrestling match with the angel (Gen 32:24-30). The sons of Jacob/Israel first became a race, and then a nation. So should the church be called Israel in an ethnic sense? No. First of all, Israel as a name is a spiritual designation (Hebrew: *yisra'el*-- "prince with God" or "one who strives with God" or simply "God strives") rather than just a family name or the name of a country. From the beginning it applied to a spiritual victory in relation to God.

Revelation 5:9-10 applies the national language of kings and priests (Exod 19:5-6) to the New Testament people of God. It tells us that on the cross Jesus purchased His followers from every tribe, people, language, and nation and made them to be a kingdom of priests. So in Revelation the language of Israel is applied to all the people of the earth who accept Jesus Christ. Whoever is in relationship with Jesus belongs to Israel because Jesus Himself is the new Israel. When the language of Revelation 7:4-8, therefore, sounds as if the 144,000 are exclusively of the ethnic tribes of Israel, we need to remember that the things of Israel have been expanded in a spiritual way through relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself is the new Israel, He has re-lived the experience of Israel. Anyone who is in relationship with Jesus, therefore, is adopted into the family of the new Jacob. It doesn't matter if you are German, African, Australian, Indian, or Chinese--it does not matter where you are from or what your ethnic background is--if you are in relationship with Jesus Christ, you are part of the family of Israel. So when Revelation uses the language and history of ancient Israel, we should not think in ethnic terms. When it comes to "Israel," it is no longer who you are descended from but Who you are related to that counts.

Old Testament Israel was geographically oriented. The family/nation was attached to a particular place. They had borders--borders that would change from time to time--but were reasonably identifiable. Whenever individual Israelites moved away from that national territory, they would seize every opportunity to travel back home, particularly to Jerusalem. Should the church be thought of as Israel in geographical terms? The answer is also no. Jesus, the new Israel, is located in heavenly places (Rev 5:6-14; 7:15-17). There is no place on earth that is closer to Him than any other. No matter where you live you have equal access to Him through the Holy Spirit.

To speak of the church in terms of Israel, then, is based on its relation to Jesus Christ. So while Revelation uses Old Testament language about Israel and its neighbors, the significance is neither ethnic nor geographical. Babylon, the Euphrates River, Jezebel, David, Egypt and Sodom are not to be understood in the old ethnic or geographical sense. They have to do with Jesus, the church, and the challenges the church faces in the course of Christian history.

The book of Revelation uses the language of the Old Testament but the meaning of places and groups is different. Physical things about Israel and its neighbors are applied in a spiritual and world-wide sense. The new Israel, on the other hand, is not located in any one particular place or made up of any one particular people. Anyone in any place who is related to Jesus Christ can become a part of that new Israel.

If the above is true, it has powerful implications for the interpretation of Revelation. An interpreter who misses this point will have as much difficulty understanding the book as will one who never heard of the Old Testament. So we must be honest and say that many sincere Christians do not read Revelation in this way. They believe that Revelation is not written to Christians, it is written to ethnic Jews living at the end of time. It really has nothing to do with the church, even though the beginning (1:11,19) and the end (22:16) seem to say that it does. We will look at evidence in Revelation that supports what I have been saying about New Testament Israel.

While I respect all godly Christians who differ with me on Revelation, I think the spiritual, worldwide nature of Israel in Revelation is easy enough to demonstrate, beginning with Rev 5:9-10. This text builds on Exodus 19:5-6, where ethnic, geographical Israel is a kingdom of priests. Israel in Exodus was an ethnic group heading for a geographical place. But the New Israel of Revelation is the purchase of the cross, and is applied to people from every tribe, language, and nation. Rev 5:9-10 adopts the language of Old Testament Israel. But there is no ethnic or geographical limitation to the New Israel of Revelation 5.

Another example of the New Israel in Revelation is the 144,000. In Rev 7:4-8 there is a description of 144,000 individuals made up of 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. It

sounds like a very ethnic group. But in the vision John never sees this group. Instead, when he looks he sees a great multitude that cannot be numbered, made up of people from every tribe, language and nation (7:9-10). This “heard” and “saw” pattern is common in Revelation (Rev 1:10-12; 5:5-6; 17:1-3; 21:9-10). What John hears described and what he sees seem very different and yet at another level they are the same. So although he hears about 144,000 Israelites, the meaning of the image is not focused on ethnic Israel. Israel has spiritual, worldwide characteristics in Revelation. This has huge implications for the interpretation of much of the symbolism in the book.

In Revelation, not only Israel is seen in spiritual and worldwide terms, but the same is true of Israel’s enemies, such as Babylon and the beasts. Let’s look at a specific geographical term in Revelation 16:12: “The sixth angel poured out his bowl on **the great river Euphrates**, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the east.” If you take the language of Revelation literally, the Euphrates River must mean the Euphrates River, a literal, geographical spot in the Middle East (in modern day Iraq). But is that what it actually means in the book of Revelation? We will explore that in the next post.

John himself explains what the Euphrates River is all about. Revelation 16:12 is part of the sixth plague. In Rev 17:1 he elaborates on the sixth plague when he describes a prostitute called Babylon sitting on “many waters” (the Euphrates River in Jer 51:13). The Euphrates River passed right through ancient Babylon. So the two are related in Revelation. The angel who comes to John in Revelation 17 is the sixth bowl angel. He has come to explain something about the Euphrates River. That something is found in Revelation 17:15.

“Then the angel said to me, ‘The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, **are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.**’” The waters John saw (in Rev 17:1) represented the Euphrates River. And what does the Euphrates River represent in Revelation? In verse 15 the angel tells us exactly. They are “peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.” The Euphrates River is a symbol of many nations—the political, secular, and economic powers of this world. In the Old Testament, the Euphrates River was a literal and local river but in the book of Revelation it is a symbol of world-wide powers in support of end-time Babylon.

The principle of “spiritual and worldwide” in relation to Israel is not difficult to demonstrate throughout the book of Revelation. In Zechariah 12:10 the “inhabitants of Jerusalem” mourn over the one they have pierced. But In Revelation 1:7 it is “every eye” in the entire world that mourns over the one they pierced. What the Jerusalemites do in Zechariah the whole world does in Revelation. In Revelation 1:7 the author clearly takes a literal and local matter from Zechariah and expands it to the whole world in relation to Jesus Christ.

In Isaiah 34:9-10 the land of Edom (a small nation in the Old Testament) is said to burn forever, with smoke constantly going up. This passage refers to the local situation of one of Israel’s national enemies in the Old Testament. In Revelation 14:10-11, on the other hand, the experience of Edom is applied to everyone in the world who receives the mark of the beast, an end-time spiritual concept. Here again, the author of Revelation takes a literal and local matter related to one of the enemies of Israel and applies it in a spiritual and worldwide sense.

In Joel 3:12-13 the tiny “Valley of Jehoshaphat” outside Jerusalem is the scene of the final battle between Judah and its geographical enemies. These enemies are located in what we

call the Middle East today. In Revelation 14:14-20, on the other hand, “outside the city” clearly has to do with the enemies of God’s end-time people located all over the world (notice the six-fold repetition of “earth” in Revelation 14:14-20).

So in the book of Revelation, Israel, the neighbors of Israel and even Babylon and its river are all applied in a spiritual, world-wide sense. The key to the language is relationship with Jesus Christ. Those who are on the side of the Lamb are ranked with Israel. Those who find themselves in opposition to God are Babylon, Egypt, Edom and the Euphrates River. Just as Israel is to be understood as spiritual and world-wide, so Babylon in Revelation is also spiritual and world-wide.

The principle of spiritual and worldwide Israel (and its OT enemies) is crucial for understanding Revelation. If you read into the book of Revelation the literal and local things of the Old Testament, you will misunderstand the whole purpose and intent of the book. You will have a great deal of difficulty finding Jesus Christ in that book and Jesus Christ is what the whole book is supposed to be about. The book of Revelation is not “The Revelation of the Middle East,” nor is it “The Revelation of Modern Day Israel.” It is “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:1) and of His church (Rev 22:16), it is about Jesus and the people who are in relationship to Him (Rev 17:14).

If a method of interpretation does not bring Jesus into clearer focus, the book of Revelation has not been understood. In the book of Revelation all the other books of the Bible meet and end. In the book of Revelation you find the Old Testament and the New Testament. You find a revelation of the gospel. Revelation makes the Old Testament come alive because the things of the Old Testament are baptized into Jesus Christ and applied to people who are living in the last days. So, the book of Revelation can make the Old Testament come alive for God's people today.

Rev 1:1 (continued)–

The text says that things “must happen soon.” But surely, 2,000 years is not soon! What does the text mean by soon? This “soon” must clearly be from God's perspective which is that a day with the Lord is like 1,000 years (2 Peter 3:8). Certainly, Jesus' coming has always been soon from one perspective: it is only a drop in the sands of time for God. But from our perspective the return of Jesus can always be soon as well. We don't know when Jesus will actually come, but we do know that He will come in our experience when we die, so the opportunity for us to get ready for His coming is now rather than sometime the future. If Jesus’ coming were not portrayed as soon many people would not take the opportunity to get ready for His return within their time of probation. So even in John's day the second coming of Jesus is portrayed as soon.

“And he signified it. . .” The word for “signified” here (*esêmanen*, from *sêmainô*) occurs in five other places in the New Testament (John 12:33; 18:32; 21:19; Acts 11:28; 25:27). In all but one of these, the word clearly means symbolic language being used to describe or predict the future. That meaning is most appropriate here as well. The language of Revelation is the language of symbolism, symbols that point to “what must happen” in the future. Of further interest is the fact that it is Jesus, not John, Who chose the symbols of the book. While John

received the vision and put it down in his own words, the actual vision and its symbols was put together by Jesus. The big picture of the vision is from God and not from John.

While this last paragraph was technical, it is of vital importance for the study of Revelation. It is fundamentally a book of symbolism. It is not a “movie of the future,” with exact depictions that would only be seen in reality at a later time. Images like the 144,000, Babylon and the Euphrates River are not to be taken literally unless the symbolic approach is meaningless in that particular case.

This passage is extremely important for the interpretation of Revelation. In most parts of the Bible, you take the words literally unless it becomes obvious that a symbol (a word that means one thing is also pointing to an extended meaning beyond itself) is intended. But the book of Revelation tells us right at the start that this is a book that needs to be read differently. In Revelation you take everything symbolically unless it becomes obvious that the plain, literal meaning is intended. This is the opposite of how you would read the rest of the New Testament. An example of the latter would be the word “Jesus.” I am not aware of anyone who would argue that when “Jesus” appears in Revelation, the word is a symbol of something else. Jesus means Jesus, the one who walked with the twelve in Galilee in the early part of the First Century. But “Lamb” in Revelation is not to be taken literally, it is another way of saying “Jesus.”

Deciding what terms in the book are to be taken symbolically or literally is not a simple task in many cases. While some symbols are clearly defined in the book (Rev 1:20; 12:9) and thus obviously symbols, most of the symbols in the book can only be recognized and understood in terms their usage elsewhere in the Bible or even in the wider context of the ancient Mediterranean world. So the interpreter should do everything possible to understand the symbolic meaning of a key term in Revelation. It is only when a figurative meaning makes no sense that a literal reading becomes the best explanation. Either way, the language of Revelation is the language of John’s time rather than ours. Speculative or allegorical readings of Revelation will usually reveal more about the interpreter than they do about God’s purpose for the book.

The combination of “what must happen” with “signified” is a clear allusion to the Old Testament. The phrase “what must happen” is unusual in biblical Greek and appears with “signified” in only one other place in the Bible, Daniel 2. I don’t think this particular allusion coming right at the beginning of the book is an accident.

In Daniel 2:45 the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) tells us that “the great God signified” (*esêmane*) to King Nebuchanezzar the things that would occur in the future. The Greek word for “signified,” of course, appears also in Revelation 1:1 (*esêmanen*). The language of 2:45 echoes the wording of 2:28, where you find the exact wording of Revelation 1:1: “What must happen (*a dei genesthai*) soon.” But in Daniel 2:28, 45 you don’t find the word for “soon” (*tachei*), instead there is “in the last days.” So the peculiar language of Revelation 1:1 is a powerful allusion to the core vision of Daniel 2. What was to be “in the last days” in Daniel is now “soon” in Revelation. There are multiple implications for the meaning of Revelation in this allusion to Daniel 2.

At the very opening of the book of Revelation, therefore, there is a powerful allusion to Daniel 2. This allusion ties the two books together, like companion volumes. While Revelation

alludes to many of the prophets (and in even greater quantity in the case of Isaiah), there is a special bond between the books of Daniel and Revelation.

The connection between Revelation 1:1 and Daniel 2 tells us many important things about the book of Revelation. First, as noted above, it is primarily a symbolic book. Unlike most of Scripture, in Revelation you assume everything is symbolic unless there is compelling evidence to take something literally. Second, the genre of Revelation will be similar to that of Daniel 2. We should expect at least some of the symbolism of the book to point to sequences of history in John's future. Not all of Daniel is historical apocalyptic, but much of it is, and that would be the case also with Revelation. Third, these historical sequences run from the prophet's time until the End, unless some other beginning point is compelling in the text. And finally, one way to detect historical sequences in Revelation would be some level of consistent symbolism. In Daniel two it is a series of metals in an image. In Daniel seven it is a series of carnivorous animals. In Revelation 8-11 it is a series of trumpet blasts. In Revelation 12 it is a series of actions by the dragon that ties the whole vision together. While the comparison is not exact, Revelation will have much material that reminds us of Daniel, and particularly Daniel 2.

Rev 1:2—

The previous verse began with the "Revelation of Jesus Christ," which is something that God gave to Him. Then it told us that the revelation is "signified" and will remind us of Daniel 2. In this verse the revelation becomes "the testimony of Jesus." John is the one who testifies about the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, which John saw. This combination of phrases is very instructive.

The "Word of God" recalls the Old Testament, the Bible that John read and loved. The prophets of the Old Testament often introduced their message with a phrase such as "The word of the Lord came to me" (Jer 1:4, etc., Ezek 7:1, etc., see also Isa 1:10; Jer 1:2; Dan 9:2; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jon 1:1; Mic 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Hag 1:3; Zech 1:1). In one case the Septuagint (Greek OT) even combined such an expression with the Greek phrase for "which he saw," a direct parallel to Rev 1:2 (Mic 1:1, see also Isa 2:1 and Zech 1:7, where the word of the Lord causes the prophet to "see"). So this verse places John in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, who received the word of God. In Revelation itself, it points the reader to the central role of the Old Testament in understanding the meaning of the symbols in the book. Revelation is full of allusions and echos to the writings of the Old Testament prophets. John's prophecy is an intentional successor to the prophecies of old and his authority is similar to theirs.

What is the testimony of Jesus? Is it a testimony FROM Jesus or a testimony ABOUT Jesus? The grammar of this phrase is similar to the opening phrase of the book, "the revelation of Jesus Christ." While the opening phrase of the book seems to have a double meaning (it is both "from" and "about" Jesus), the primary meaning here of the Greek genitive ("of") is "subjective," this is a testimony from Jesus himself. It reflects the chain of revelation that began when God gave him the revelation in the first place (Rev 1:1). The parallel phrase "the word of God" primarily reflected the process by which God communicated through the OT prophets to the people of Israel and Judah. While "the word of God" is also concerned with content, the usage in the prophets and this verse focus more on the process of transmission. So the

“testimony of Jesus” is likewise a focus on where the testimony came from more than the content of the testimony.

As we have just seen, in Old Testament times the prophets took the words of God and ministered them to Old Testament Israel. The concept “testimony of Jesus” suggests a New Testament parallel to the role of the Old Testament prophet. A crucial text for this is Ephesians 3:2-6. There it speaks about “the mystery of Christ” that was “revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets” (Eph 3:4-5, NIV). So the New Testament witness from Jesus involves prophets just as much as in Old Testament times.

According to Ephesians 3, the role of the New Testament prophet is to unpack the mysteries concerning Jesus and to help interpret the significance of His life, death, resurrection, heavenly work, and return to this earth. In this verse John claims to be one of those New Testament prophets. They received special revelation from God, just like the Old Testament prophets did. But this special revelation had an added perspective. The mystery of Christ, which was not fully revealed in OT times, is now made clear through the ministry of people like Paul. The book of Revelation is part of that prophetic witness. And like Paul (2 Cor 12:7-10), a large part of John’s witness comes through direct revelation from God.

According to the best Greek manuscripts, the testimony of Jesus is “what John saw” (literal translation: “The testimony of Jesus, which John saw”). John saw a vision that he received from Jesus Christ and that was already cast into symbolic language by Jesus (see comments on Rev 1:1). The testimony of Jesus is not the book of Revelation itself, the writing of Revelation is only described in the next verse. The testimony of Jesus is the visionary gift that John received from Jesus. (See Rev 1:2– [Excursis on the Testimony of Jesus])

John does not claim, in any sense, that the book of Revelation is his own idea or theology. He is very clear that he received the content of the book in a vision from Jesus Christ. His authority, therefore, is like the authority of the Old Testament prophets and the book of Revelation is like an Old Testament prophecy. For John, the book of Revelation is not an ordinary book and not his own book in the ultimate sense.

Rev 1:2 (Excursus on the Testimony of Jesus)–

The “testimony of Jesus” is a phrase dear to many Seventh-day Adventists. On the basis of Revelation 19:10 (“the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,” KJV), Adventists apply the phrase “testimony of Jesus” to the ministry of Ellen G. White; both her living ministry in the church from 1844-1915 and also the ongoing influence of her writings today. But is Revelation 19:10 actually a reference to the ministry of a specific individual in the 19th Century?

Revelation 19:9-10 comes at the climax of the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:5-8-- see comments on these passages for more detail). An angel interpreter comes to John in verse 9 and pronounces a blessing on those invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. John is so overcome by the angel and the announcement that he falls at his feet to worship the angel. The angel forbids him from doing this, saying that he is a fellow servant of John and of John’s “brothers” who “have the testimony of Jesus.” John should worship God instead. Then the angel explains, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” What exactly does this mean? A careful look at Revelation 19:10 is in order.

A straightforward reading of the Greek text of Revelation 19:10 indicates that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of “the” prophecy. It is not simply the spirit of prophecy, there is a definite article involved (*tês*). This opens up two main possibilities. The testimony of Jesus could be “the testimony of ‘the’ (or ‘this’) prophecy” implying the book of Revelation itself. In that case the testimony of Jesus would simply be another way of referring to the book of Revelation. It would not be a reference to a 19th century individual or anything else at the end of time. But there is another major possibility.

In many languages, including German, French and Greek, the definite article is used for abstract concepts like “beauty” and “love.” I will illustrate from the modern language (outside of English) that I know best, German. In German love is “*die Liebe*” (literally translated “the love”). The concept of outer space is *das All* (literally “the everything”). Abstract concepts naturally take the article, even though it would not be used in good English translation. That is the case with French also (*l’ amour*– “love”). The same is true with the Greek. So it is grammatically possible, even likely, that “the prophecy” here means exactly what the KJV translation says, “the spirit of prophecy.” That would mean the “testimony of Jesus” is the prophetic gift that lies behind prophetic revelations like the book of Revelation. Which of the two possible translations (with or without the definite article in the Greek) is correct?

The content of Revelation 19:9-10 is strongly paralleled in Revelation 22:8-9. In both passages John falls down at the feet of an interpreting angel to worship him. In both passages, the angel commands him not to do so in virtually identical language. The NIV (Rev 19:10; 22:9) accurately follows that Greek when it translates identically: “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers. . .” In both passages the angel’s command ends with “Worship God!” It is the content in between that is most important for understanding “the testimony of Jesus.” In Revelation 19:10 the “brothers” are defined as those “who hold to (literally “have”) the testimony of Jesus.” In Revelation 22:9 the “brothers” are defined as “the prophets.” Who is it that has the testimony of Jesus? The prophets. Therefore, the parallel text to Revelation 19:10 (Rev 22:9) supports the common translation of the verse as “the spirit of prophecy” in the abstract sense, the spirit that lies behind the writings of the prophets.

This post is really heavy, but worth the effort. There is one additional element of the parallel between Revelation 19:10 and 22:9 that deserves mention. Revelation 22:9 adds an additional phrase to “the prophets”: “And of all who keep the words of this book.” Some who disagree that “testimony of Jesus” means the prophetic gift point to this additional phrase as also defining testimony of Jesus. Those who have the testimony of Jesus are not only the prophets, but all who seek to follow the instructions of Revelation. There is no specific focus on the gift of prophecy. But I think this observation doesn’t hold.

Read literally Revelation 19:10 says, “I am a fellow servant **of** you and **of** your brothers. . .” The angel is a fellow servant of John and of his brothers. Revelation 22:9 says, “I am a fellow servant of you and of your brothers. . . and of all who keep. . .” Notice that Revelation 22 adds an additional group to the “fellow servants,” all who keep the words of this book. This third group has no parallel in 19:10. The “brothers” in 19:10 are those who have the testimony of Jesus. The “brothers” in 22:9 are the prophets. So another way of saying “prophets” is to say “those who have the testimony of Jesus.” This mean that the testimony of Jesus in 19:9-10 is the spiritual gift of prophecy possessed by John and numerous colleagues in the First Century. This agrees with what Revelation 1:2 says; the testimony of Jesus is “what John saw.”

Revelation 12:17 associates the testimony of Jesus with the end-time remnant (see Rev 14– [Excursis on the Remnant]). The remnant facing the dragon is recognized by two characteristics: They keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. Based upon what we have learned in this excursis, John would understand that the remnant of the woman’s seed (the church at the end of history) would have access to a prophetic, visionary gift like the one John had. Although Seventh-day Adventists have always read Revelation 12:17 in this way, the Adventist pioneers never noticed the conclusive parallel in Revelation 1:2, probably because the King James Version followed a slightly different Greek text, based on late medieval manuscripts. But our study has underscored the correctness of the SDA position on 12:17.

It is commonly held among Christians that the gift of prophecy ceased with the close of the New Testament canon. This belief has a long history, going back to the Second Century when a group called Montanists claimed that all believers in Jesus are as inspired as the prophets. In reaction, many in the church came to see the writings of the New Testament as the only truly prophetic revelation given to the church. But the parallel between Revelation 1:2 and 12:17 tells us that the office of the New Testament prophet did not die with the first century. It would continue in the church and be manifest again in the very last days of earth's history. The church (the remnant of the woman’s seed) would once again have a prophetic gift like John's.

In the final days of earth's history, God is not going to leave His people without a prophetic witness. The final events portrayed in Revelation can be quite scary and something to be concerned about. But in those final, scary events, God is not going to leave His people without witness. He will restore to them the prophetic gift He shared with John and the apostles. The author of Revelation does not understand himself to be the last of the new testament prophets. Down the line of history, when Revelation’s remnant comes in to play, the prophetic gift that John had would be manifested again.

According to Revelation 12:17, the end-time remnant has a prophetic visionary gift like John's. Seventh-day Adventists have always understood this text to be fulfilled in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Such a position is not exegetically compelling in the sense that the passage does not name the person who would have such a gift, nor does the text limit the gift to a single person. But applying the "testimony of Jesus" or the "Spirit of Prophecy" (19:10) to the work of Ellen White is exegetically defensible. The end-time remnant would have a prophetic, visionary gift like John's. If the ministry of Ellen White fits those criteria and comes in the context of the end-time remnant (see Rev 14 [Excursus on the Remnant]), it would be appropriate to consider her ministry a fulfillment of Revelation 12:17. While the prophecy does not limit the gift to a single person, any movement that considers itself a fulfillment of Revelation's remnant should manifest the presence of a ministry like John's.

Rev 1:3—

The text says, "Blessed is the one who reads. . . and blessed are those who hear. . ." What does that mean? Why does it speak of one person reading and many persons hearing? The book of Revelation in its original context was apparently intended to be read in public, in church. It was not originally intended to be studied by individuals but to be heard in a context where one person reads the book out loud and many people listen to that reading. Because of this, a number of scholars have suggested that the best way to understand the book is through a dramatic reading, like the performance of a play. As one hears the book read dramatically, it can have a special impact.

I once traveled through Turkey with a group of students. A young woman prepared a dramatic reading and song for each of the seven churches of Revelation. When we came to each specific location, on the very spot where the churches originally existed, someone recited the Scripture for that church and then we all sang a song to impress the message of that Scripture upon our hearts. It was both fun and meaningful to hear the book of Revelation done in the ancient way. When Revelation was first received, there were those who read and those who listened. Listening was intended to be a rewarding experience.

A literal translation of this verse says, "Blessed is the one who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy. . ." There is a special dynamic in the Greek text that cannot easily be translated. The words for reading and hearing are Greek participles which imply verbal action that can take an object. The object of these words are "the words of this prophecy." In the Greek the object of hearing can take two forms. In one form (the Greek accusative) this phrase would mean "hear **with understanding**." The other option (the Greek genitive) means "to hear **without** understanding."

A common question people ask with regard to Revelation is "Were the original readers intended to understand Revelation or is it more like Daniel, where even the author did not understand many things that were communicated to him?" (Dan 8:27; 12:4, 9). The grammar of this verse makes the answer to this question clear without a doubt. Revelation 1:3 tells us that the original readers and all who read and hear the book of Revelation were intended to understand its message. Revelation is not a sealed book like Daniel, for another time and place, its message was intended to be understood immediately. Therefore, a careful exegesis of the

text in the original context is an important foundation for our own understanding of the book today.

One of the motivations for reading and hearing the book of Revelation is the fact, in John's words, that "the time is near." Since 1900 plus years have passed, it is fair to ask in what sense the author could say that "the time is near." I think John's choice of language here is very significant. It echos the words of Jesus spoken as part of His end-time sermon in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. The comparison with Mark 13 is particularly close. So at this point we will break off the commentary for a time to explore the relationship between the phrase "the time is near" and Jesus' eschatological sermon, particularly the verbal parallels in Mark 13:29-33. Tomorrow look for an excursus on Mark 13 and the nearness of the end.

Rev 1:3 (Mark 13 and the Nearness of the End)–

In Mark 13 Jesus offers a number of "signs" of events that the disciples would experience in the course of their lifetimes (Mark 13:5-23– in these verses He repeatedly says "**you** will see"[second person], speaking to His disciples). Then in verses 24-27 Jesus switches to third person to describe the Second Coming of Jesus itself (verse 26, NRSV– "Then **they** will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory"). So in Mark 13:5-27 Jesus distinguishes between events preceding His return (5-23), which the disciples would experience, and the return itself (24-27), which the disciples would not experience. So looking forward from the Mount of Olives, Jesus predicted that the disciples would see the signs of the End, but not the End itself.

In Mark 13:29-33 Jesus summarizes the key points of the whole Olivet sermon. In Mark 13:29 (NIV) Jesus says, "When you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door." In the time of Jesus (around 31 AD), His coming was not near. Certain events (Mark 13:5-23– deceptions, wars, earthquakes, persecutions, preaching of the gospel) had to happen first. Only after all of these events take place could it be said of timing of the Second Coming (Mark 13:26) that "it is near" (Mark 13:29– *eggus estin* in the Greek). In Mark 13:33 (KJV) Jesus goes on to say, "Ye know not when the time is (Greek: *kairos estin*). The Greek word for "appointed time" is *kairos*. That is what is near in Mark 13:29, the appointed time of Jesus' Second Coming.

The striking thing is that Revelation 1:3 repeats the exact same language as Mark 13:29, 33 in the original. John says here, "The time is near" (*ho kairos eggus estin*). This phrase points directly to the language of Jesus in Mark 13:29 and 33. Since Mark 13:29-33 summarizes the key point of the whole sermon, the allusion in Revelation 1:3 points the reader to the whole sermon of Jesus as background to John's choice of words.

At the time of Jesus' end-time sermon in Mark 13 (also Matthew 24 and Luke 21), the Second Coming was NOT near. But by the time the book of Revelation WAS written (probably around 95 AD), the time of Jesus' coming was near. What had happened in the meantime? Evidently the "signs of the End" in Jesus' Olivet discourse. Is that really possible? Beginning tomorrow, we will examine the historical evidence of what took place from Jesus' day (31 AD) to John's (95 AD). We will discover that Jesus' words about the disciple's future had a very striking fulfillment within their own experience.

In Jesus' eschatological sermon on the Mount of Olives He talks about things the disciples would experience between His day and the End. He talks about "false Christs" (or "Messiahs" – Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22). These would be messianic imposters, people who would claim to be the Messiah, but would not be the real deal. Gamaliel makes reference to a couple of these (Acts 5:34-39) and we know from Josephus that there were many messianic imposters in the 60s, leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus also predicts that there would be many "false prophets" (Matt 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22). This prediction was fulfilled in the "Judaizers" of Galatians and the proto-Gnostics of Colossians and 1 John. In 2 Peter 2:1 reference is made to false teachers in the church who are a counterpart of the false prophets in the Old Testament. John clearly locates false prophets in the churches of his day (1 John 4:1-3).

In the Olivet discourse Jesus tells His disciples that they would experience "wars and rumors of wars" (Matt 24:6; Mark 13:7). Yet the whole Empire was largely at peace in AD 31, a peace that came to be known as the *Pax Romana*. So predicting wars and rumors of wars at the time Jesus' spoke was rather counterintuitive, but it proved to be correct a few decades later. By the 60s of that same century, especially in the run-up to the siege of Jerusalem, there was turmoil in many parts of the Empire. So Jesus' comment on wars and rumors of wars had a very real fulfillment in the lifetime of His disciples.

In His end-time sermon Jesus talks about famines (Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11), pestilences (contagious disease – Matt 24:7; Luke 21:11) and earthquakes in diverse places (Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11), all of which would occur in the experience of His disciples. A great famine in Palestine is mentioned in Acts 11:27-29. This probably occurred during the 40s sometime. It was after the conversion of Paul (Acts 9) but before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15 – Paul's first missionary journey [late 40s] began after the Council). But a far more dramatic famine occurred in Jerusalem itself during the siege and eventual destruction of the city in AD 66-70. In the time of Nero, 30,000 people died of pestilence in Rome alone. And earthquakes were quite frequent in the 60s. Laodicea was leveled by an earthquake in 60 AD. Pompeii was hit in 63, and Rome itself experienced an earthquake in 68 AD. So the disciples would have understood these predictions to be fulfilled within their lifetimes.

Jesus also predicted dramatic signs in the heavens before His coming would be near (Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:11, 25-26). While Adventists have understood these predictions to have a more recent fulfillment (from 1780-1833), the historian Josephus tells some remarkable stories of heavenly signs and apparitions in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Many of these stories are repeated in the opening chapter of the book *The Great Controversy*.

Jesus also predicted that sufferings like the pain of childbirth (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8) and persecution (Matt 24:9; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-19) would be part of the experience of His disciples. There is certainly abundant evidence in the book of Acts that persecution was the regular experience of the early church. And the language of birth pains is repeated in Romans 8:22 and 1 Thessalonians 5:3. Related to this is Jesus' language of a great tribulation like none before it or since (Matt 24:21-22). This too would seem to have a powerful fulfillment in incredible suffering of the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70).

There is one final item, that may seem a bit harder to place in the first-century experience of the disciples of Jesus. Jesus predicted that the gospel would be preached in the whole world as a witness to all nations before He would return (Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10). The natural reaction today is to declare that this part of Jesus' prediction has not yet been fulfilled. One possibility is that Jesus was not predicting that the gospel would go to the world in the lifetime of His disciples. After all, though He uses second person in Matthew 24:9 and 15, the language of the gospel going to the world (24:14) could be understood in a more general way. He does not explicitly say that the disciples would experience that (notice a similar pattern in Mark 13:9-11). Nevertheless, it seems clear that the apostles later believed that this prediction had been fulfilled in their experience. In Colossians 1:23 (NIV) Paul declares that the gospel has been preached "to every creature under heaven." In Romans 1:8 (NRSV) the church's faith is being "proclaimed throughout the world." In Romans 16:25-26 (ESV) the gospel "has been made known to all the nations." So even this aspect of Jesus' eschatological sermon found a fulfillment within the experience of the His disciples.

So the phrase "the time is near" in Revelation 1:3 needs to be understood in light of the Olivet discourse of Jesus, particularly as recorded in Mark 13:29-33 (see also Matthew 24:32-33). Jesus' clearly predicted that His return would not be "near" until certain events had taken place. There is abundant evidence that the things Jesus was referring to were powerfully fulfilled in the lifetime of His disciples. While Jesus did not predict that He would return during the lifetime of His disciples, He did indicate that His coming would become near within their experience. This is confirmed by Revelation 1:3, written toward the end of the first Christian century.

How could Jesus' coming be "near" late in the First Century and yet we are still here in the Twenty-first? An illustration may be helpful. If you approach the Grand Canyon from the south, the landscape is very flat for kilometers. But finally you reach Grand Canyon Village and you cannot drive further north without falling into the canyon! But merely arriving at the edge of the canyon does not mark the end of the drive. The road continues along the south rim of the canyon for many kilometers. Once you have arrived, you can experience the rim for hours without falling in!

The disciples of Jesus, similarly, would experience many things leading up to the nearness of the Second Advent. The church would see the Second Coming draw near in its early experience, as the events preceding the end were fulfilled in their experience. Since that time (AD 70), we have been traveling along the edge of the precipice. The Second Coming has been near in the statements of Scripture and the experience of God's people. Time has gone longer than the disciples expected (consider 1 Thess 4:15-17, for example), but the ultimate fulfillment of Jesus' predictions is still valid.

From a Seventh-day Adventist perspective the "signs of the end" that people experienced from AD 1780-1833 were God's way of renewing our focus on the End in more recent times. While time has always been proclaimed as short, the recent intensification of earthquakes, wars, rumors of wars, famines and pestilences give rise to hope that in a truly final sense, the end is near. We live in an age where one could truly imagine the gospel going to the world in a very short time, using amazing technologies like broadcast media, the internet,

Facebook and many more. While history is long and the expectation of many grows faint, those who believe in the words of Scripture will not lose heart. For them, the words of Revelation 1:3 (“the time is near”) ring ever true.

Rev 1:1-3 (Summary)–

The first three verses of Revelation display a chain of revelation moving from heaven to earth. Revelation in general and the book of Revelation in particular come to us through a three-part process. The revelation begins with God, moves to Jesus Christ, is passed on--through the angel--to John, and then it goes from John to the church, which experiences the revelation through public reading of the book.

The revelation begins with a transaction in heaven. Jesus is the One to whom God communicates His revelations. That revelation is called “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Jesus then passes that revelation on to John through a mediating angel (Rev 1:1). John sees the vision and experiences its symbols. That experience is called “the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 1:2). John then writes what he has seen in a book and that is called “the words of this prophecy” (Rev 1:3). So there are three stages in this process: “the revelation of Jesus Christ,” “the testimony of Jesus Christ,” and “the words of this prophecy.”

What is the revelation of Jesus Christ? It is what God gave to Him (verse 1). What is the testimony of Jesus Christ? It is what John saw (verse 2). What are the words of this prophecy? It is what John wrote (verse 3). This is a beautiful chain of revelation: first of all, the revelation is gathered together in heavenly places and placed in custody with Jesus; second of all, the revelation is ministered to John; and third of all, the revelation is written out and given to the people.

We have seen earlier that the testimony of Jesus is a debated concept. Some have suggested that the testimony of Jesus is the book of Revelation itself. These often point to the definite article in Revelation 19:10: “the spirit of the (this) prophecy.” But the chain of revelation in 1:1-3 suggests otherwise. In this chain of revelation, the testimony of Jesus is what John saw (1:2) rather than what he wrote (1:3). It concerns the transmission from Jesus to John. The book of Revelation transmits that “testimony” in written form so it can be passed on to the churches, whether or not John would be physically present.

The book of Revelation, therefore, is the product of John’s prophetic gift, not the gift itself. The testimony of Jesus is not the book of Revelation, it is the prophetic spirit. New Testament prophets were the bearers of God’s revelation. Some of them wrote books that were placed into the scriptural canon, others did not. John was not the only biblical writer that could be called a prophet, Paul also counted himself as one who was a bearer of the revelation of God (2 Cor 12:7-10).

Rev 1:4-6 (Introduction)–

This passage introduces a triple trinity. First there is a trinity of persons, representing God the Father (“the one who is and was and is to come”), then the Holy Spirit (the seven spirits before the throne), then Jesus Christ. The reason Jesus Christ is mentioned third here is because he is the subject of the other two trinities that follow in the passage. The first of these

two is a trinity of qualities that identify who Jesus is; His death, resurrection and heavenly status. Then there is a trinity of the actions Jesus has done to redeem His people and to elevate them to the highest status imaginable. The third of the three trinities is in the form of a doxology, a song of praise.

Rev 1:4—

"John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia" reminds us of the letters of Paul because at the beginning of his letters Paul says things like, "Paul, To the churches of Galatia" or "Paul, To the church in Rome." Such an opening is also typical of ancient letters that have been found at archaeological sites in Egypt (super-low humidity means long-lasting "paper"). So the ancient book of Revelation is introduced in this verse, not as an apocalypse or a prophecy, but as a letter. That raises one of the most interesting questions that scholars have asked about the book of Revelation: What kind of literature (genre) is it and how does that affect the way one reads the book?

When one looks more closely at the evidence in the book of Revelation itself, one realizes that it not conform to any particular style of literature. Its genre is a mixture of apocalyptic, prophetic, and letter (epistolary) forms. Although it has many features of an apocalypse or a prophecy, it is also a letter to real people in real places not far from where John was located at the time of writing. This book is not some abstract fantasy. It is grounded in a particular time, place, and circumstances like the rest of God's revelations in the Bible.

"Grace and peace to you" is a greeting that Paul often places at the beginning of his letters (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3, etc.) and was also so used by Peter and John (1 Pet 1:2; 2 Pet 1:2; 2 John 3). When a Greek met someone on the street, he would say "grace" the way English-speaking people say "hello." But there were some small differences between the typical Greek greeting and the kind used by John here and by Paul in his letters (*charis*).

The typical Greek "grace" on the street was *chaire* (greeting one person) or *chairete* (greeting several). In a letter it was more common to use the infinitive *chairein*. All of these are found in the New Testament. The singular *chaire* was used (at least in Greek translation) by the angel Gabriel to greet Mary (Luke 1:28), by Judas greeting Jesus in the garden (Matt 26:49) and by Pilate's soldiers as they abused Jesus (Matt 27:29; Mark 15:18; John 19:3). The plural *chairete* is found in 2 Cor 13:11 and Phil 3:1 and 4:4, but it is not clear in these references if the word is used as a greeting or simply to express "rejoice in the Lord." The infinitive *chairein* is used in letters described in Acts 15:23 and 23:26. It is also used as the opening of a letter in James 1:1. In 2 John 10-11 it occurs twice within a reference to the typical form of oral greeting in ancient Greek.

It is a bit surprising, therefore, that Paul and John do not use any of these typical ancient Greek greeting forms. Instead they use the Greek form *charis* (also "grace"), which had developed deep Christian meaning as a reference to the unmerited favor that God poured out on the human race in Jesus Christ (John 1:17; Rom 3:24; Gal 2:21; Eph 2:5-7). Christians celebrated the work of Christ in the way they greeted each other, which was close enough to the general Greek forms to be recognized as a greeting, but different enough to mark them off

from the rest of society, perhaps used at times as a secret signal to identify each other in unfamiliar places.

In addition to "grace" (*charis*), John uses "peace" (*eirênê* in Greek) as a greeting in this verse, as was the custom also in Paul's letters. If you are walking down the street in Israel today and see a Jew coming, you exchange Hebrew "shaloms" (peace) as a symbol of your blessing upon that person (blessing means roughly a desire for the person's prosperity and success). That this greeting was an ancient one in the Hebrew language is witnessed occasionally in the Old Testament (Judg 6:23; 19:20; 1 Sam 25:6; 1 Chr 12:18). It is also used as a farewell ("go in peace") in Judges 18:6; 1 Samuel 1:17; 20:42; 2 Samuel 15:9; 2 Kings 5:19). This word for "peace" (translated as *eirênê* in Greek) was also found in the mouth of Jesus as both greeting (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21, 26) and farewell (Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; 8:48). The farewell phrase is also mentioned in James 2:16. So what Paul and John seem to have done is combine the familiar greetings of both the Greek and Hebrew worlds. I'm sure it was not lost on either Paul or John that this combined greeting was an excellent summary for the entire ministry of Jesus.

The double greeting of "grace and peace" comes, as was noticed in the introduction to this verse, from several individuals: "From him who is, and who was, and who is to come, the seven spirits before his throne, and Jesus Christ . . ." At the very beginning of the book we have a complete trinity of "persons." (In the Bible I am not aware that the members of the godhead are ever referred to as "persons," that was a term the church in the fifth century settled on to best express the relationship within the godhead.) While the word "trinity" never appears in the New Testament, it is clear from passages like this that God can be spoken of in terms of three: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the book of Revelation we find a great fondness for the number three because it is the number of persons in the Godhead.

The first of these references is itself three-fold; him who is and who was, and who is to come. This is an evident reference to God the Father. The three-fold reference is repeated fully in Revelation 1:8 and 4:8. But in 11:17 there is a partial repetition of the language. God is introduced there as the one "who is and who was." Many later manuscripts have the full reference, including "is to come." This is typical of later scribes trying to "correct" what seems to them a mistake in the text. The actual reason "is to come" is missing in 11:17 is because it is in the context of the establishment of God's kingdom at the second coming. God no longer "is to come" because at that point in time He has already come.

The three-fold phrase "was and is and is to come" is an excellent example of the grammatical problems in the book of Revelation. Scholars of Revelation's Greek have noticed that its Greek is similar to that written by a typical fifth-grader (ancient papyrus discoveries include examples of school texts). This may partly be explained by John writing Greek as a second language. Another theory is that John uses grammatical oddities to signal the presence of an allusion to the Old Testament. The three-fold phrase in this verses mixes two participles with a regular verb in awkward fashion. A literal translation into English gives a sense of the flavor: "From the one being and the he was and the one coming."

A possible trigger of this grammatical oddity is an allusion to Exodus 3:14. There the Greek translation of the Hebrew reads something like "I am the one being" (or the one "who is"—*egô eimi ho ôn*). "The one who is and was and is to come" is a Greek way of saying "I AM

that I AM.” The ultimate source of the vision of Revelation is the God of the Old Testament, who is clearly manifested in the person of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:17-18, cf. Isa 44:6; 48:12).

The phrase “seven spirits” appears four times in the book of Revelation. The first reference is here, where the phrase is placed between references to God the Father and Jesus Christ, making up a trinity of personalities. The second reference is in Revelation 3:1, where Jesus introduces Himself to the church at Sardis. That reference echos this first one, a common pattern in Jesus’ introductory statements (see Rev 1:12-16 [Excursis on Jesus in the Seven Churches]–). The third reference is in Revelation 4:5, where the “seven spirits” appear before the throne of God in the heavenly temple. And the final reference is in Revelation 5:6, where the seven spirits are equated with the seven eyes of the Lamb. The spirits are sent out into all the earth.

The “seven spirits” seems clearly a reference to the Holy Spirit, the third member of the godhead, for the following reasons. 1) They first appear here in the context of God the Father and Jesus Christ, a trinity of personalities. 2) Revelation is a symbolic book (Rev 1:1), so a straightforward reference to the Holy Spirit would be more surprising than a symbolic reference. 3) The key number of the book is seven, so seven “spirits” fits the pattern of the book better than any other number. It is the number of completeness. 4) If the Lamb taking the book in chapter 5 is a reference to Jesus’ ascension to heaven, the seven spirits going out into all the earth (Rev 5:6) would be a reference to Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2. The Holy Spirit can also be referred in Revelation simply as “the Spirit” (Rev 1:9; 4:2; 14:13; 17:3; 19:10; 21:10; 22:17, etc.). The reference to “seven spirits” is always in the context of the heavenly relationship between the members of the godhead. References to “the Spirit,” on the other hand, are usually from the standpoint of John or the general human context.

Rev 1:5–

Reference to Jesus Christ here is one of those rare places in Revelation where the language is completely straightforward. “Jesus Christ” is not a symbolic reference to someone else or something else. It refers to the person known in the New Testament as the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, who was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, ministered for three and a half years in Galilee and Judea, and then died on a Roman cross, was buried, and resurrected on the third day after the crucifixion. He then ascended to heaven and was seated on a throne at the right hand of God. See notes on “the revelation of Jesus Christ” in relation to Revelation 1:1.

In the trinity of personalities introduction in this passage, Jesus Christ is mentioned third for literary reasons, not to diminish Him in any way in relation to the other two members of the godhead. He is the central focus of Revelation 1:4-6 from here on. Mention of Jesus Christ triggers the mention of three qualities or qualifications that enable Jesus to take up the heavenly role that He plays in the book of Revelation. He is the “faithful witness,” “the firstborn of the dead,” and “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” The word “witness” (*martus*) is drawn from the law court, but also is the source of the English word “martyr.” The concept of “witness” is expanded in the New Testament to include martyrdom; bearing witness unto death or through death. So while “faithful witness” can be a reference to Jesus three-and-a-half-year

ministry of preaching, it seem in this context much more a reference to the death of Jesus on the cross. This is confirmed by the opening phrase ("by His blood") of the trinity of actions that is listed in verses 5 and 6.

The second reference in this trinity of qualities describes Jesus as the "firstborn of the dead." This reference to the resurrection does not imply that He is the first person ever raised from the dead. There were a number of resurrections mentioned in the Old Testament (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:35; 13:21) and several also occurred in the course of Jesus' ministry and death (Luke 7:13-15; Matt 9:25 and parallels; John 11:43-44; Matt 27:52-53). But "firstborn" is used here more in the sense of pre-eminence rather than priority in time. By His resurrection Jesus gained pre-eminence over death and His resurrection is the necessary pre-requisite for the resurrections of all other human beings (see 1 Cor 15:20-23). So the first two core qualities of Jesus that make all the difference are His death and resurrection (see also 1 Cor 15:3-5).

The third crucial quality of Jesus listed here is that He is the "ruler of the kings of the earth." At His ascension to heaven after His death and resurrection, He joined His Father on the throne (Rev 3:21; 5:5-6). From this time on He has been "seated at the right hand of God" ruling the earth (Acts 2:33; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Heb 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22). It appears that when Satan induced Adam and Eve to sin (Gen 3:1-10), he usurped the dominion over the earth that they had been assigned by God (Gen 1:27-28). It was Satan, therefore, that represented earth in the heavenly council described in Job (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6). Through His death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus won back Adam's dominion over the earth, which He now rules from the right hand of God's throne in heaven.

In this verse we have the three characteristics or qualities of Jesus that make Him Who He is today. He is "the faithful witness," a reference to the cross. He is "the firstborn from the dead," a reference to His resurrection. He is "the ruler of the kings of the earth," a reference to His heavenly reign since the time of His ascension. These are a trinity of qualities that uniquely fit Jesus for the work that He does in Revelation. His death, resurrection, and enthronement in heavenly places are the things that qualify Him to be everything that the book of Revelation describes Him to be and everything that we need. These qualities are hidden to the world. The great power and authority of Jesus are not widely known in this world. But in Revelation Jesus glorious status is openly and publicly revealed.

In this passage John seems intent on piling up "trinities." In the middle of verse five a third consecutive triad begins. Having just completed a trinity of qualities, John now moves to three actions of Jesus. These actions are all directed toward His people. These are the things that Jesus has done and will do for you. This new trinity is in the form of a Greek doxology, which begins with a preposition of direction toward God as the object: "To him who loves us." The word "loves" is a present tense in the Greek. The Greek present not only expresses time in this context (like the English present tense), there is a particular focus on continuation. The Greek present is more than just here and now, it expresses that the action being described is going on and on, it is very continuous. This well expresses that the love of Jesus Christ is not a casual or temporary matter, it is ongoing and continuous. He "loooooooves" us.

Mention of the continuous love of Jesus Christ leads John to two statements about Jesus' actions in the past. These actions are the outgrowth of his love. The first of these past

actions is when Jesus "freed us from our sins by His blood." There is an important manuscript variant in relation to this word. In the King James Bible it translates that Jesus has "washed" (*lousanti*) us from our sins in His blood. By way of contrast, the NIV and ESV translate "freed" (*lusanti*) us from our sins. As you can see from the Greek transliteration, the word for "washed" (*lousanti*) is only one letter different from "freed" (*lusanti*) and the two words actually sound the same in the Greek. So scribes copying manuscripts on the basis of oral reading could easily switch one word for the other. While textual scholars prefer "freed" as the earlier and more likely reading, the choice is not a critical one for understanding, since both concepts are applied to believers elsewhere in the Bible. The concept of freedom from sin is related to the metaphor of ransom or redemption (Matt 20:28; Gal 3:13; 4:5; 2 Tim 2:6, etc.). The concept of washing from sin is also frequent (Acts 22:16; Eph 5:26; Tit 3:5, etc.).

In the Greek "freed" (or "washed" if you prefer the KJV reading) is an aorist indicative, which represents a specific point in past time. Some scholars see that moment of freeing or washing as the cross, that point in time when the whole human race was delivered from sin. This would parallel the opening phrase of the previous trinity in this passage, Jesus is the "faithful martyr." Another possibility is that the reference to freeing in the past is a reference to Christian baptism, that point in an individual's experience when the sins of the past were forgiven. This reference would be more likely if the word "washing" was in the original. There is nothing about the grammar of this passage that requires one interpretation or the other. But overall the book of Revelation has more of a cosmic than an individual focus, although the individual focus is not completely absent (Rev 5:9-10; 12:11; 14:13; 16:15; 22:17-19). So a reference to the cross here is more likely.

Rev 1:6—

The third in a trio of Jesus' actions is He "made us a kingdom and priests to God." Like the previous action of Jesus, this one is in aorist tense, meaning a point in past time. If the point in past time of the "freeing" is the cross, here the reference may be more to the ideal experience of the believer. When He ascended to heaven Jesus, in His own person, raised the whole human race into a new level of status on account of the cross (Rev 5:5-10). The highest levels of status in the ancient world were reserved for kings and priests. Kings had the highest status in the political realm and priests had the highest status in the religious realm. In personal experience this new status can be ours by faith when we contemplate the greatness of what Christ has done for us. At the point of baptism, when the new commitment of a person is ratified before the community, believers have the highest level of status imaginable.

The goal of our elevation to the status of kings and priests is that we might "serve" Jesus' Father. Christians are no longer "slaves" to sin, they are now "slaves" to God and to each other (Matt 20:25-28; John 12:26; Phil 2:7; Rom 16:1; 1 Cor 9:19; Gal 1:10; Col 4:12). It is interesting the degree to which Christians principles have influenced many parts of the world. Even in secular business there is an increasing focus on "servant leadership." The purpose of administrative leadership is to serve those who are under them, to provide resources and encouragement that will make them better. The mission of the whole institution is best served when leaders lead not for themselves but for the benefit of those that they lead. So we have

come to say in the United States that the president “serves” for a four-year term. Senators “serve” for a six-year term. Members of Congress “serve” for a two-year term. Officials of government “serve” at the pleasure of the president. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus gave the human race a new picture of God and what God’s rule is like. This has had a significant impact on how many governments and institutions seek to function.

The word “doxology” combines the Greek word for “praise” or “glory” (*doxa*) with the Greek word for “study” or “logic” (*logos*). It came to have the meaning of “song of praise.” The last phrase of this verse is clearly a doxology. It begins with “To Him be glory.” This is what praise is all about--seeing the tremendous qualities and actions of Jesus and giving Him the appropriate praise. Although not written in the form of a doxology, Revelation 14:7 is a call to God's people in the last days of earth's history to give Him glory. To glorify--to praise--Him is ultimately the reason human beings exist. And it will be at the heart of the final message to world.

The doxology actually begins in the middle of verse five with the words “to him.” The doxology, however, is interrupted by a three-fold recital of what Jesus Christ has done to earn the praise. Human beings are called to give Him glory because He loves us and has freed (washed) us from our sins by His blood and has raised us to a glorious status. The doxology then resumes with the repetition of the words “to him.”

Rev 1:4-6 (spiritual lessons)–

The outcome of Jesus’ death and resurrection is the highest level of status for the human race, to be counted as kings and priests. This can have powerful benefits in everyday life. I don't always feel like a king, do you? When you feel like you're washed up, nothing is ever going to go right, and everybody's against you, it is easy to wonder whether life is worth living. But those who are in Jesus Christ are elevated to a new and high status as kings and priests. Kings were the people in the ancient world who had all power and status and were looked up to. Priests had all power and status in the realm of religion. Because of the love that Jesus is constantly showering on us, we have been freed from sin and the tremendous burden that sin places on us. Jesus replaces the burdens and humiliation of sin with the highest place in terms of status. When you study the book of Revelation and begin to see what Jesus has done for us, you can begin to grasp the new status. We are truly, according to the new testament, in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. The new status becomes the basis for praise “--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”

The book of Revelation is not only a revelation of Who Jesus Christ is but also of who and what we become in relationship with Him. While the revelation of Jesus is the primary focus of the book, the reader is never far from the writer’s intention. Reading the book is intended to bring a blessing to readers and hearers. Praising God is in the context of beings freed from sin and raised to a totally new status in Jesus Christ. And throughout the book there are further reminders that the book is designed to have a major impact on the church and its collection of believers (Chapters 2 and 3; 5:9-10, 12; 12:11; 14:13; 16:15; 22:16-19). Revelation appeals to God's people not to be constantly looking at the things of the world, the sorrow and trouble, but to lift their eyes up to see Jesus and how they have been elevated to heavenly

places in Him. When believers understand the fresh status that they have in Jesus, they can become truly excited about praising and serving Him.

Rev 1:7-8 (Introduction)–

We move now to the last two verses of Revelation's Prologue (Rev 1:1-8). The focus up until this point has been on the chain of Revelation from God to the church. This revelation of Jesus Christ came by means of the vision John received and his writing out of that vision in the form of the book we still have today (Rev 1:1-3). This chain of revelation was followed by a triple trinity (Rev 1:4-6); a trinity of persons, a trinity of qualities and a trinity of actions. The latter two focus specifically on Jesus. After a brief doxology, our attention is drawn now to the return of Jesus, which was briefly mentioned in verse three ("the time is near"), but is addressed in more detail here.

Rev 1:7–

This verse is, like 1:1, deeply entwined with specific Old Testament texts. Nearly all commentators agree that verse seven alludes to Daniel 7 and Zechariah 12. The verse begins with an allusion to Daniel 7: "Behold he comes with the clouds." The pronoun "he" clearly refers to Jesus Christ, who was the sole focus of verses 5 and 6. Jesus was qualified for His mission by His death, resurrection and enthronement in heaven (Rev 1:5). His mission is then articulated in three actions: He loves us, has freed or washed us from our sins and has elevated us to the status of kings and priests. Verse 7 brings us to His final action for His people, He will return "with the clouds." The Greek "with" (*meta*) means that at His coming he is accompanied by clouds or "among the clouds." In the Old Testament clouds often accompanied manifestations of God (Deut 4:11; Psa 18:11-12; 97:2) and could even function like heavenly chariots for Him (Psa 104:3; Jer 4:13; Dan 7:13).

"He comes with the clouds" points in the direction of an allusion to Daniel 7:13-14. Daniel's son of man functioned like a second Adam, who was given dominion over the earth and the animals at creation (Gen 1:26-28; 2:18-20). Likewise, the son of man in Daniel 7 receives dominion over the animals (kingdoms) that were hurting Daniel's people in Babylon. During His earthly ministry Jesus often identified Himself with Daniel's son of man, who comes with the clouds of heaven to the ancient of days to receive worldwide dominion. Jesus saw Himself fulfilling Daniel 7 in part through his preaching, teaching and healing while He was on earth (Matt 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24). In Revelation 1:7, Daniel 7 is applied to the second coming of Jesus (see also Matt 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27). When He returns to earth He will be accompanied by clouds, just as He was when He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

Seventh-day Adventist exposition of Daniel 7:13-14 understands it as applying to Jesus' entrance into the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary in 1844. But critics often point to texts like the above to argue that Daniel 7 is fulfilled, first of all, in the earthly ministry of Jesus and finally, at the second coming of Jesus. There is no question that the earthly Jesus in the gospels applied Daniel 7 to both His earthly ministry (Matt 9:6; Mark 2:10, 28; Luke 6:5) and His

return to earth at the End (Matt 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; Rev 1:7). But does that settle the original meaning of Daniel 7? I believe it does not.

New Testament writers rarely, if ever, do exegesis of Old Testament texts in the sense that we understand the word exegesis today. In my book *The Deep Things of God*, chapter three, I describe exegesis as the process of seeking the answer to the question, “What was the biblical writer trying to say?” Exegesis focuses on the human intention of the biblical author when he or she wrote the passage in question. Jesus was not doing exegesis of Daniel 7 in His multiple references to the chapter in the gospels and also here in Revelation. He was not trying to tell us what Daniel’s original intention was in his original context. He was, rather, interpreting Daniel 7 in the light of His messianic ministry, featured in two advents, one in the first Christian century and the other at the end of history. Daniel’s intention for the “coming with clouds” seems to have been different. He was pointing to a heavenly event that would precede the judgment of the Little Horn at the end of the “time, times and half a time” (Dan 7:25-26). The dominion is given to the Son of Man as a prelude to it being taken away from the Little Horn. Thus, Adventist interpretation of Daniel 7 is exegetically defensible in the light of the original context. Jesus used the Daniel passage for a different purpose than Daniel’s original intent, but His interpretation does not supersede exegesis of Daniel.

Much of this verse is an elaborate allusion to Zechariah 12:10-12. But New Testament writers do not usually quote or allude to the Old Testament for the purpose of proof-texting. Rather, they quote small portions of the Old Testament with the larger background context in mind. This is certainly the case here.

Zechariah 12 reports the word of the Lord concerning the Israel of Zechariah’s day. It projects a future day in which the people of the earth gather against the city of Jerusalem and place it under siege (Zech 12:1-4, see also Joel 3, Ezekiel 38-39, Psalm 2 and Daniel 11:40-45). During that time the Lord would be a defender of the people of Jerusalem (Zech 12:5-9). To prepare them for this victory, He touches the hearts of the “house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem” with a spirit of grace and supplication. This happens as they “look upon me, whom they have pierced” (12:10). Since Yahweh is the one speaking in this passage (12:1, 4, 7), it is Yahweh Himself who is described as “pierced” here. On that day the house of David, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the “land” (12:12) around it would mourn. So Zechariah 12 is a prophecy focused on Yahweh and concerning Jerusalem, Judea and the inhabitants of that area. What does all this have to do with the book of Revelation?

In this verse John takes the literal, local situation of the prophecy in Zechariah 12 and applies it to the world-wide, end-time situation surrounding the return of Jesus Christ. In the process he takes the literal, local situation of Jerusalem surrounded by armies and expands it in two ways. First, the literal, ethnic, people of Israel (Zech 12:1) are expanded in Revelation to encompass all the followers of Jesus from every nation, tribe, language and people (Rev 5:9). In relationship with Jesus the Jewish Messiah, all are counted as Israel. Second, the geographical aspects of Zechariah are expanded to include the entire world. Jerusalem no longer represents only the ethnic people of Yahweh, it now represents the church, the community of everyone in every place who is connected to Jesus.

Notice the differences between Revelation 1:7 and Zechariah 12:10-12. In Zechariah it is God who is pierced. In Revelation it is Jesus who is pierced. In Zechariah it is the land around Jerusalem that mourns, in Revelation it is the entire earth that mourns. In Zechariah it is the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem that mourn, in Revelation it is all the tribes of the earth that mourn. So in Christ, the author of Revelation takes the literal and local things of Israel and expands them in a spiritual, worldwide way. The ethnic things of Israel are expanded in a spiritual sense, and the geography of Israel is expanded to the whole world. This has powerful implications for the interpretation of prophecy, especially in the book of Revelation. For more detail on this concept see Rev 1:1 (Excursus on Christ-Centered Prophetic Interpretation) and the book I co-authored with Hans LaRondelle entitled *The Bible Jesus Interpreted* (available in the Logos Bible Software SDA package and separately).

Seventh-day Adventists have seen special significance in the reference to “those who pierced Jesus” seeing His second coming. From this text and others, Adventists have drawn the inference that there will be a special resurrection just before Jesus’ return. That resurrection will include some of the righteous who died just before the End (Rev 14:13) and also those involved directly in the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; and Revelation 1:7). This special resurrection supports the idea that the key issue in the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan is the character of God. The universe can only be cleansed from sin when all acknowledge the true character of God, especially those who had distorted it before. For that to happen they need to witness the key turning points in the conflict, including the Second Coming itself and the final judgment before the great, white throne (Rev 20:11-15). What would otherwise be a minor detail has enhanced significance in light of the cosmic conflict over the character of God. See especially notes on Revelation 12:10-11, and the comments here and there on Revelation 12:7-12.

Rev 1:8–

The Prologue of the book of Revelation (1:1-8) ends with a statement that is clearly out of the mouth of God the Father. What is not clear in the verse is whether the last half of the verse is part of that statement or is John’s description of the Father in the language of verse 4. Either way there is one addition to the descriptive phrase, “the almighty.”

A new descriptor of God is also added at the beginning of this verse, “the Alpha and the Omega.” Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last. Thus this phrase is a metaphor for two other phrases with reference to God, “the beginning and the end” and “the first and the last.” The Alpha and the Omega are repeated with “the beginning and the end” in 21:6 and 22:13. “The first and the last” is found several times in Revelation (1:17; 2:8; 22:13) but always with reference to Jesus instead of the Father. So Alpha and Omega is another way of saying God is both all-powerful and all-knowing. God contains within Himself everything that can be known and referenced with human language.

What is interesting is that in 22:13 the Alpha and the Omega is applied to a speaker who turns out, in context, to be Jesus Christ. This is a strong affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ. Titles that are clearly applied to God the Father can also be applied to Jesus Christ in this book. In His divinity, Jesus Christ is as all-powerful and all-knowing as the Father.

The full phrase in the second half of this verse is repeated in Revelation 4:8, except in that case “Lord God Almighty” precedes the “was and is and is to come.” From that point on in the book, “Almighty” seems to replace the three-fold phrase as the primary designation of God the Father in the book of Revelation (15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:15; 21:22). In this verse the expanded phrase is clearly the capstone of the Prologue. In verse 9 the book moves from the opening theological concepts to a brief narrative of John’s experience on the Island of Patmos.

The word translated “Almighty” is from the Greek word *pantokratôr*. This word is a combination of the Greek word for “all” (*panta*) and one of the Greek words for “power,” by itself “the mighty one.” (*kratôr*). So Almighty in the Greek means “the one who has power over all.” It is an expression of God’s omnipotence. “God Almighty” reflects a long history in the Old Testament, beginning with Genesis 17:1, where we find the Hebrew equivalent of *pantokratôr*, *El Shaddai*. *El Shaddai* appears dozens of times in the Old Testament, most of them in the book of Job. In the New Testament outside of Revelation, it appears only in 2 Corinthians 6:18, where it is found in a complex interweaving of Old Testament passages from the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) and the prophets.

Rev 1:8 (Theological Implications)–

One of the great subtexts of the book of Revelation is the problem of suffering and evil. If God is truly all-powerful, why is there so much evil and suffering in the world? This verse is the first of many places in the book of Revelation that pull back the curtain and reveal a cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan that lies behind the history of this world and helps to explain many things that would be hidden otherwise. In the cosmic conflict we observe the extent to which Almighty God has limited His power in order to provide true freedom to His created beings. God’s self-limitation is seen in two major ways. First, in creation God expanded the universe in a way that limits His options for future action. And second, when God gave creatures that He created freedom to choose and to love or not love, He much further limited His own power to empower those He had created. The reason for freedom is love. Love must be freely chosen if it is to be genuine. It cannot be mandated or forced if it is to be love. On the other hand, freedom to love implies the freedom to reject or to rebel. For the sake of love, God was willing to take on the risk of rebellion. God did not will evil, it was the natural consequence of freedom exercised in destructive ways. See notes on Revelation 12:7-12.

Rev 1:1-8 (Summary and Conclusion)–

What we have in the first eight verses of Revelation is a clear statement of the sum and substance of this book. It evolves around two great themes: Jesus Christ (Who He is and what He does, which centers on the cross) and eschatology (the coming with clouds and the reference to the last things with the Omega). One could say in Revelation that the Alpha of Jesus’ work was His life, death, and resurrection and the Omega, the final events of this earth and His second coming. The book of Revelation plainly revolves around these two poles: the pole of Jesus Christ and who He is, and the pole of eschatology, the things that will happen in John’s future.

The prologue provides the basic setting for the symbolic portions of this book. As we go through the various symbols of the book, many of which are strange and bizarre to our eyes and ears, we must not forget where we began. The more difficult parts of the book can be best explained with reference to that which is reasonably clear. And John begins with language that is reasonably clear. This book is the Revelation of Jesus Christ and not just the revelation of the end-time, not just a revelation of the Antichrist. When you are wading through the seals, the trumpets and the plagues, it is easy to forget that. But John warns us at the beginning; if you don't get a clearer picture of Jesus from your study of this book, you probably haven't understood it correctly.

But even more than this, the book of Revelation was not given primarily to satisfy our curiosity about the future. It was given to teach us how to live today and how to respond to the mighty revelation of Jesus Christ. "Blessed is the one who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep the things which are written in it, for the time is near." Revelation 1:3. As we saw earlier, the hearing of this book is to be with understanding. And to the degree that we understand, our lives will be changed.

As we have outlined above (see notes on 1:1-8 [Introduction]), the Prologue of Revelation has many parallels to the Epilogue, found in 22:6-21. These two parts form a bookend of relatively plain language around the visionary center. The center of the book contains a pyramid of seven visions, the first parallel to the last, the second parallel to the second from the last and so on. The fourth vision (Rev 12-14) stands on its own in the center as the primary focus of the entire book. This is a Hebraic structure in which the climax of a work comes in the center rather than at the end of the book.

Rev 1:9-20 (Introduction)–

This section of the book of Revelation introduces the human author, John, in a bit more detail (1:9), summarizes the context in which the whole book was given (1:10-11), gives us our first visual glimpse of Jesus (1:12-18) and then returns to the context in which the book was given (1:19-20). While to some degree this passage serves as an introduction to the entire book of Revelation, it is also a specific introduction to the seven letters Jesus dictates to the seven churches of Asia Minor.

I understand the book of Revelation to be a series of seven visions, four of which are explicitly divided into seven parts: the letters to the churches, the seals, the trumpets and the bowls. The seven visions are listed as follows:

Seven Letters to Seven Churches (Rev 2-3)

Seven Seals (Rev 6:1-8:1)

Seven Trumpets (Rev 8:7-11:18)

The Great War (Rev 12:1-15:4)

Seven Bowls (Rev 16)

The Millennium (19:11-20:15)

The New Jerusalem (21:9-22:5)

Each of the seven visions of Revelation is preceded by an introductory scene that recalls some aspect of the Old Testament sanctuary and temple. These introductory scenes function

like stage backdrops to a play in seven acts. Each introductory scene has important connections to the entire vision that follows. The seven introductory scenes are listed as follows:

Jesus Among the Candlesticks (Rev 1:9-20)

The Heavenly Throne Scene (Rev 4-5)

The Altar of Incense (Rev 8:2-6)

The Ark in the Heavenly Temple (Rev 11:19)

The Emptying of the Heavenly Temple (Rev 15:5-8)

Worship and a Wedding (Rev 19:1-10)

The New Jerusalem Descends (Rev 21:1-8)

The seven visions and their sanctuary introductions together form a seven part chiasm in the structure of the book as a whole. Together with the Prologue (Rev 1:1-8) and the Epilogue (21:6-21) the book of Revelation exhibits the following chiastic (a pyramid structure where the first and last parts are parallel and the center is highlighted) structure:

Prologue (1:1-8)

Seven Churches (1:9-3:22)

Seven Seals (4:1-8:1)

Seven Trumpets (8:2-11:18)

The Great War (11:19-15:4)

Seven Bowls (15:5-18:24)

The Millennium (19:1-20:15)

The New Jerusalem (21:1-22:5)

Epilogue (22:6-21)

Right at the beginning of this passage is an interesting way to open a new section of the book, "I, John" (verse 9). This is a fairly unique form of expression in the New Testament, it is, however, familiar from the Old Testament. You will find it in the prophetic portions of the book of Daniel (Daniel 7-12), most of which were written in the Hebrew language. We have already noticed a connection between the books of Daniel and Revelation (see notes on Rev 1:1) and as you go through the verses that follow (Revelation 1:12-17 is parallel to Daniel 10), this is clearly the case.

In the very last vision of Daniel is a figure much like what we see in Revelation 1. It seems clear that the vision of Christ in Revelation 1 builds on Daniel 10, in particular, and to a lesser degree on the vision of Daniel 7. The last narrative of the book of Daniel ties in with the first narrative of the book of Revelation.

What is the significance of this? In a sense, Daniel and Revelation are like a two-volume edition. There is One Who comes in the clouds and is like the Son of Man. The figure of Jesus that we see at the beginning of Revelation reminds us of the book of Daniel. We will get into the details as we explore Revelation 1:12-16. But an important piece for understanding this scene is the strong background in the book of Daniel. There is a special relationship between the book of Revelation and the book of Daniel.

Rev 1:9–

The experience of John is similar to that of Jesus. John and the churches he is writing to share a companionship in the "suffering," the "kingdom," and the "patient endurance" that was exhibited by Jesus. We may take Jesus' behavior for granted today, it is simply part of a long tradition that has been handed down to us. But John and the churches share in the fresh-minted wonder of the Jesus story. According to John's Gospel, Jesus was sent from the very bosom of God to show us what God is like (John 1:18). If we have seen Him, we have seen the Father (John 14:9). In Old Testament times, God spoke to people in many and various ways, none of them close to as clear the revelation that came in Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-3). But think what that means.

Many people picture the God of the Old Testament as powerful, judgmental, and at times arbitrary and severe. He always gets His way in the end and He can use rain, wind and fire to accomplish His purpose. But the New Testament tells us that, rightly understood, the Old Testament points us to Jesus (John 5:39-40). And Jesus unfolds a picture of God that balances and clarifies the picture one might get from the Old Testament. This self-sacrificing picture of God is affirmed also in Revelation (Rev 5:6; 12:11).

Jesus came to proclaim "the Kingdom." That kingdom was promised in the Old Testament (Psalm 47; Dan 2:44-45) and was the fervent longing of the Jewish people at the time of Jesus. Jesus' opening message was a radical, prophetic proclamation that the long-awaited kingdom of God had now arrived (Matt 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43). But the kingdom Jesus preached was not of this world (John 18:36-37). The government of God is of a different character than human forms of government. Human government is driven and motivated by power, fame and wealth. God's government is driven by self-sacrificing love. So at the very time Jesus was proclaiming the kingdom, He was patient in suffering and endurance to the point of death. Through His death on the cross Jesus painted the ultimate picture of what God is truly like.

The church's experience is to be an extension of Jesus' own experience. Suffering and persecution give believers the opportunity to show in the flesh anew what God is like. When believers model their lives on Jesus, when they become what He was and do what He did, it gives the world a clearer picture of the character of God. On the other hand, when churches are driven and motivated by power, wealth and earthly esteem, they betray their own mission and give a false picture of God. That is why the "beasts" of Revelation are important to its message. Revelation reveals to the world that the very entities that put on a Christian face often damage God's reputation in the world and make His character over into the image of Satan.

This verse tells us that John was on the island of Patmos "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Patmos is an island in the Aegean sea, much closer to modern-day Turkey (the Roman province of Asia) than to mainland Greece. It is shaped somewhat like a sea horse, about ten miles long and six miles wide at its widest point. In the middle is an excellent, natural harbor, where the width of the island is less than 200 meters.

Why was John on the island? The Greek behind this verse is ambiguous. He is simply on the island "because of" the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. The gospel is the reason he is there. Does that mean, as long church tradition suggests, that the preaching of the gospel led

to John's arrest, trial and imprisonment/exile on the island? Or does it mean he went to the island to preach the gospel there? Which is it? Was he there to be a prisoner or a preacher (obviously it is possible to be both)?

According to church tradition, during the reign of Roman Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96) John was summoned to Rome to be tried for his faith by the Emperor. His witness there was powerful and the Emperor sought to destroy him by having him cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. God preserved his life in much the same way as Daniel's three friends survived the fiery furnace in Daniel 3. Failing to kill John, the Emperor ordered him banished to the Island of Patmos where, according to Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, 5.30.3, Irenaeus was an early church father in the late second century), he was put into forced labor in the quarries. When Domitian died (AD 96) without an heir, a new dynasty led by Nerva (AD 96-98) allowed John to leave the island and return to his home in Ephesus.

This is a great story, and it is repeated in *Acts of the Apostles* by Ellen White (pages 569-570). But recent historical scholarship raises some questions about the accuracy of the story.

Recent scholarship, particularly the work of Leonard Thompson (the book *Apocalypse and Empire* and the article in *Semeia* 36), has raised serious questions about the traditional story of John's exile to Patmos. For one thing, ancient Patmos was not a barren and isolated place. There is plenty of evidence for significant ancient structures, and the island's location in the Aegean Sea was strategic (Athens and Rome to the west, Ephesus to the east, Santorini and Rhodes to the south, Byzantium to the north). Thompson also notes that the historical accounts of Domitian as a persecutor and scoundrel all arise from historians (like Tacitus and Suetonius) that served in the court of the emperor Trajan (the adopted son of Nerva, reigned AD 98-117). So their accounts of Domitian are written in the context of a new dynasty that replaced the line of Domitian and could be expected to treat Domitian's legacy with hostility. Actual records of Domitian's time suggest a more benevolent figure than the tradition portrays. So current Revelation scholarship considers the suffering of Christians at the time Revelation was written to be more "perceived" and anticipated than actual. After all, the Empire had been the protector of Paul on numerous occasions in the book of Acts.

What about Patmos itself? Is there any ancient evidence that Patmos was used for banishment by emperors in the first century? In *Semeia* 36 Thompson discusses two first-century documents that are relevant to the topic. One is a list of all the penal islands in the Empire at the time. Patmos is not on that list. The second document is a list of all the islands in the Aegean Sea and their primary function. Patmos is listed there among the resorts, not the prisons. Anyone visiting Patmos today would probably agree that if Patmos were a prison, it would be a great place to be in jail! The climate is extremely pleasant and the landscape is amazingly beautiful. So actual first-century evidence does not support the contention of later tradition (late second to fourth centuries) that Patmos was a penal island.

Is there any way to reconcile the tradition of John's banishment (which was repeated by Ellen White) with the current state of the historical evidence? As a Seventh-day Adventist, I would have to point out that neither Ellen White nor those closest to her (like her son) claimed that she was an expert on history. The historical parts of books like *Acts of the Apostles* and *The Great Controversy* were drawn from historians of the time and changes would often be made

when further research called for it. There was no sense that her visions were concerned with historical detail, the history she outlined were not the point she was making, it illustrated the spiritual points she was trying to make. So one historical option is to consider John's exile to Patmos one of those details of history that she would "correct," given the current state of the historical discipline.

But since historical understanding is not a settled matter, we should probably not discard the idea of banishment on Patmos too readily. It may be helpful to consider the possibility that the two bodies of historical evidence (tradition and historical scholarship) can be reconciled in some way. I would suggest that John might well have been exiled to Patmos even if it was not a typical penal island. Placing John on Patmos could have seemed to the Emperor a way to keep his message out of the urban centers of the Empire without being too trying on the body of an old man. But most actions have unintended consequences. And the unintended consequence of the Emperor's action was to provide a place where John's message was recorded in a powerful fashion that made it more prominent in world history than it otherwise might have been. God does not force the human will, but uses human decisions to ultimately accomplish His purposes.

Rev 1:10–

When did John receive this vision? When scholars look at this text, they don't find the question easy to answer. This verse opens with "on the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit" (NIV). The question that immediately jumps out at us is what John means by the "Lord's Day" (*kuriakê hemêra*)? We will explore the biblical and historical evidence in more detail in posts to follow, but first I want to summarize the most likely options scholars have considered. There seem to be five basic possibilities. Since this question is of particular interest to Seventh-day Adventists, I will summarize the five options and then explore them in detail by means of an Excursis on the Lord's Day in the book of Revelation, starting tomorrow.

Rev 1:10 (Excursis on the Lord's Day)–

There are five major options in the scholarly literature for the meaning of the "Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10. 1) One obvious possibility, since John seems to be a Jew, is that "Lord's Day" indicates that John received the vision on the Roman Saturday, the seventh day of the Jewish week, the day following the Preparation Day (Luke 23:54). 2) Some Christians writers in the Second Century identified the Lord's Day as the Roman Day of the Sun, the first day of the Jewish week, and the day that Jesus rose from the dead (Matt 28:1). So it is possible that John is indicating he received the vision on the day we would call Sunday. 3) While Jesus rose on the first day of the week, it was also the time of Passover. Ever since Jesus' death and resurrection, Christians have celebrated Easter every year around the time of Passover; not once a week but once a year. So one possibility is that John was signaling that the vision came to him at the time of year that Jesus rose from the dead, the time of Passover around March or April of our calendar each year.

4) There is the suggestion that the "Lord's Day" is reminiscent of the Old Testament "Day of the Lord." Perhaps John was using Lord's Day because it is connected to God's

judgments at the end of the world, the close of human history. Perhaps he was saying, “when the vision came to me I was conscious that the end of all things was at hand.” 5) Finally, some ancient documents suggest there was an “Emperor’s Day” once a year when people in the Roman Empire were encouraged to come together for worship. If John had that in mind when he wrote this verse, he would be noting the true God’s intervention on the very day when the Emperor seemed fully in control. The point would be that Jesus is Lord, not the Emperor.

Which of these possibilities is the correct one? Stay tuned.

This Excursis makes extensive use of the fine article on the subject by Ranko Stefanovic in *Andrews University Seminary Studies*. It was on the “Lord’s Day” that John went into vision, the vision that provided the content which became the book of Revelation (see notes on Rev 1:1-3 [Summary]). The phrase “the Lord’s Day” occurs only here in the entire Bible in exactly this form. Additionally, it is not found in earlier Christian literature outside the Bible. Furthermore, the context of Revelation 1:10 does not help us with our understanding. So at the very least, the meaning of “the Lord’s Day” is a difficult thing to determine from a scholarly perspective.

The adjective “Lord’s” (*kuriakos*) does occur in earlier Greco-Roman sources, usually referring to the Imperial government. But in Christian sources, this adjective is always used with reference to Christ, as in “the Lord’s supper” by Paul (1 Cor 11:20). Church Fathers in the following centuries used the adjective similarly: The Lord’s word, the Lord’s Scriptures, the Lord’s blood, the Lord’s body, the Lord’s commandments and the Lord’s coming.

Most attempted solutions focus on a particular day, either a day of the week (Saturday, Sunday) or a day in the year (Easter, Emperor’s Day). But one of the five proposals is more figurative: the Day of the Lord. In future posts I will take up these five proposals, beginning with the least likely and moving to the most likely, at least in my opinion.

The least likely view of John’s intention for the phrase “the Lord’s Day”, in my opinion, is probably the association with Easter. In this view, John went into vision on the Christian Passover, the annual day celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. The argument is made that weekly Sunday worship developed later and grew out of the annual celebration of Easter. And in support of this view it is noted that the first part of Revelation has strong allusions to the Passover feast (some scholars have noted evidence of all the annual feasts in different parts of Revelation; see Rev 1:13 [Excursis on the Sanctuary in Revelation]).

The arguments for Easter as the meaning of the Lord’s Day are largely speculative. There is no evidence that Easter was ever called “the Lord’s” (*kuriakê*) or that Sunday worship grew out of the Easter celebration. But more decisive against this view is the fact that John lived and wrote in the eastern part of the Empire, and the eastern church used the “Quartodeciman” reckoning of the resurrection, which celebrated it on Passover in the Jewish lunar calendar. Thus Easter could fall on any day of the week. In the western part of the Roman Empire Christians customarily celebrated Easter on a Sunday near Passover, and this practice prevailed church-wide by the fourth century. But that historical reality is irrelevant to what John meant by Lord’s Day around 95 AD. Easter is not likely what John had in mind.

The second proposal for “Lord’s Day” in this text is that it serves as a parody of the Emperor’s Day that is supposed to have occurred in the First Century. It is known that before the

ministry of Jesus there was a day known as *hêmera Sebastê* or “Augustus Day.” It is also known that in the First Century the adjective *kuriakos* could apply to things that belonged to the Emperor. Putting these two pieces together suggests that “Lord’s Day” could be a subtle reference to an imperial equivalent.

The relation between Lord’s Day and Augustus’ Day, however, does not work linguistically. There is no evidence that the specific term Lord’s Day was ever used to honor the Emperor, whether Augustus or others. Neither is there direct evidence that early Christians used the title “Lord” (*kurios*) for Jesus in reaction to emperor worship (it is possible, but there is no evidence). If John had wanted to bring the emperor’s day into play at this point in his book, he could simply have used the familiar phrase *hêmera Sebastê*, Augustus Day. He did not. Hence this explanation for Lord’s Day in Revelation 1:10 is unlikely.

The most popular view of Revelation 1:10 among commentators is that the “Lord’s day” of Revelation 1:10 is Sunday, the first day of the week, the day of Jesus’ resurrection. The strength of this view is that later Church Fathers used the phrase with reference to Sunday, and the Latin equivalent, *dominus dies*, became one of the names for Sunday in the Latin Church. But all clear references to Sunday as the Lord’s Day are nearly a century or more later than Revelation and thus cannot serve as evidence for the meaning when John wrote Revelation.

Having said that, there are two documents much closer to the time of Revelation that have been cited in favor of this proposal, they are the *Didachê* and Ignatius’ Letter to the Magnesians. The *Didachê* is also known as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. This document is dated anywhere from 70-150 AD and most scholars today favor a fairly early date. So the *Didachê* may be contemporary with the book of Revelation or even earlier. The key verse (14.1) is translated by J. B. Lightfoot as follows: “On the Lord’s own day, gather together and break bread and give thanks.” At first glance this sounds like the perfect proof for the Sunday thesis, but there are some problems with that connection.

Does *Didachê* 14.1 prove that “Lord’s Day” in this text refers to the early Christian day of worship, presumably Sunday in the minds of many scholars? Hardly. The reality is that the word “day” in Lightfoot’s translation (see yesterday’s post) is not there in the Greek original (if it were it would be *hêmeran*). It was supplied by the translator. The actual text reads “according to the Lord’s ____ of the Lord.” The sentence begins with “according to” (*kata*) rather than “on.” And the adjective Lord’s (*kuriakên*) does not define what belongs to the “Lord.” In context the author of the *Didachê* probably meant “according to the Lord’s *teaching*” or “the Lord’s *way*.” So the key sentence in the *Didachê* turns out not to be relevant to the question of “Lord’s Day” in Revelation 1:10.

The following is a very heavy post and a bit hard to follow, but it is important because there is so much misinformation out there about this passage on the basis of reconstructed texts and mistranslations.

Another widely cited evidence that the Lord’s Day in this verse could be referring to Sunday is the *Letter to the Magnesians* by Ignatius of Antioch. Ignatius of Antioch was martyred around 15 years after Revelation was written. So the date of the letter (written on the way to martyrdom) is very close to the date of Revelation. The letter deals with the issue of “Judaizing” that seems to have been an issue in Magnesia (a city in the same general area as the seven

churches of Revelation). In *Magnesians* 9:1 Lightfoot translates “no longer keeping the Sabbath, but living in accordance with the Lord’s day, on which our life also arose through Him. . .” What could possibly be clearer? A few short years after Revelation was written, to a church not far from Ephesus, Ignatius instructs the church to stop keeping the Sabbath, but rather worship on the Lord’s Day, the day of Jesus’ resurrection. But once again, things are not what they seem to be at first glance. And translator’s biases can clearly mislead greatly.

Once again (as with the *Didachê*) the word “day” is not found in the original Greek text, but is supplied by the translator. Actually, the one Greek manuscript says “according to the Lord’s life” (*kata kuriakên zôên*), however, the Greek text reconstructed by modern editors on other grounds, omits the word for “life” (*zôên*), leaving the noun the adjective modifies unspecified. But even if you accept the reconstructed reading, the one word you cannot supply here is “day,” because if that implies keeping Sunday, it is the Old Testament prophets who are keeping Sunday! (Mag 9.1-2, cf. 8.1-2) But if it is the OT prophets who set the example of living according to the Lord’s _____, it is most likely the Lord’s LIFE, which was disclosed in their prophecies. Surely Ignatius wasn’t saying the OT prophets were keeping Sunday! But it was appropriate for him to say they were living according to Christ’s life as they understood Him ahead of time.

Let me summarize the previous post and its significance for the meaning of Lord’s Day in Revelation 1:10. According to popular reconstruction, Ignatius was telling the Magnesian Church to stop keeping Sabbath and instead keep Sunday. But as we have seen, such an interpretation is based, not on the Greek text of Ignatius, but on a reconstruction of the Greek text and a mistranslation of the reconstruction. What Ignatius is saying to the Magnesians is this. Don’t keep the Sabbath in a legalistic manner, as some Jews and Christians do, rather keep it according to its true, spiritual meaning, as the Old Testament prophets did. In fact, an unknown fourth century editor put exactly such a spin on Ignatius’ text in the margin of the crucial passage. He wrote: “Let every one of you keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner. . .”

What are the implications of Ignatius’ text for the Sabbath/Sunday developments in the early church? The most that can be said is that the Magnesians were certainly still keeping the Sabbath, not far from Patmos and Ephesus, and perhaps fifteen years later than Revelation. Rather than supporting a Sunday interpretation of Revelation 1:10, Ignatius supports the observance of the Sabbath in John’s circle of churches.

As far as the Sunday interpretation of Revelation 1:10 is concerned, there is no evidence in the late First Century or the early Second for the phrase “the Lord’s Day” to be a reference to Sunday. During this period, whenever Sunday is mentioned, it is always described simply as “the first day of the week.” This is true of the Gospel of John (20:1, 19), which was probably written shortly after Revelation. It is also true of *The Epistle of Barnabas* (dated 100-130 AD) 15:8-9. It is also true of Justin Martyr (around 150 AD), who bears the first unambiguous witness to Sunday observance, but calls it “the first day of the week,” not the Lord’s Day (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 24, 41, 138). He also calls the day after the Sabbath the Day of the Sun (*hêliou hêmera*), but not the Lord’s Day (*First Apology*, 67).

Interestingly, the Latin version of a Christian apocryphal work called *Acts of John* actually calls the seventh day (not the first) the Lord’s Day. This work was probably written 50-80 years

after Revelation, so the best evidence we have not only fails to support Sunday as the “Lord’s Day” but actually points more toward the Sabbath as the day John would have been referring to. But more on that later.

Before we look at the evidence for the Sabbath as the day John was referring to by “Lord’s Day,” there is one more proposal to examine. A number of scholars, going back almost 300 years, have proposed that John’s “Lord’s Day” (*kuriakê hemêra*) is actually pointing to the Old Testament Day of the Lord (*hê hêmêra tou kuriou*). The Day of the Lord is a common expression in the prophets for the day of judgment, the troubles that would accompany the last days (Isa 13:6, 9; Joel 1:15; 2:11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad 15; Zeph 1:14; Mal 4:5). The phrase is also frequently used in conjunction with the Second Coming of Jesus in the New Testament (Acts 2:20; 1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10).

The immediate difficulty with this proposal is the difference between the two expressions, “the Lord’s” (*kuriakê*), on the one hand, and “of the Lord” (*tou kuriou*) on the other. They are both possessive forms, but one is an adjective and the other is a noun in the genitive case. On the other hand, detailed studies in ancient Greek usage indicate that the two expressions can be used interchangeably. The one expression is a synonym of the other. Thus, the Lord’s supper (1 Cor 10:20) is synonymous with “the table of the Lord” (1 Cor 10:21). The difference between the two is a matter of emphasis. It is, thus, possible that the phrase “the Lord’s Day” in Revelation 1:10 expresses that the vision of Revelation is centered on the *parousia* (coming) of Jesus Christ.

A strength of the “Day of the Lord” interpretation for Revelation 1:10 is that eschatology is the framework for every vision of the Apocalypse. The Prologue and the Epilogue of Revelation both speak of “things which must happen soon” (1:1; 22:6), “the time is near” (1:3; 22:10), and “I (or “he”) am coming quickly” (22:7, 12). These multiple parallels at the edges of the book form an envelope for the entire work. This suggests that the whole content of Revelation is focused on eschatology, which in the rest of the Bible can be summarized in the phrase The Day of the Lord. Since one of these eschatological statements come in the very first verse of the book, it adds to the sense that eschatology is a central theme of the entire book.

This can be verified extensively along the way. Each of the seven churches offers promises to those who overcome (2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21). These promises are fulfilled in the New Jerusalem vision at the end of the book, although not always in the same order as the promises (22:2; 21:7-8; 22:4; 22:5; 21:27; 21:10; 22:3-5). The final end is anticipated in the full extent of the worship in 5:13-14. The second coming of Jesus is portrayed in 6:14-17, 14:14-20 and 19:11-21. Final events also seem to be in view in 11:15-18 and much of Revelation chapters 13-22. So the Day of the Lord interpretation for this verse is at least plausible.

In my opinion the most likely explanation for the Lord’s Day in this verse is that John is referring to the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, Saturday to us today, the day after the Preparation day (Luke 23:54), which we know as Friday. While the exact phrase “the Lord’s Day” (*kuriakê hemêra*) is never used elsewhere in the New Testament or in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, there are strong equivalents in a number of places, and these all refer to the seventh-day Sabbath. In the Septuagint, the seventh day is “a Sabbath to the Lord (*kuriô*) your God” (Exod 20:10). So the Sabbath command itself indicates that the Sabbath

is the special day that the Lord has made. The same language is used in the Sabbath command of the second recitation of the ten commandments as well (Deut 5:14).

In addition, there are more than a dozen texts in the Old Testament where “the Lord” (*kurios*) refers to the seventh day as “my Sabbath” (*ta sabbata mou*— Exod 31:12-13; Lev 19:3, 30; 26:2; Isa 56:4-6; Ezek 20:12-13, 16, 20-21, 24; 22:3-8; 23:36-38; 44:12-24). In addition to these, the Hebrew of Isaiah 58:13 describes Yahweh referring to the Sabbath as “My holy day” and “the holy day of Yahweh” (ESV— the second word “day” is not in the text but carries over from the previous phrase— “my holy day”). This language is extremely close to “the Lord’s day” and could well be the text John had in mind when he wrote “the Lord’s Day” in Revelation 1:10. The Sabbath is the only day of the week in the Old Testament that could be called the Lord’s day.

In the New Testament supporting evidence for the Sabbath as the Lord’s Day is also strong. All three Synoptic Gospels (Matt 12:8; Mark 2:27-28; Luke 6:5) quote Jesus as saying “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath (*kurios tou sabbatou*). Thus the Sabbath as “the Lord’s Day” makes perfect sense from the biblical perspective. Mark 2:27-28 is even more interesting than the other two, because it explicitly ties Jesus’ saying back to creation.

In Mark 2:27 it says (my translation), “The Sabbath was created for the man (*ton anthrōpon*) and not the man (*ho anthrōpos*) for the Sabbath.” In the Hebrew “the man” is *ha adam*, which is often translated simply as “Adam” (Gen 1:27; 2:7, 15, 16, 18-23, 25). This confirms that the Sabbath is not something for the Jews only (created at Sinai) but goes back to the beginning. It was created for Adam and, therefore, the whole human race.

When Jesus was correcting His audiences, He often went back to creation for God’s ideal. In Matthew 19, the Pharisees were disputing about divorce (Matt 19:3) on the basis of Deuteronomy 24:1-3 (Matt 19:7). Jesus acknowledges Moses, but notes that Deuteronomy offers a temporary measure because people’s hearts are hard (Matt 19:8). If you want to know God’s ideal, you need to go back to the beginning (Matt 19:8, cf. 4-6). The same happens in Mark 2. The dispute with the Pharisees over Sabbath observance is based on tradition (Mark 2:23-24). But the ideal for Sabbath observation goes back to creation (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath ultimately is the Lord’s Day because the Lord created it along with the human race at the beginning.

Based on the biblical evidence alone, the Lord’s Day as the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, is the best attested. And one can add to the biblical evidence the reading in the Latin version of the *Acts of John*, late in the Second Century, in which the seventh-day Sabbath is explicitly called the Lord’s Day. There is only one day of the week in the Bible that is called “the Lord’s,” and that day is the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week.

In addition to the above, there is also evidence the Sabbath continued to be kept in the churches of Asia Minor after the time of John. Ignatius accuses the Magnesians of “sabbatizing.” Such a word only makes sense if they were keeping it (Ignatius wants them to keep it in the right way). In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 7.1, 8.1, and 21.1, probably written in Smyrna in the mid-Second Century, Polycarp was captured on the Preparation Day or Friday and his martyrdom occurred on “the Great Sabbath” (*sabbaton megalon*). The combination of

the preparation day and the Sabbath indicates that Christians in Smyrna were still observing the Sabbath 60 years after Revelation was written.

It would be strange, therefore, if John used the phrase “the Lord’s Day” for any other day of the week than Saturday.

According to Stefanovic, the biblical evidence indicates that John probably had both the seventh-day Sabbath and Day of the Lord in mind when he wrote the book of Revelation. The strongest biblical and historical evidence favors the seventh-day Sabbath as the day when John received the vision. But the eschatological nature of the book of Revelation also favors an allusive reference to the Day of the Lord. So Stefanovic concludes that the Lord’s Day in Revelation 1:10 has a double meaning. The purpose of the vision was to explain things from the perspective of the Day of the Lord, the final judgment, the end of the world. But that eschatological vision came to John on the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath of the Lord. Since the Sabbath goes back to creation, its ongoing observance also anticipates the restoration of Eden at the end of the world. The Sabbath is also a sign of deliverance in the Exodus and the Return from Babylon (Deut 5:15; Ezek 20:10-12). These events in the New Testament anticipate God’s final deliverance of His people at the Second Coming. Stefanovic concludes that John coined a new phrase, the Lord’s Day, to combine two biblical concepts, the Sabbath and the Day of the Lord, into a single idea.

While I was initially skeptical, my careful review of Stefanovic’s work suggests to me that he is right. John often uses double meanings, starting with the very first phrase of the book, “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” So a double meaning in this verse should not be a surprise.

Rev 1:10 (continued)–

As John came to be “in the Spirit,” he heard behind him a loud voice like a trumpet. Note that he did not hear a trumpet, rather he heard a loud voice that had characteristics of a trumpet. In verse 12 he turns to “see the voice.” As he turns to look John sees a “son of man” standing among seven lampstands. This son of man is clearly understood to be Jesus, the one who died and rose again (Rev 1:18).

This is one of several instances in Revelation with a hearing/seeing dynamic. John hears one thing (1:10) and sees another (1:12ff.). The two most prominent examples of this literary strategy are the lion/lamb sequence (5:5-6) and the two groups in Revelation 7. John is told about the lion of the tribe of Judah. But he never sees the lion. When he looks he sees a Lamb looking as if it were slain. In chapter 7 John is told about a group called the 144,000 drawn from the twelve tribes of Israel (7:4-8). But he never sees the 144,000, when he looks he sees a great multitude that no one can number from every nation, tribe language and people (7:9ff.). The Lion and the Lamb would seem to be opposites at first glance, but they are very different images for the same person, Jesus. The 144,000 and the Great Multitude are also opposite on the surface of things, yet this literary dynamic suggests that they are two different ways of characterizing the same group, the end-time people of God. In the Book of Revelation, what John hears and sees often seem very different, yet they are the same person or group.

Coming back to Revelation 1:10-12, the voice like a trumpet is the voice of Jesus. Though described differently, it is the same voice in verses 10 and 12.

Rev 1:11–

John is here commanded to write what he sees and send it to the seven churches. The counterpart of this verse is verse 19, where John is commanded to write what you “have seen.” The parallel between these two verses, with the move from present to past tense, suggests that John has seen the entire vision of Revelation between verse 11 and verse 19. When we get to verse 19 we will look more closely at the overall structure of what John has seen and has written down in the last book of the Bible.

The purpose of writing the vision is so it can be sent to the seven churches. These seven churches are always written in the same order, the order that they have in a geographical circuit. If some one started in Ephesus and traveled through the seven cities/churches in a broad circle, he or she would encounter each city in the order given here and would eventually return to Ephesus after visiting Laodicea. Many scholars believe this was a postal circuit in Roman times. But in this book the seven cities/churches are probably listed in this way because they were all part of John’s pastoral district. The ancient sites of these seven churches can all be visited today.

In the New International Dictionary of the Bible, the article on the Book of Revelation was written by John Bowman. Bowman notes that the seven churches are represented by seven candlesticks. Evoking the seven-branched candlesticks of the Old Testament sanctuary, he imagined a giant, back-lit, seven-branched candlestick on the island of Patmos casting a shadow on the Roman province of Asia. Each of the seven cities/churches are located roughly at the tips of the shadows cast by the seven branches of the candlestick. This suggests a chiastic structure in which Ephesus is parallel to Laodicea, Smyrna to Philadelphia, Pergamum to Sardis, with Thyatira being the top and center-point.

That John might have such a seven-branched structure in mind is supported by a number of things in the text. The letter to Thyatira is roughly twice as long as all the others, which is appropriate to its central location in the chiasm. Pergamum is parallel to Sardis and both churches receive largely negative messages. Smyrna is parallel to Philadelphia and both churches receive largely positive messages. Thus, it is expected that the messages to Ephesus and Laodicea are also parallel in focus, and we will explore this further when we get to chapters 2 and 3.

Rev 1:12-18 (Introduction)–

When John turns to “see the voice” he observes Jesus in the midst of seven candlesticks or lampstands. No movement is mentioned here, but in Revelation 2:1 Jesus is described as the one who “walks” among the seven golden lampstands. According to verse 20, these lampstands represent the seven churches listed in verse 11. So Jesus is portrayed here as intimately connected to the seven churches. This intimate connection is worked out in detail in the seven letters that follow (Rev 2 and 3). Jesus knows all He needs to know about each of the seven churches (Rev 2). And He comes to each of the churches with characteristics drawn from the introductory vision in the opening chapter. See Rev 1:12-20 (Excursis on the Introduction to the

Seven Churches) for more information on this interconnection between the introductory vision and the seven letters themselves.

An intriguing possibility is that this vision of Jesus among the lampstands recalls a key statement of the Old Testament covenant between God and Israel: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people." Leviticus 26:12. God used the ancient language of covenant to communicate important aspects of His relationship with Israel. Jesus here relates to the churches the way that Yahweh related to Israel in Old Testament times. The picture of what God is like in the New Testament is grounded in the story of Jesus but rooted in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament God made a covenant with Israel saying, "I will be your God and you will be my people." Covenants in ancient times were like contracts or agreements between two parties. Some of those covenants were between equals, but scholars have noted the similarity of God's covenant with Israel and ancient suzerainty covenants, where the stronger party lays out the obligations of the weaker party, but the weaker party is allowed considerable self-rule. The covenant spells out the limits of the relationship so all parties are clear on what is expected and what is not. The covenant concept is not that well known among most Christians today, but it is an important biblical concept and has some interesting implications for everyday spiritual life.

There are some interesting spiritual implications for us in the ancient concept of covenant. First of all, the concept of covenant provides tremendous security in our relationship with God. God makes clear what He expects from us and we are not left to wonder what He has on His mind. He gives us the security of knowing exactly where we stand with Him.

Second, God is not arbitrary. Unlike some ancient rulers, He does not subject His people to arbitrary rules that they are required to follow but have no effect on Him. In the Old Testament God subjects Himself to the rules of the covenant (Deut 7:7-9). The covenant concept is used repeatedly in the Israelite religion because God is not like the ancient pagan gods who could not be trusted. The pagan gods could be very capricious. They could be on vacation when you prayed and not hear you. They could get up cranky and wipe out 10,000 tribesmen just for the fun of it. The Hebrew God came into just that kind of environment and limited Himself legally for the sake of His people. He said to them, "I am the God of the covenant. I will tell you exactly Who I am, exactly how I behave, and how I will respond to various situations you will find yourself in. I will subject myself to my own laws and behave exactly as I am asking you to behave."

God IS God and is not limited in any way by nature, He is truly all-powerful. But in creation God chose to limit Himself by giving His creatures freedom to think and do. And in the covenant He graciously subjected Himself to the same laws His creatures on earth were subject to, so that Israel could have clear expectations of how He would behave. The beautiful result of God's gracious covenant is that Israel had security in its relationship with God. The Israelites had a God who could be depended on while the gods of other nation were capricious and arbitrary. Israel knew where it stood with Yahweh because He could be counted on to act in consistent ways. In the image of Jesus among the candlesticks, we see once again the God of

the covenant. The same God that walked with Old Testament Israel now walks with New Testament Israel.

It is encouraging to know that God's character is the same today as it was yesterday. The God we could count on yesterday we can count on today. He is not going to wake up on the wrong side of the bed and change His opinion of us in a totally arbitrary way.

People in today's world may not find the concept of covenant as helpful as the ancients did. In today's world there is much suspicion of legalities, lawyers, and courtrooms. We fear that such processes are just a complicated way to subvert justice and empower some over others. But in the ancient context, the language of covenant provided people with tremendous security in their relationship with God. In a universe that is stable and governed by law it is safe to move about. Gravity is not here one day and gone the next. Covenant assured the Israelites that they were on safe ground with Yahweh. And it assured followers of Jesus that He too was the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8), in deed as well as in word.

As a pastor I have seen many followers of Jesus who are insecure in their relationship with God. They don't know if they have done enough or if they are right with God. They don't know if they have the assurance of salvation or if they have received the Holy Spirit. Many may be reassured by the picture of a gracious God. But others may discount all such talk because something inside them feels that they are too flawed to be the object of God's unlimited grace. To them the metaphor of covenant can assure them that God has made every provision for "exceptions" like them. It is not against His character to accept those who are deeply flawed.

In this passage the Jesus of the covenant provides security to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Are these churches perfect? Have they done all the right things? No. As we go through the seven letters, it is very clear that the churches are fallible, make many mistakes, and, in many ways, are even turning away from Jesus. Some are in such a dire situation that the light on their candlestick seems about to go out. Yet Jesus continues to walk among those candlesticks as the faithful God of the covenant Who is there for His people. What He did for them, He does also for us today. Jesus is the God of the Covenant.

The covenant concept is one example of how the picture of Jesus among the lampstands is grounded in the Old Testament. But the vision itself is filled with multiple allusions to various parts of the Old Testament. The most direct connection between this vision and the Old Testament is Daniel 10:5-6, where there is a visionary figure of a man clothed in linen with a golden belt around his waist. His face was like lightning, his eyes like a flame of fire, his arms and feet were like polished brass and his voice was like the roar of a multitude of people. The vision of Revelation 1 also has similarities with the vision of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7. And Jesus is described in language (1:17-18) that is reserved for Yahweh in the Old Testament (Isa 44:6; 48:12). So the "son of man" in this passage is a divine figure in Old Testament terms.

In addition to Isaiah and Daniel, there are allusions to other prophets and the Psalms. We will explore these allusions in more depth as we work through the vision verse by verse.

Rev 1:12-20 (Excursus on the Introduction and the Seven Churches)–

This is an introductory vision to the seven church letters that follow in chapters two and three. It functions like a stage backdrop, containing many elements that are picked up in the letters themselves. As Jesus proclaims His messages to the seven churches, He constantly refers back to this introductory vision.

In this introductory vision Jesus is described with many features. He is standing in the middle of the lampstands (verse 13), He has eyes like blazing fire (14), His feet are like burnished bronze (15). Out of His mouth comes a sharp, two-edged sword and in His hand He holds the seven stars (16). He is the first and the last (17), the one who died and came to life, and the one who holds the keys to death and Hades (18). It is a picture of the heavenly Christ in all His glory come down to the Island of Patmos to encourage John and guide the seven churches.

The fascinating thing about the introductory vision to the seven church letters is that Jesus uses portions of this vision to introduce Himself to each of the seven churches. To the church at Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7) He introduces Himself as the one who holds the seven stars (1:16, 20) and walks among the seven golden lampstands (2:1; 1:13). To the church at Smyrna (2:8-11) Jesus introduces Himself as “the first and the last” (1:17), the one who died and came to life (1:18). To the church at Pergamum (2:12-17) Jesus introduces Himself as the one who has the sharp, two-edged sword (2:12).

This pattern continues throughout the seven churches, although some of the introductions include elements also from the Prologue (1:1-8). To the church at Thyatira (2:18-29) Jesus introduces Himself as the Son of God (1:6). When He comes to the church at Sardis (3:1-6) He is the one who has the seven spirits of God (1:4). And to the church at Laodicea (3:14-22), Jesus is the faithful and true witness (1:5), the ruler of God’s creation (1:5). Each of the seven prophetic letters begins with an introduction of Jesus in terms of some elements of the vision of chapter one and the Prologue.

When you consider how Jesus introduces Himself to each of the seven churches you learn some fascinating things about God. In the Gospel of John Jesus is portrayed as the greatest revelation to humanity of what God is like (John 1:18; 3:13-17; 5:19-21; 17:1-5, see also Heb 1:1-3). So from a New Testament perspective, the more you learn about Jesus, the better you will understand the character of God.

In the letters to the seven churches Jesus presents Himself to each church in a unique way. No two churches get the same picture of Jesus. He knows what each church is like and He respects each church’s unique needs. He meets each church where they are. Here we see the amazing condescension of God in Jesus Christ. Although the churches are very flawed, He nevertheless shapes the way each one encounters Him. No church gets the full picture of Jesus, they probably couldn’t handle it (John 16:12). And no two churches get exactly the same picture of Jesus. The letters to the seven churches are a marvelous example of a major biblical reality: God meets people where they are.

There are some powerful spiritual implications that can be drawn from the way Jesus introduces Himself to the seven churches of Asia. For one thing, at the beginning of each letter Jesus says something to the effect of “I know your works” (Rev 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). He

knows each of the churches intimately. This is true also of His relationship with each one of us. He knows all about us, even before we encounter Him!

That in itself has a number of implications. One of the keys to spiritual life is confession. Confession is simply telling the truth about yourself. The first step in a deeper walk with God is acknowledging your faults (1 John 1:9), revealing your deepest and darkest secrets to Him. But at that point many people hesitate. It is painful to explore the dark side of one's characters. It can feel humiliating and shameful. But in the case of Jesus, there is certainly no need to hide anything from Him, He already knows all there is to know about us! (See also John 2:23-25) Since He already knows, confessing our sins to him is not a threat, He will not change His mind about us on account of new information. Our secrets are safe with Him, nothing worse can possibly happen on account of confession.

We have seen that Jesus is introduced in each of the seven church letters with characteristics drawn from chapter one, particularly the introductory vision of 1:12-20. In chapter one we get a full picture of Jesus. But none of the churches gets the full picture, in fact, each of the churches gets a different pictures of Jesus. This is very significant in a couple of ways. Since none of the churches have the full picture of Jesus, it is clear that they need each other. Each church's witness is supplemented by the others. Only the combined witness of all the churches will give the full picture of Jesus in this world. The same applies to individuals. No individual has the full picture of Jesus. We all need each other, even when the views of others are challenging. There is no church and no individual who has reason to think they have it all together. We can all learn from each other, feeble and defective though that witness might be. And it underlines the importance of humility. Since we all "know in part" (1 Cor 13:9), arrogance and self-importance is excluded, both for individuals and for churches. My (our) picture of Jesus is incomplete, so we all need to be constant learners.

There is one final implication of the relationship between the introductory vision of Jesus (1:12-20) and the letters to the seven churches (chapters two and three). Each of the churches is different. Each of the churches is flawed. Each of the churches is loved by Jesus (Rev 1:5; 3:19). Each of the churches is approached in a different way by Jesus.

The encouraging outcome of all this is that Jesus loves each of the churches, feeble and defective though they are, the way they are. While He doesn't want any of them to stay the way they are (He encourages each to overcome in its own way), He has not rejected them on account of their defects. He loves each of the churches, just the way they are. And that steadfast love is the basis of church improvement in each case. In fact, that steadfast love is exhibited in the very fact that Jesus meets the churches where they are. He knows each one and designs His approach to their unique needs and qualities. God meets people where they are in Christ, and He invites us to do the same with each other (see 1 Cor 9:19-23).

Rev 1:12–

When John turns to "see the voice" that sounded like a trumpet in verse 10, the first thing he notices is seven golden lampstands or candlesticks. For anyone familiar with Judaism or the Old Testament thoughts go immediately to furnishings of the tent-sanctuary instituted by Moses and then the temple established under Solomon. The lampstand of the Mosaic

tabernacle was a single piece made of pure gold (Exod 25:31-40; 37:17-24). Three branches came out of either side. Along with the stem there were seven total branches with cups to hold oil that would burn, bringing light to the inside of the tabernacle. The lampstand was the only instrument that brought light into the sanctuary (Exod 35:14; 39:37; Num 8:1-4). The lampstand was used in a metaphorical sense in Zechariah 4:1-14 to offer a word of encouragement to the community that had returned from Exile to Babylon. The work God had asked them to do was not to be accomplished through human effort, but by the mighty work of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 20 of this chapter the seven golden lampstands are said to represent the seven churches of Asia Minor to which this vision is directed. As the lampstand was the only source of light in the Old Testament sanctuary/temple (except for those occasions when the glory of God was directly manifested— Exodus 40:34-38; 1 Kings 8:10-11), so the New Testament church is to be a light for the world. The lampstands correspond to the seven-fold activity of the Spirit in behalf of the churches (Rev 1:4).

In Old Testament times, God intended that Israel would be the means through which light and blessing would go to the world (Exod 19:5-6; Isa 42:1, 6; 49:3-7; 60:1-3, 14). The role that God laid out for Israel was then taken up by Jesus (Luke 2:29-32, note the references to the above Isaiah texts there). Jesus delegated Israel's role to His disciples, and through them to the church. So the church is like a lamp that gives light to the world (Matt 5:14-16, cf. Phil 2:15-16). In Revelation 11:4, the two witnesses are identified as the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. As summarized by Stefanovic, the lampstand emblem defines the essential role of the church as God's witness in the world.

In the New Testament outside of Revelation the sanctuary lampstand is mentioned only in Hebrews 9:2 as part of a list of items found in the Hebrew tabernacle. According to Hebrews, the lampstand was placed in the first apartment, the so-called Holy Place, along with the Table of Shewbread (often translated the Bread of the Presence). Ironically, the Altar of Incense was also placed in the Holy Place in the writings of Moses (Exod 40:26), but in Hebrews it is placed in the second apartment, the Most Holy Place (Heb 9:3-4). Was the author of Hebrews writing on the basis of a faulty memory, or was he perhaps reflecting Exodus 26:35, where only the table and the lampstand are mentioned in the first apartment? Does the passage instead reflect the way things were in Herod's temple? And if so, when, how and why did the change occur?

Rev 1:12– (Digression on the Location of the Altar of Incense)–

The material that follows is best located at Revelation 8:3-4, but since my curiosity caused me to do some research on this, I thought it best to post now and relocate it when I get to chapter 8.

Part of the problem regarding the location of the Altar of Incense is the ambiguity of the Hebrew in Exodus 30:6. The altar of incense was to be placed "in front of (before) the veil (curtain) that is above (by, near) the ark of the covenant" (reflecting various translations in the ESV, NRSV, KJV, NIV and NASB). The Hebrew simply says, "in the face of the curtain/veil." Does that put the altar in the Holy Place or the Most Holy? Exodus 40:3-5 is also ambiguous, but the altar is listed after the lampstand and the table instead of along with the ark, suggesting a different part of the sanctuary. Perhaps the clearest indication of location is toward the end of

Exodus 40. There the ark of the covenant is placed in the “tabernacle” (Exod 40:21– Hebrew: *mishcân*). But the table, the lampstand and the altar of incense are placed in the “tent of meeting” (Exod 40:22-26– Hebrew: *b’ôhel mô’êd*). Since incense was burned every day on the altar (Luke 1:9) and the Most Holy was to be entered only once a year, this makes sense.

Since Jewish recollections of the First-Century temple (Mishnah) also locate the altar of incense in the Holy Place, the author of Hebrews in 9:3-4 is not projecting the contemporary situation over against the one in the time of Moses. Whatever he is saying about the Altar of Incense and the Most Holy Place is either mistaken or has some deeper purpose to it.

The most popular solution to this problem among conservative Christians is to note that the author of Hebrews does not place the altar of incense “within” the veil. In 9:2 he speaks of the first apartment “in which” (*en hê*) can be found the table and the lampstand. But when he comes to 9:4 he says that the second apartment was “having” (*echousa*) the altar and the ark. This suggests that the author of Hebrews is not locating the altar in the Most Holy Place but indicating a special theological connection between the altar and the ark.

The theological connection between the Altar of Incense and the Most Holy Place is evident from a number of facts. 1) On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest sprinkled blood on both the altar of incense and the ark (Exo 30:10; Lev 16:14). 2) On the Day of Atonement the High Priest took coals from the altar of incense and brought them “inside the veil” into the Most Holy Place before the ark (Lev 16:12-13). 3) 1 Kings 6:22 (ESV, NIV, NRSV) says that the altar of incense “belonged to” the “inner sanctuary” (*debir*). While the altar was physically located in the Holy Place, it was functionally connected to the Most Holy Place. Perhaps on the Day of the Atonement, the curtain between the altar and the ark was drawn aside during the time the High Priest was inside the Most Holy Place. If that is so, the ambiguity regarding the location of the Altar of Incense is purposeful and theologically interesting.

Rev 1:12 (continued)–

The mention of lampstands here calls two important features of Revelation to mind. First of all, the Book of Revelation is thoroughly grounded in the stories, places and people of Old Testament Israel. There is hardly a single verse in the book that is not a patchwork of words and phrases that echo the Old Testament writings and context. So it would be surprising if the Book of Revelation made no mention of the sanctuary or the temple in its outline of John’s vision.

Second, the sanctuary and temple of Old Testament times is not only mentioned here but repeatedly and obviously throughout the book. The lampstand is echoed here in chapter 1 and probably also in chapter 4 (4:5). Temple is mentioned frequently (Rev 3:12; 7:15; 11:1-2, 19; 14:15-17; 15:5-8; 16:1, 17; 21:22) and so is the Mosaic tent sanctuary (Rev 13:6; 15:5; 21:3). Other obvious references to sanctuary and temple include the Altar of Incense (8:3-4) and the Ark of the Covenant (11:19). There is another reference to altar in Revelation 6:9-10 and this is probably the Altar of Burnt Offering, which was located in the outer court of the sanctuary and the temple. And the obvious is only the beginning of such references, as we will see.

The centrality of the Sanctuary and its services is a fact worthy of careful consideration. So this seems a good place for an Excursus on the Sanctuary in Revelation, which will follow.

Rev 1:12 (Excursus on the Sanctuary in Revelation)–

We noted earlier (see Rev 1:9-20 [Introduction]) that the Book of Revelation is structured in terms of seven main visions with a prologue (1:1-8) and an epilogue (22:6-21). These seven visions function in a similar way to seven acts in a play. We also noticed that each of these seven visions are preceded by “sanctuary introductions,” which function like stage backdrops to each of seven acts in a play. Each of the introduction scenes focuses on an element (or several elements) of the Old Testament tabernacle or temple (such as the lampstand in 1:12-13, the altar of incense in 8:3-4, and the ark of the covenant in 11:19). These seven introductions form an explicit sanctuary pattern throughout the Book of Revelation. When you study these seven sanctuary introduction as a group, some interesting conclusions can be drawn. Stay tuned. . .

The first sanctuary introduction scene begins in this verse and continues through verse 20 (1:12-20). The most obvious sanctuary element in this passage are the lampstands or candlesticks in 1:12-13. But there is one interesting twist here. While the lampstand in the Mosaic tabernacle was a single item with seven branches (Exod 26:31-35; 37:17-24), there are seven lamps mentioned here with no indication as to how many branches each of the lamps might have (1:12). Interestingly, in Solomon’s temple there was not one lampstand but ten, all made of pure gold (1 Kings 7:49; 1 Chr 28:15; 2 Chr 4:7, 20). There too we have no mention of the number of branches on each lampstand, but there is the cryptic mention in 2 Chronicles 4:7 of “according to the legal specifications” (Hebrew: *ke-mishpatam*). The Hebrew word “*mishpat*” means “judgment,” “legal decision” or “legal specification.” Essentially the same phrase is repeated in 2 Chronicles 4:20 (*ka-mishpat*). The language of “legal specification” almost certainly is a reference back to the regulations given in the *Torah*, the five books of Moses. So it is safe to assume that the lampstands in Solomon’s Temple, while ten in number, were similar in appearance to the single lampstand of the Mosaic tabernacle, with seven branches. So it is likely that the seven lampstands of Revelation 1 each had seven branches, even though that is not mentioned in the text.

That John would be familiar with the seven-branched candlestick is evident from the Arch of Titus in Rome. Located at one end of the Roman Forum, the Arch of Titus celebrates his recent (at the time it was built– 82 AD) conquest of Jerusalem in AD 70. There is a clear depiction of a seven-branched candlestick on the Arch as one of the spoils of war.

In the Mosaic tabernacle, the lampstand was placed on the south side of the Holy Place, the first apartment, opposite to the Table of Shewbread (Exod 40:24). The purpose of the lampstand was to provide light for the interior of the temple (Exod 35:14; 39:37). In fact it was the only human provision for light inside the tabernacle. Since the roof of the tabernacle was peaked, there was a space above the curtain between the two apartments that would allow significant light to enter the Most Holy Place. And during times when God’s living presence (the Shekinah glory) entered the tabernacle/temple (Exod 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chr 7:1-3; Ezek 8:4) and was manifested over the ark between the cherubim (1 Sam 4:4, 21-22; Isa 6:1), there would also be a divine source of light in the sanctuary/temple.

In Solomon's temple, the ten golden lampstands were divided into two groups of five each. One group was left of the entrance, presumably in a row, and the other group to the right side of the entrance (1 Kings 7:49; 2 Chr 4:7).

Coming back to Revelation, in the middle of the seven golden lampstands was "one like a son of man" (Rev 1:13). He was dressed in a foot-length robe with a golden sash across his chest. The phrase "son of man" suggests that this glorious figure is Jesus. That identification is confirmed in verse 18 when he introduces himself to John as the one who died and rose again.

Scholars have long debated whether the dress of the son of man in this vision (Rev 1:12-18) suggests a High Priestly role. The robe is called a *podêrês* in the Greek, an extension of the Greek word for "foot" (*pous*, *podos*). A recent dissertation by Ross Winkle examined the evidence regarding High Priestly dress throughout the Bible and the ancient world. He drew the conclusion that John would have perceived Jesus as dressed in High Priestly attire in this visionary scene. While not all scholars agree, the large amount of sanctuary language in the visionary introductions of Revelation supports the idea that the son of man's dress here has something to do with his location among the sanctuary lampstands. Since common priests did not bear golden decorations in the chest area, a High Priestly reference is likely.

Revelation 1:12-20, therefore, presents a mix of sanctuary images. The seven golden lampstands recall the lampstands in the Holy Place of both the tabernacle and the temple. The reference to a "son of man," on the other hand, recalls the vision of Daniel 7:13-14, where a son of man approaches the Ancient of Days who is sitting on the heavenly throne (Dan 7:9). The heavenly throne is represented in the sanctuary by the Ark of the Covenant (1 Sam 4:4, 21-22; Isa 6:1), so Daniel's son of man has entered the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. While the High Priest is the only person who could enter the Most Holy Place when the Shekinah was present, he could also minister in every other part of the sanctuary, so this image recalls the Most Holy Place, but is not limited to it.

The question that immediately rises has to do with the location of this visionary scene (Rev 1:12-18). Is it on earth or is it a vision of the heavenly sanctuary? One popular theory is that the scene is in the heavenly sanctuary and the lampstands locate it in the Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. The door that John goes through in Revelation 4:1 would be the entrance to the Most Holy Place, where God's throne is. But the evidence of these texts does not support this.

First of all, when the son of man speaks to John, the voice is not above him but behind him (Rev 1:10). John is on the Island of Patmos (1:9) and does not look up to locate the voice, but turns in order to look behind him (1:12). Second of all, when John turns to look at the son of man, he sees him in the midst of the lampstands. According to Revelation 1:20, the lampstands represent the seven churches, which are located on earth. The entire focus on chapters two and three is on the churches of Asia Minor. John himself does not ascend to heaven until the invitation of Revelation 4:1, "Come up here." So the evidence of the text is that the scene takes place on earth rather than heaven. The door of 4:1 is the door into the heavenly sanctuary.

We have seen that the scene of Revelation 1:12-20 contains a mix of images drawn from both the Holy and the Most Holy apartments of the sanctuary. But since the lampstands here represent the seven churches of Asia Minor, this sanctuary is located on earth rather than in

heaven. The visionary scene here shows Jesus in the sanctuary of the church! But since the imagery here includes the Most Holy Place, how is that kind of reference appropriate to the church in the New Testament?

It just so happens that sanctuary language can be applied to the church in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Paul says to the Corinthians, "You are a temple (Greek: *naos*) of God." The references to "you" in this passage are all in the plural. 1 Corinthians 3 is not about a body temple (that reference is 1 Cor 6:19-20), Paul is referring here to the temple of the church. That temple is destroyed by the factions in the Corinthian church (1 Cor 3:3-6), not by unhealthy food or lack of exercise! The word *naos* is also used for the church in Ephesians 2:21 and there is also a fascinating description of church as temple in 1 Peter 2:4-10. So the sanctuary language applied to the seven churches in Revelation 1 is far from unique in the New Testament.

In the book of Hebrews, sanctuary language is repeatedly applied to the heavenly sanctuary. So how is sanctuary language appropriate to the church on earth? The theological answer lies below the surface in Matthew 18:20. There Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I with them." What is not obvious on the surface is that this is a virtual quotation from the Jewish rabbis. In the Mishnah, a book of early rabbinic teachings collected around 200 AD, is a very early (200-300 BC) tradition that goes, "Where two gather to study Torah, the Shekinah glory is in the midst" (*Aboth*, 3:2). The similarity between these two statements is plain to see.

Notice, however, the two subtle differences between Jesus' statement and the tradition of the rabbis. Where the followers of the rabbis gather to study Torah (Moses or the whole OT), the followers of Jesus gather in His name. Jesus expands the meaning of Torah to include His life, death, resurrection and teachings. As He said in John 5:39-40, the OT Scriptures testify of Him. The other subtle difference is in the outcome of the gathering. The followers of the rabbis are graced by the presence of the temple Shekinah. The followers of Jesus are graced by His personal presence. Jesus now functions for His people the way the Shekinah functioned in the tabernacle/temple of the OT. He is the ultimate revelation of what God is like.

It is on this basis that it is appropriate to associate the church with the temple and even the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. The gathering of two or three in Jesus' name brings all the blessings of the sanctuary upon the believers. The church is the corporate, earthly manifestation of the OT sanctuary.

If the New Testament temple is Jesus Himself, it is appropriate for NT writers to use temple language wherever Jesus is present. So the language of sanctuary/temple in the NT has three extended uses. Since Jesus is in heaven, seated at the right hand of God, there is a sanctuary in heaven, and this is explored in detail in Hebrews and, to a lesser degree, in Revelation. But if Jesus is in the midst of the church then sanctuary/temple language is also appropriate for the church (1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4-10). In fact, all who believe are priests in the New Testament temple (1 Pet 2:5).

Through the Holy Spirit, however, Jesus also dwells in the hearts of each believer. Our own bodies are, therefore, considered temples for the Holy Spirit to dwell in (1 Cor 6:19-20 and

possibly Col 1:27-28). So sanctuary/temple language is appropriate for wherever Jesus is, whether in heavenly places, in the church at large, or in the very bodies of the saints.

From a traditional Seventh-day Adventist perspective, one of the great events of human history is the cleansing of the sanctuary foretold in Daniel 8:13-14. While the Hebrew of Daniel 8:9-14 is very difficult to translate and interpret, the Adventist view of this text makes at least as much exegetical sense as any other. This raises the question, if the New Testament concept of temple is centered in Jesus and is located wherever Jesus is (heaven, church, body), which meaning does the “cleansing of the sanctuary” have in New Testament terms? What is it in heaven that needs “cleansing?” What is it about the church on earth that needs cleansing? What spiritual realities about the human body need cleansing? We will take up these three questions in the next three posts.

If there is a sanctuary in heaven, what is it in heaven that needs to be cleansed? The most obvious thing is the need to vindicate the character of God in the face of Satan’s lies against Him. That, I suspect, is the primary purpose of the investigative judgment. Determining who will be saved or lost doesn’t require 150 years. I suspect God’s accounts are more efficient than the local bank, which can give you a full update on your account at a moment’s notice. But what could take many, many decades is a careful examination of God’s own actions and intentions over the whole course of the cosmic conflict. And the beautiful side to this is that God’s government operates completely in the sunlight. He is willing to open His books and allow the whole unfallen universe to verify that He can, in fact, be trusted. God desires the willing obedience of free creatures who trust Him with their lives on the basis of careful examination and evidence. So the most important thing in heaven that needs cleansing is God’s reputation, and I write that in full reverence.

The other thing in heaven that needs cleansing is **our** reputation. There are many worlds full of creatures that have never rebelled against God who have to be wondering whether the neighborhood is likely to be ruined if you and I show up! Such an investigation might also require many decades. The rest of the universe has the right to know that you and I will be safe to save. In both cases we see a God who places His reputation in the hands of His creatures. What a gracious and wise God, who knows that peace and harmony in the universe can only be achieved when freedom is freely exercised for the good of all!

We are applying the New Testament concept of the sanctuary to the idea of a cleansing of the sanctuary at the end of time (Dan 8:13-14). We have seen that Jesus is the Shekinah glory of the church sanctuary in the New Testament era (Matt 18:20 in light of ancient Jewish tradition). What is there about the church that needs cleansing as we approach the end-time?

One thing that comes to mind is a number of false doctrines that hurt God’s reputation in a fallen world. For example, the concept of an everlasting, burning hell, held sincerely by many Christians, has probably produced more atheists than any other factor. It is sad when elements of the church, those who advocate for God in this world, those who claim to be following Jesus, paint God as cruel, punitive and judgmental. These are qualities of character that belong to Satan in Scripture (John 8:44; Job 1:6-12; Rev 12:10). Satan loves to accuse God of the very things he does (Job 2:5-6). When God’s character is portrayed in satanic terms, it is no wonder many people turn away. For example, one reason many muslims refuse to consider

the claims of Jesus, is the historical memory that Christians bearing crosses on their shields killed man, woman and child (including fellow Christians) in Jerusalem during the Crusades. A mission for God's people at the end of time is cleansing the church of doctrines that make God look bad (including indulgences, legalism, antinomianism, minimizing the commandments, etc.).

Another thing in the church that needs cleansing is administrative systems that don't reflect well on God or His form of government. God's government is open, allowing all to audit the books. He encourages freedom, and treats everyone fairly in the fullest sense of that term. In contrast, church authority is often secretive, discriminatory, abusive and coercive. The beast of Revelation 13 is the poster child for such administrative systems. When the government of a church becomes entwined with political and economic motivations, it reflects badly on God's character and government in this world. God foresaw that the church would need cleansing in this area, and it may be even more difficult to achieve than cleansing in the matter of doctrines.

In the New Testament, the sanctuary in the ultimate sense is Jesus Himself (Matt 12:6; John 2:19-21). But in an extended sense, it is wherever Jesus is. He is the Shekinah glory of the New Testament (Matt 18:20 in light of Jewish tradition). Through the Holy Spirit Jesus also dwells in human bodies, which can also be spoken of as temples (1 Cor 6:19-20).

What in the body temple might need cleansing at the end of time? This is where an emphasis on health may be appropriate. If the human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, then we need to treat the body the way we would any other kind of temple. In our eating and drinking, our exercising, our restraint, we consider the glory of God in all that we do (1 Cor 10:31). If the glory of God is His character (Exod 33:18-19; 34:6-7), then the lifestyle and character of those who proclaim His name can give Him glory (Rev 14:7) or reflect badly on His character. In a small sense the recent "Blue Zone" reports about Loma Linda University show the possibilities in physical health for making the ways of God attractive in this world.

Another area related to the cleansing of the body temple might be sanctification. As we approach the end of time, the people of God will want to put away all known sin in their lives, so that their body temple will be fully dedicated to the worship of the one we proclaim. I know that this concept can be overplayed and even cause harm, but what trusting follower of a gracious God would want to harbor rebellion against Him in the life? If we are fully committed to God and we face a choice that clearly either honors or dishonors Him, those committed to God at the end of time will more and more choose only that which honors him.

Let me share an illustration of what "eschatological perfection" might be like. I once knew a man who was kidnaped, taken to a large room behind a bar, and ordered at gunpoint to have sex with two women for the entertainment of an audience. For the fully devoted follower of God, the question in this situation becomes: Would I rather die than choose to sin, especially when the sin might be "fun?" At the end of time the people of God will face choices like this, and will honor Him in their decisions, even at the cost of life itself (Rev 12:11). The true Christian cannot serve two masters (1 Cor 6:15-20).

Let me digress a bit to the text of Daniel 8:13-14 and the use of the word "cleansing," which is familiar from the King James Version of the English Bible. I am well aware that the Hebrew word in 8:14 is not the normal word for "cleansing" (*taher*), but rather is closer to

English words like “vindicate” or “restore” (*nitsdaq*, from *tsadaq*). The specific form in the Hebrew is passive (the nifal form), so newer translations tell us the sanctuary will be “restored to its rightful state” (ESV, NRSV), “properly restored (NASB), or “reconsecrated” (NIV). The King James translators were influenced by the Septuagint (ancient Greek translation of the OT—*katharisthêsetai*), which translates the Hebrew with a form of *katharizô*, which DOES mean to cleanse or purify. They may also have been influenced by the Latin Vulgate, which translates the Hebrew with *mundabitur*, which also means cleansing.

We learn two things from all this. 1) The Hebrew word *nitsdaq* is much broader than cleansing, including elements of vindication, restoration and reconsecration. 2) The ancients, both Greek and Latin, understood that there was a strong element of “cleansing” in the word as well. So “cleansing” in the King James is not so much a mistranslation as, perhaps, too narrow a translation, using an English word that doesn’t have the breadth of the Hebrew. That the Hebrew word *tsadaq* (vindicate, restore) has the extended meaning of “cleansing” or “purifying” (normally *taher* in the Hebrew) is evident from poetic parallels like Job 4:17, 17:9 and 25:4.

My use of “cleansing” the sanctuary in previous posts was for the sake of familiarity and convenience. Such a use is allowed by the text, but is probably not the best translation.

At this point in a study on the sanctuary in the Book of Revelation, people tend to ask, “What is the relationship between the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly? What is the heavenly sanctuary like?” Adventists generally have given three answers to this question, two of which are generally considered “orthodox” and one “heretical.”

The “heretical” view of the sanctuary was popularized by John Harvey Kellogg, the famous Battle Creek physician who also dabbled in theology and biblical study. He argued that the earthly sanctuary does not represent a temple in heaven, but rather represents what God is doing in our lives right here on earth. Such a metaphorical use is certainly allowed by the Scriptures, as we have seen above (Jesus’ body as a sanctuary, and also the church and the believer as temples). Where Kellogg got into trouble is his disinterest in or denial that there is a sanctuary in heaven. Because much of Seventh-day Adventist theology makes reference to the heavenly sanctuary, Kellogg’s view was quickly marginalized, even though elements of it had been well-received in the past.

The second Adventist view on the relation of the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries is the literal view. In this view the earthly sanctuary was an exact replica of the heavenly sanctuary. There is a temple in heaven with two apartments, lampstands, altars, and a literal ark of the covenant. In this view the work of God in heaven is confined to a specific structure with forms and furnishings identical to the earthly counterparts. Thus if Jesus entered the Holy Place in AD 31 and then the Most Holy in AD 1844, He made geographic moves within heaven that had significance for the plan of salvation.

This view has the advantage of simplicity, taking everything quite literally, with a point by point correspondence between the earthly and the heavenly. Such a view is fairly easy to understand and can be easily applied spiritually. So this is considered an acceptable view among Adventists.

The literal view of the heavenly sanctuary is not universally accepted by Adventists because of some difficulties that arise. First, one must ask which earthly sanctuary is the model for the heavenly building; the tabernacle of Moses, the temple of Solomon, the temple of Ezekiel or the one started by Zerubbabel and finished by Herod? Every one of these sanctuaries was different. If heavenly geography was the primary purpose of the earthly sanctuary it would have helped if God had provided a more consistent prototype. Second, the New Testament does not separate Jesus and His Father geographically at the ascension (see Revelation 5, for example). Jesus sits at the right hand of God's throne in New Testament times (Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Heb 8:1). When he ascended to heaven He was "going to His Father" (John 20:17). Third, the best Adventist scholarship considers that Moses did not copy the heavenly sanctuary itself, but a model or pattern (*tabnith*) that God showed him on Mount Sinai (Exod 25:8-9). So viewing the heavenly sanctuary as an exact replica of the earthly is somewhat at tension with the biblical evidence. Fourth, the author of Hebrews does not seem all that interested in a one to one correspondence between earthly and heavenly (Heb 9:5). Thus most Adventist scholars do not have a rigidly literal view of the sanctuary in heaven.

The third view of the heavenly sanctuary, and the one that appeals most to me, is that the various earthly sanctuaries and temples represent heavenly REALITIES. Rather than a one to one correspondence between the earthly type and the heavenly antitype; the same rooms in the same shape, an altar in heaven where the one on earth is, a lampstand (or several), etc.; the earthly sanctuary is offering a pictorial representation of what God is doing in heaven for our salvation. This does not mean that there is no temple building or structure in heaven, there may be, but that the shape and contents of such a structure are not the primary thing, God is using pictures and analogies to help His creatures understand His will and His ways. The key to the sanctuary is what it represents more than the specific details of each part.

The earthly sanctuaries had strong counterparts in the ancient world. There is evidence for two-part sanctuaries and temples very similar to the Mosaic sanctuary in Egypt and Mesopotamia well before the time of Moses. So one could argue that the "pattern" Moses was given on the mountain was an accommodation to human understanding and familiarity. The Hebrews already knew what temples represented and God used that knowledge to teach them things about Himself they could not have known otherwise. Not only so, from an Adventist perspective these earthly sanctuaries also give us a clearer glimpse of what God is doing in heavenly places. For more detail on these three Adventist views of the sanctuary see William G. Johnsson, "The Heavenly Sanctuary— Figurative or Real?" *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, volume 4, edited by Frank B Holbrook (Silver Spring MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), 35-51.

I will now return to an examination of the sanctuary images in each introductory vision of the Book of Revelation. Revelation is divided into seven major visions, beginning with the churches, the seals and the trumpets. Each of these seven visions is preceded by an introductory vision that features aspects of the Old Testament sanctuary and temple complexes. We have been exploring in some detail the first of these introductory visions, the view of the heavenly Son of Man in Revelation 1:12-20.

We concluded that the Son of Man represents Jesus Christ, the one who died and rose again (Rev 1:17-18). He is seen here (1:12-18) on earth, not in heaven, and is dressed in the garb of the High Priest. He is walking among the lampstands of the sanctuary, which represent the churches of Asia Minor (1:11, 20). We drew from this that the opening introduction features Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary of the church on earth. We noticed that this type of sanctuary language is common in the New Testament (1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4-10). The church is a temple because Jesus is the Shekinah glory of the New Testament (Matt 18:20 in light of Jewish tradition), and wherever Jesus is becomes a temple as a result (Matt 12:6; John 2:19-21). So in the opening introductory scene of Revelation the key idea is that the church on earth is truly a temple of God.

When we go to the second introductory scene of Revelation (4:1-5:14), we observe a thorough mix of images from every part of the Old Testament sanctuary. There is more sanctuary imagery in this passage than anywhere else in Revelation. There is a door into heaven like the entrance to the tabernacle and the mention of a trumpet (Rev 4:1). The door could be used for any part of the services and the trumpet is particularly associated with the daily service (*Tamid*). There is a throne in heaven (4:2), which is represented by the ark of the covenant (the ark itself is not mentioned until 11:19). The jasper, sardius (perhaps ruby or carnelian) and emerald mentioned in 4:3 are found in the breastplate of the High Priest (Exod 28:17-21).

The twenty-four elders remind us that there were twenty-four courses of priests in the Old Testament sanctuary, according to 1 Chronicles 24. The lamps (Rev 4:5) remind us of the sanctuary lamps of Revelation 1. The sea of glass (4:6) may represent the laver or wash basin of the tabernacle. The four living creatures around the throne (Rev 4:6-8) remind us of Solomon's temple with two smaller angels on the ark and two larger ones spreading their wings over the ark in the Most Holy Place (1 Kings 6:23-28). The calf (Rev 4:7) was used for sin offerings in Leviticus 4. The "holy, holy, holy" (4:8) recalls the sanctuary scene in Isaiah 6. Revelation 5 also mentions the Lamb that was slain, incense going up and horns (5:6-8), all of which are features of the daily service (*Tamid*) in the Hebrew sanctuary. So there is a thorough mix of images from the entire sanctuary in Revelation 4-5. This raises the question: What aspect of the sanctuary is in view here since there are images from all over the sanctuary?

There were two occasions in the ancient tabernacle services when the whole sanctuary was involved. The first was the inauguration of the sanctuary itself. In the inauguration service, every article of furniture and every detail was involved in one way or another. The other occasion in which the entire sanctuary was involved was the Day of Atonement. Is it possible to know which of these two occasions is in view in Revelation 4-5? Is the reader to see in Rev 4-5 the Inauguration of the Heavenly Sanctuary or the Day of Atonement?

A careful look at the evidence suggests that the inauguration is in view. Day of Atonement imagery is clearly present in the second half of the book of Revelation, but the evidence for it here is weak. For example, in the Day of Atonement the special sacrificial animal was the goat. But chapter 5 centers on a lamb instead of a goat. Lambs were sacrificed during the dedication of the temple, but not goats (1 Kings 8:63). So the fact that a lamb was involved in this vision would suggest a focus on inauguration rather than on the Day of Atonement. This is confirmed by the fact that whatever is taking place here is in direct response to what

happened on the cross. It is the sacrifice that dedicates the temple. Further, there is no reference to judgment in Rev 4-5, which we would expect if the Day of Atonement were in view. Instead of judgment, intercession is the focus here, with incense continually going up (5:8). So the scene of Rev 4-5 would appear to be a symbolic description of the inauguration of the sanctuary in heaven.

The third sanctuary introduction in the Book of Revelation is found in Revelation 8:2-6. Here we see four sanctuary images: the golden incense altar, incense, trumpets, and the censer. As we have already seen, the altar of incense seems to have been located in the Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary and is a central feature of the daily service (*Tamid*), but it also has a special theological relationship with the Most Holy Place.

We know from ancient Jewish sources (the *Mishnah*) that the ritual of the daily service (*Tamid*) was carefully prescribed. And this ritual is reflected in this passage and throughout the first half of Revelation. First a priest enter the Holy Place and trimmed the lampstand (cleaning, re-filling, re-lighting— see Rev 1:12-20). He then left the door to the temple open (4:1). A lamb was then slain (5:6) and its blood was poured out at the base of the Altar of Burnt Offering in the temple courtyard (6:9-11). The priest then collected coals from the fire on that altar into a censer (firepan), added incense, and then ministered that incense at the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place (8:3-4). During this time there was a period of silence (8:1) following by the blowing of seven trumpets (8:2, 6). At the conclusion of the service, the priest threw the censer down to the earth (8:5).

The focus of this daily service was intercession. The incense represents the righteousness of Christ which gives us confidence to approach the presence of God through prayer (Rev 8:3-4). The imagery of this sanctuary introduction (Rev 8:2-6) points to the daily service and its focus on intercession. In the imagery of the sanctuary, Jesus Christ is interceding for His people. The prayers of the saints are combined with incense to somehow enhance their effectiveness before God. As the people of God claim Christ and His cross, they are assured of their acceptance before God.

At the very center of the book and its sanctuary introductions comes Rev 11:19: “Then God's **temple** in heaven was opened, and within his **temple** was seen the **ark of his covenant**. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.” In moving from Revelation 8 to Revelation 11 we move from the Holy Place of the sanctuary to the Most Holy Place, where the ark of the covenant can be found. The word for “temple” here is the Greek term **naos**. It is a special term reserved especially for the Most Holy Place of the temple. This is true, not only of the Bible, but also of the ancient Greek temples one can still see in Egypt today. When the tour guide in Egypt brings you to the inner shrine of a temple he says something like, “This is the **naos**, the holiest part of the temple.” So in Revelation 11:19 there is a clear focus on the ark and the Most Holy Place. And, in verse eighteen, there is also a mention of the final judgment: “The nations were angry; and your wrath has come, **the time has come for judging the dead** and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great--and for destroying those who destroy the earth.” Rev 11:18

Revelation 11:18 is the first verse in Revelation where “judgment” is described as a present reality (in 6:10 it has not yet begun). In the context of that judgment there is a view of the ark in the Most Holy Place. So I would conclude that Revelation 11:19 contains the theme of judgment just as Revelation 8 contained the theme of intercession.

The next sanctuary introduction is found in Revelation 15:5-8. This passage contains a large number of sanctuary images. We have already made mention of the term *naos*, the Greek word for the Most Holy Place of the temple. It occurs again here, translated “temple.” The angels in this scene wear white and gold garments reminding us of the garments worn by the priests. The phrase “tabernacle of the testimony” occurs in Numbers 17 and is applied to the Most Holy Place there. But perhaps the primary background to this introduction is imagery found in Exodus 40 and 1 Kings 8, where the tabernacle and the temple were dedicated, respectively.

This passage, therefore, contains imagery related to the inauguration of the Old Testament sanctuary. But there is a difference here. In Revelation 15 and 16 the temple is emptied and is never put in use again. The powerful message of this passage seems to be that the temple in heaven is abandoned and intercession is no longer available. The sanctuary was inaugurated in Revelation 4 and 5, went through phases of intercession and judgment, and is here shut down, the services cease.

The scene in Rev 19:1-10 is remarkably parallel to Revelation 5. This scene of celebration and praise mentions worship, the throne, the Lamb, and the twenty-four elders, among other things. So it is the chiasmic counterpart of the worship scene in Revelation 4 and 5. Revelation 19 has more things in common with Revelation 4-5 than either does with any other part of Revelation. These two passages are clear parallels.

There is a very interesting difference, however. In this section there is a total absence of explicit sanctuary images: there is no incense, no altar, no ark of the covenant, no doors or any other article of furniture from the Old Testament sanctuary. Worship is taking place in chapter 19, just as it does in Revelation 5, but all direct reference to the sanctuary and its furnishings is absent. So the key idea of this introductory passage is the absence of a sanctuary structure and its furnishings. The sanctuary is no longer needed in order to worship God.

The final sanctuary introduction in Revelation is found in chapter 21, verses 1-8. There is a remarkable statement in verses 2 and 3: “I saw the Holy City, ***the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God***, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Now ***the dwelling of God is with men***, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’”

Where is the sanctuary in this text? The original for “dwelling” (in verse 3) is actually “tabernacle” or tent. God’s tabernacle (same word as in 15:5-8) has come down to earth. But verse 2 makes it clear that this “tabernacle” is actually the New Jerusalem, the Holy City itself. So in Revelation 21-22, the New Jerusalem becomes the sanctuary. It is shaped like a cube, just like the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. In fact, the only perfect cubes in the Bible are the Most Holy Place and the New Jerusalem. This perfect cube is founded on the stones that are in the High Priest’s breastplate. So the New Jerusalem, in essence, becomes the Most Holy Place. God and the Lamb themselves become the temple of the city.

There are also sacrificial services in that temple. “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his **servants** will serve him.” Rev 22:3. The word “servants” reflects a Greek word that is not the usual word for servant or slave. Instead it has to do with priestly, even sacrificial, service in the sanctuary. They will serve Him in the city that has become the eschatological temple. This is not to imply that literal sacrifices will occur there, but only that the sacrificial service of the sanctuary and everything associated with it, is no longer needed in the New Jerusalem.

In conclusion, we see that each of the seven visionary introductions in the book of Revelation have a theme related to the Sanctuary. These themes are listed below.

- 1) Church = Temple
- 2) Inauguration
- 3) Intercession
- 4 Judgment
- 5) De-Inauguration
- 6) Absence
- 7) City = Temple

As we examine the seven themes that emerge from looking at the sanctuary introductions in the Book of Revelation as a whole, it becomes apparent that there is a complete cycle moving from the earthly temple in chapter 1 (the seven churches) to the earthly temple in chapters 21-22 (the New Jerusalem). On the next chart below, an earth-heaven-earth pattern can be observed. When the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven, the heavenly sanctuary returns to earth (Rev 21:2-3). The New Jerusalem on earth is the chiasmic counterpart to the scene of Jesus among the lampstands in chapter 1. In both cases the scene takes place on earth. But scenes 2-6--the five sanctuary introductions in the middle of the book--are all in heaven and related to the heavenly sanctuary.

When you look at all seven sanctuary introductions in Revelation you realize that Introductions two through six present a complete history of the heavenly sanctuary throughout the Christian era. The sanctuary begins its function with an inauguration ceremony (Rev 4-5). That history continues with a phase of intercession (8:3-4), followed by judgment (11:18-19), abandonment (15:5-8), and eventually absence (19:1-6). Through the Christian era, the sanctuary is established, goes through its phases of intercession and judgment, then closes its work and is no longer needed in the New Jerusalem. So the Sanctuary Introductions of Revelation provide a beautiful picture of the role of the heavenly sanctuary throughout the Christian era of earth's history.

It is interesting how much of the book of Revelation is dependent on the sanctuary and how the sanctuary even helps to structure the book. The sanctuary imagery of the book of Revelation seems to be purposefully chosen rather than randomly placed.

The Sanctuary Introductions at the beginning and the end of Revelation frame the history of the heavenly sanctuary exhibited in Introductions two through six. In the opening scene (1:12-20) “God is with us” is viewed as a spiritual presence; Jesus among the candlesticks of the seven churches. But the last scene (21:1 and beyond) shows God with us in a more literal sense (22:5). We actually get to see Him face to face. The closing scenes of Revelation portray

the restoration of the Garden of Eden and the ideal Jerusalem. They is also the fulfillment of Exodus 25:8. In the New Jerusalem sanctuary God truly dwells in the midst of His people, no longer only by metaphor, but now in reality. The New Jerusalem scene is the fulfillment of all of Israel's hopes and all of humanity's hopes.

The reference to Exodus 25:8 in the previous post calls to mind the larger purpose of the sanctuary/temple. It is a means by which God reveals Himself to human beings and also enters into relationship with them. As such it is a means, not an end, and its usefulness should not be overplayed. A powerful, and to me shocking, statement on this topic can be found in Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 364: "If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God's law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses." The "additional directions to Moses" include the sanctuary, its services and its furnishings (Exod 25-40).

According to the previous statement (PP 364), the sanctuary was "Plan D" in terms of God's attempts after the Fall to reach out in relationship and reveal Himself to the human race. Plans A, B and C were the sacrificial regulations given to Adam, the covenant of circumcision, and the Ten Commandments. So the sanctuary furnishings and rituals were a means of revelation and relationship rather than the ends themselves. Ultimately, God seeks friendship with free creatures (Isa 41:8; Jam 2:23; John 15:14-15), a friendship that began in the Garden of Eden. There God and humanity were in intimate friendship that was renewed each day in the cool of the evening. But that friendship was broken by sin, not because God was unwilling, but because God's glorious character would only be intimidating and potentially even destructive to sinful creatures. The "wrath of God" is not God's irrational rage, but the natural consequence of sin, so for human protection and to prevent the possibility of a sinful immortality (Gen 3:22), humanity and God were separated by a flaming sword (Gen 3:23-24). God was inside the Garden and the human beings were outside the Garden.

Sin separated humanity from God after the Fall (Gen 3:22-24). God was inside the Garden, human beings were outside the Garden and there was an angel with a flaming sword between. This is the context in which Exodus 25:8 comes. God saw in the sanctuary a way to be in the midst of His people without His presence being hurtful to them in any way. Through the sanctuary in the wilderness, God could be physically manifest in the Most Holy Place, which provided His people with a sense of His spiritual presence with them in all that they did. The sanctuary was a means to an end, a real, but limited, access to God through the priests. Every day the priests approached God by entering the Holy Place, separated only by a curtain. Once a year, the High Priest entered for a few moments into the Most Holy Place itself. Through these activities, Israel had real but limited access to God.

With the intercession of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, New Testament Christians had enhanced access to God. They had the presence of the living Christ in the sanctuary of the church (and even their bodies). But even more significant, through the person of Jesus Christ humanity is raised up into heavenly places, continually interceding in our behalf before the throne (Eph 2:6; Rev 5:5-6). We still do not experience the physical presence of God (we cannot, in most cases, see, hear or touch God), but in Christ there is a real contact with God, in the sanctuary of the church and, through Christ, before God in heaven.

This is the essence of the New Testament's concept of the Now and the Not Yet. While in many ways our experience of intimate friendship with God is a Not Yet experience, something to be fully experienced only in the future (Rev 22:5), there is a real spiritual presence available in Christ. Through the gospels and the book of Revelation, we can know God in ways that the Israelites could not have imagined.

Revelation 21-22 returns the world back to the beginning. The New Jerusalem restores the physical experience of friendship with God. What had been experienced in the Garden of Eden is restored once more. Heaven has once more come down to earth. The New Jerusalem itself has become a Most Holy Place, the perfect cube within which God and humanity can share unlimited friendship. Through the presence of Jesus Christ, the New Jerusalem becomes a temple in the same way the Garden was. The church and the New Jerusalem become one, the bride of Christ (Rev 19:6-9; 21:9-10). And all of this is once more taking place on earth. The Garden of Eden has become the garden city. The sanctuary as a distinct entity is no longer needed (Rev 21:22). God and humanity are in unlimited relationship. They will see His face (Rev 22:5).

Rev 1:13—

This verse tells us that one like a son of man was “in the middle of” the seven golden lampstands. While the exact layout is unclear, the son of man figure is portrayed as somehow in the midst of the seven. The language of “in the middle of” recalls Matthew 18:20, where Jesus states that where two or three are gathered in His name, He is in their midst. If this son of man is Jesus, it is very close to an allusion to Matthew 18:20. This scene illustrates the principle of Matthew 18:20, enhancing the sanctuary focus of this passage.

The scene in Revelation 1:13 is fairly static, but the scene is elaborated in Revelation 2:2, where Jesus is portrayed as “walking” among the seven lampstands. This echoes the promise of the covenant that God “will walk among you” and have a committed relationship with His people (Lev 26:11-12). So Jesus here is not passive, waiting for the churches to come to him, He is active, approaching each church with a knowledge of its needs and a solution to its problems. Jesus is seen ministering to the churches in the same way that the priests in the daily service ministered at the lampstand, cleaning the receptacles, refilling them with oil, and relighting as needed.

While the term translated “lampstand” is the same in chapters one and two (a form of the Greek *luchnia*), there is a shift to a new word in Revelation 4:5 (a form of *lampas*). The former word is the clear counterpart of the sanctuary lamps in the Greek Old Testament (1

Kings 7:49; 1 Chr 28:15; 2 Chr 4:7, 20; Jer 52:19). The latter word also probably alludes to the sanctuary but in a more indirect way.

The phrase “son of man” has two major meanings in the Old Testament. First, “son of man” is simply a way to express the humanity of oneself or another. This meaning of the phrase is very common in the Book of Ezekiel, who is often called “son of man” by God. On the other hand, in Daniel “son of man” refers to a figure in the vision of Daniel 7 who is a heavenly being, a second Adam, and plays a central role in the events of the final judgment. This use of the phrase was common in the mouth of Jesus while He was on earth (Matt 9:6; 26:64; Mark 13:26; Luke 12:40, etc.). Does that mean that the “son of man” is necessarily Jesus in Revelation 1:13-16?

The answer to this question is clarified in verses 17 and 18. The one that John sees is so bright and intimidating that John falls (in fright, from *pipto*, not the normal word for “falling down in worship”) down at His feet. The son of man puts his right hand on John and assures him with the words “I was dead and now I am alive forever.” The “son of man” in verses 12-16 is clearly the glorified Jesus.

The son of man in this vision wears a robe down to his feet and has a golden sash across his chest. I am particularly indebted to the dissertation of Ross Winkle for the information that follows. Clothes are an important factor in establishing someone’s identity. Some obvious examples, policemen and basketball players tend to wear distinctive types of clothing. No matter where you are in the world people who pursue these professions (or wish they could be well-known basketball players) can be immediately detected on the basis of dress. The same is true in the religious realm. The priests and High Priest of the Israelite sanctuary services could be recognized by their distinctive dress.

There are three dress elements in Revelation 1:13-16 that seem particularly associated with the Israelite High Priest. First is the foot-length robe (Rev 1:13– Greek *podêrês*), which in the Greek Old Testament is almost exclusively associated with the High Priest (regular priests wore shorter tunics). The second is the golden belt or sash (also 1:13– Greek: *zônên chrusên*). Only the High Priest had garments of gold on or near the chest. The third element is the bare feet (1:15), signified by the bronze color (Greek: *chalkolibanô*) of the son of man’s feet. The high priest (as well as other priests) served in the sanctuary in bare feet (holy ground).

There are three dress elements associated with the High Priest in Revelation 1:13-16. There is the foot-length robe, the golden sash and the bare feet. Further evidence that the High Priest is in view would be the fact that the son of man figure is clearly Jesus Christ, as is evident from his death and resurrection in Revelation 1:17-18. And throughout the book of Hebrews Jesus Christ is portrayed as the High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary. He is the heavenly counterpart of the earthly High Priest.

There is one further piece of evidence. As we have seen in the excursus on the sanctuary in the book of Revelation (in the context of Rev 1:12), each of the visionary introductions in the book of Revelation (1:12-20; 4-5; 8:2-6; 11:19; 15:5-8; 19:1-10 and 21:1-8) have something to do with the sanctuary. The proximity of the seven golden lampstands confirms that Revelation 1:12-20 is a sanctuary introduction, thus the reader is alerted to be on the lookout for other sanctuary elements in the passage. The dress of the son of man is just such an element.

Rev 1:14–

The son of man's head and hair were white like wool, white as snow. The whiteness of head and hair reminds at first of the color of age and wisdom (Job 15:9-10; Prov 20:29). If so, this would probably be a reference to His eternal pre-existence (John 1:1-2). But that would be more likely were only the hair white. Since the head is also portrayed as white, the whiteness is not so much a sign of age as splendor. The ancient Greek gods were often portrayed with shining heads. This is not the everyday Jesus of His ministry on earth, it is the heavenly Christ, shown with the glory He had before with the Father (John 17:1-5) and which was displayed briefly in the Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9 and parallels).

Since eyes, mouth and face are mentioned later in this passage (14-16), it is possible that the reference to the head is limited to the forehead, the part of the face most closely associated with the hair. It is interesting that the description of the son of man's head and hair is not taken up in any of the letters to the seven churches. There are aspects of Jesus that none of the seven churches fully comes to understand.

It is most likely that the description here recalls Daniel 7:9. There the son of man appears before the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9, 13-14), whose clothing was as white as snow and His hair like wool. Here the son of man has taken on some of the characteristics of the Ancient of Days. Portraying Jesus with attributes of divinity is common in the book of Revelation (see, for example, 1:17-18 compared with Isa 44:6 and 48:12, note also the acclamation of the Lamb in 5:13-14). In the New Testament generally, Jesus is often portrayed as the Yahweh of the Old Testament (compare Phil 2:9-11 with Isaiah 45:23, and John 12:41 with Isaiah 6:1-3). No doubt this phrase also recalls the face like lightning in Daniel 10:5-6. The larger passage of Revelation 1:13-16 combines elements of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7 with the divine figure of Daniel 10:5-6.

The whiteness may also be a sign of purity. In Isaiah 1:18 Yahweh says that though one's sins be like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. In that text also, the white as snow is paralleled with wool. Fresh snow was probably as white as anything the ancients experienced (see also Psalm 51:7). Throughout the book of Revelation white is associated with Christ and with His followers (Rev 14:14; 19:11; 3:4-5; 6:11; 7:9). The only occurrence that is in any way ambiguous is the rider on the white horse of the first seal (Rev 6:1-2). But I would argue that reference is also to Christ.

The son of man's eyes are like blazing fire (literally "flame of fire," Greek: *phlox puros*). The eyes of the Lord are also associated with lampstands in Zechariah 4:1-12. But it is even more likely that the eyes here recall the throne of Yahweh in Daniel 7:9 (Greek: *phlox puros*) and the divine figure of Daniel 10:5-6, who had eyes like lightning. Angels are also "flames of fire" (*puros phloga*) in Hebrews 1:7. Eyes like a flame of fire would be bright and penetrating as if to read the thoughts and intents of someone's heart (Heb 4:12-13). And this is exactly what happens in Revelation 2:18-29, where Jesus' knowledge of their works penetrates the secrets of the troubled church of Thyatira.

Some commentators have seen these eyes are pointers to the omniscience of the heavenly Christ, which was also reflected during Jesus' ministry on earth (John 2:23-25). Even as He walked this earth, he knew what was going on inside each person. He can judge things as

they are, not as people might pretend them to be. But the good news here is that there is nothing to fear about confession. Jesus already knows. Nothing we tell Him will change His mind about us. His love for us is grounded in reality, not fantasy. He knows all about us even before we confess. So why not confront the truth about ourselves?

There is also an eschatological side to this image. In the ancient world, flaming eyes were sometimes associated with anger. Jesus' eyes are like blazing fire (*phlox puros*) at His return in judgment (Rev 19:11-12). This parallels 2 Thessalonians 1:8, where the return of Jesus is "with flaming fire" (*en puri phlogos*). Even when He intervenes to deliver His people, His negative judgments are grounded in right knowledge of the situation.

Rev 1:15—

The son of man's feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace. This again recalls the heavenly figure in Daniel 10:5-6, whose arms and legs looked like polished brass (*chalkos exastraptôn*). But Revelation one uses the unusual Greek word *chalkolibanô*, the meaning of which is not entirely clear. I am again particularly indebted to the dissertation of Ross Winkle for the word study below.

This term (*chalkolibanô*) is unique within the New Testament (also found in Rev 2:18) and is also not found in extant Greek literature before the time of the New Testament. So it may be a term John himself coined. It has been translated into English as "brass," "fine brass," "bronze," and "burnished bronze." It appears to be a compound word, combining the root of *chalkos* with the word *libanô*. *Chalkos* can refer to metal in general but more often refers to copper, brass or bronze. That something like this is intended in 1:15 is evident from the reference to refining in a furnace. John is familiar with *chalkos* and its parallels and uses them in 9:20, 18:12 and 21:19. The term is also used in the Septuagint (Greek OT) to describe the gleaming bronze feet of the four living creatures in Ezekiel 1:7 and the divine figure in Daniel 10:6.

The issue in this particular verse is John's unusual combination of *chalkos* with *libanô*. The word *libanos* can refer to the Lebanon mountain range, the frankincense tree, from which incense comes, or the frankincense itself. In Revelation 8:3 an angel stands upon the altar, holding what appears at first to be "golden frankincense" (*libanôton crusoun*). With "golden" as an adjective, however, this phrase must mean "golden frankincense holder" rather than the incense itself. Hence most translators interpret the phrase as "golden censer." Applying a similar exegetical process to the use of *chalkolibanô* in Revelation 1:15 and 2:18 suggests that *libanô* refers to the container in which incense is burned. Thus the meaning of the compound word here and in 2:18 is "bronze incense holder." In other words, combining the word for "incense" with the word for bronze points to the implement in which incense is burned, rather than the incense itself. Reading *chalkolibanô* in this way adds a further sanctuary element to the larger passage.

The bronze censer was particularly associated with the tabernacle (Exodus 27:3; 38:23; Num 16:37, 39 [English]), rather than the temple of Solomon, where silver and gold censers were used (1 Kings 7:50; 2 Kings 25:15; 2 Chr 4:22). So when Aaron the High Priest made atonement for the sin of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, he used a bronze censer (Numbers 16:46-

48 in the English translations [following the Latin Vulgate numbering], 17:11-13 in the Greek and Hebrew editions of the OT). This would highlight the High Priestly ministry of the “son of man” within the seven churches. In that context, Jesus’ feet looked like a bronze incense holder in color.

The voice of the son of man was like the sound of rushing waters (NIV). In ancient times this seems to have been a way of impressing upon readers the great majesty and authority of the one who was speaking. This phrase especially recalls the Hebrew of Ezekiel 43:2, “the sound of mighty waters” (*qôl mayim rabîm*). In Ezekiel 43, this is the voice of the God of Israel (43:2) who is later named Yahweh (43:4). So once again in this passage (Rev 1:13-18) Jesus is described as the Yahweh of the Old Testament. There is no massive gap between Jesus and His Father. They are not the Gods of different testaments. They are not performing a “good cop-bad cop” routine. The Jesus who walked this earth was no different than the Father would have been, had the Father Himself come down and walked this earth among us. Truly Jesus was the greatest and clearest revelation of God in all of human history (Heb 1:1-3).

The phrase is repeated in Revelation 14:2 and 19:6. In Revelation 14:2 it appears to be the voice of God, while in Revelation 19:6 this sounds seems to be the hosts of heaven praising God. The same phrase occurs in Ezekiel 1:24, there as a reference to the sound made by the wings of the four living creatures. In Daniel 10:6 the voice of the heavenly figure is like the sound of a crowd. In Isaiah 17:12-13 this phrase refers to the boastful noises the nations make in their opposition to God.

Some commentators have noticed a contrast between the approach of Jesus in Revelation 1:13-16 (intimidating brilliance, sword, huge sound) and his approach to Laodicea in 3:20, standing patiently at a door that Laodicea is free to open or leave locked. How does one reconcile an intimidating picture of God with the God who gives His creatures freedom to reject Him and seeks to win their favor by appeal and persuasion? The ultimate picture seems to be the latter, as evidenced in 1:17-18 (“don’t be afraid”). The brilliance of Jesus in 1:13-16 has John’s full attention for the message that follows. The purpose of the mighty waters is not to gain service out of fear, it is to get people’s attention so they can discover what God is really like (the One who stands at the door and knocks and tells us not to be afraid).

Rev 1:16–

In his right hand the son of man has seven stars. In the Old Testament the right hand is the hand of power (Psa 21:8) and of favor (Psa 44:3), both of which seem appropriate to this passage. Although many modern translations say that the son of man “held” the seven stars, the Greek word here implies simply “has” (*echôn*), which is ambiguous in terms of how he is “having” them. They could be resting on top of an open palm or grasped within the hand. But as a present participle, John does not see Jesus taking up these stars, they are continuously in His hand and were already there when the vision commenced.

In the letter to Ephesus (Rev 2:1), however, the holding is described with a stronger Greek term (*kratôn*) which implies to arrest, take into custody, apprehend, seize, grasp. In that verse there is the clear sense that the son of man is intentionally holding on to the stars, not letting them go. Holding the stars in his hand, therefore, probably recalls John 10:28, where

Jesus asserts that no one can snatch His “sheep” out of His hand. Being in the right hand of Christ implies security, care and protection. The stars are highly valued by Him and are useful as instruments to accomplish His work.

Although the contrast between “having” in 1:16 and “grasping” in 2:1 seems significant, in the letter to Sardis (3:1) the expression returns to simply “having” (*echôn*). We may not, therefore, want to make too much of this distinction. Since the stronger word for grasping is used one out of three times, its meaning should probably apply in all three cases.

In verse 20 these stars are identified as the “angels of the seven churches.” (See comments on verse 20). In Daniel 12:3, the faithful followers of God are described as stars. Isaiah 62:3 speaks of Yahweh holding in His hand the faithful inhabitants of Jerusalem as a “crown of beauty” or a royal diadem. These usages are consistent with the comparison to John 10:28.

In Matthew 28:20 Jesus promised His disciples that He would be with them always, even until the end of the world. This continuous presence is well represented by the son of man’s ongoing possession of the seven stars, which in some sense represent the churches.

There are two major Greek words for “sword” in the New Testament and in the book of Revelation. The word sword in this verse translates the Greek *romphaia*. It was a large, broad and heavy sword that was used for battle, execution, and military slaughter. The word is repeated in the letter to Pergamon (Rev 2:12, 16) and is used for one of the weapons the rider on the pale horse uses to slay a quarter of the earth (Rev 6:8). It also comes out of the mouth of the rider on the white horse in 19:15 and 21. There it is the weapon with which he smites the nations (19:15) and those who followed the beast and the false prophet (19:20-21). *Romphaia* was also used metaphorically for the “sword” that would pierce Mary’s soul in Luke 2:35.

The use of *romphaia*, therefore, highlights the fearsomeness of this description of the son of man. It is a frightening

The more common word for sword in the New Testament is *machaira*. If the *romphaia* is especially related to military use, the *machaira* seems the weapon of choice for the self-protection of everyday individuals. It was a relatively short sword (sometimes translated “knife”) and so was smaller and more convenient for everyday use. It was the weapon carried by Peter and one other disciple (Matt 26:52; Mark 14:47-48; Luke 22:36, 38, 49; John 18:10-11). The mob that joined Judas and approached the Garden of Gethsemane carried such swords (Mark 14:43). And the jailer of Philippi was likewise attired. The *machaira* is also mentioned in the context of persecution and martyrdom (Rom 8:35; Heb 11:34, 37). And it is the means by which the deadly wound of the sea beast occurs in Revelation (13:14).

More metaphorical uses of *machaira* also occur. In Ephesians 6:17 the sword of the Spirit represents the Word of God. In Hebrews 4:12, the sharp two-edged sword is the Word of God that divides the soul and the spirit, the joints and the marrow. It is also the metaphorical sword that the message of Jesus brought to those who heard Him (Matt 10:34). The Greek word translated “two-edged” (*distomos*) is a compound of the Greek words for “two” and “mouth.” So it is literally the “two-mouthed” sword. This perhaps explains the ancient expression for slaughter; “the mouth of the sword” (Luke 21:24).

A follower of this site and former student, James Merrills, commented that in Kittel's Theological Dictionary (vol. 4, p. 525) the *machaira* sword is associated with sacrifice, a distinction from *romphaia* (the heavy military sword) that he and I both think is significant for the four horses of Revelation 6. When I did my inductive word study of *machaira*, however, I did not find the words used at all in relation to Israel's sanctuary or temple, which led me to question my own assumption regarding a distinction among the four horses (rider on the second horse was given a large *machaira*, the rider on the fourth horse killed many with a *romphaia*).

A fresh look at Kittel and other sources clarified the matter for me (thank you James!). In ancient Greek (time of Homer— nearly a thousand years before NT), the *machaira* was probably closer to a knife than a sword and was originally used for sacrifice and for everyday things like cooking. As such, it is not surprising that it was the implement in the Greek OT that Abraham was intending to use to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22:6, 10 LXX). Because of the context, most versions translate *machaira* there as “knife.” The same implement was used for circumcision in the Greek of Joshua 5:2-3, 21:42 and 24:31 (not in the English translations for the latter two), so the *machaira* was originally much smaller than the *romphaia*.

The use of *romphaia* here instead of *machaira* works somewhat against the perception that the son of man is priestly. The sword coming out of the son of man's mouth is not sacrificial, it is intimidating, and John responds in the way that he would think appropriate to such a manifestation (1:17).

In addition to this verse and Hebrews 4:12, the concept of a “two-edged” sword occurs twice in the Old Testament. In Psalm 149:6 the two-edged sword is associated with the destruction of the wicked. In Proverbs 5:4 the two-edged sword is a metaphor for the seductive and destructive words of the adulteress. The two-edges of the sword were designed to cut both ways, which is a great advantage in close hand-to-hand combat (where the smaller *machaira* would be handy). As such the two-edged sword is an excellent metaphor for the Word of God, which can “cut” for healing as well as for negative judgment. According to F. F. Bruce, the two-edged sword provides grace to those who repent and trust in God, and judgment to those who disobey.

As noted by Stefanovic, the fact that the sword comes from the mouth of Jesus can indicate that this sword is verbal rather than physical in nature (see Job 5:15-16; Isa 49:2, see also “rod of His mouth” in Isa 11:4 and “breath of His mouth” in 2 Thess 2:8). On the other hand, in Revelation 19, the sword that smites the nations (19:15) and destroys the followers of the beast and the false prophet (19:20-21) also comes from the mouth of Christ (who is the Word of God), and seems quite literal in its effects. The language of Revelation 2:16 also speaks of Christ making war with the church of Pergamon. Is there any way to reconcile the two ways the Bible uses the sword? I would suggest that the intersection of these two concepts comes through the relationship of God's Word with the fate of those who rebel against it. The negative judgments of God are the natural consequences that come when people reject the source of life (Rom 1:20-28; Rev 22:17). God's word has great penetrating power. Whether one accepts or rejects is the basis for judgment.

While parts of the son of man's face were described before this, now we see the face as a whole. The sun shining in its strength is literally "the sun shining in all its power." The sun shines at maximum power in the middle of the day, at the zenith of the sky, and particularly when there are no clouds or haze to interrupt its brilliance. A similar expression is found in Judges 5:31, where those who love the Lord are like the sun that rises in its might (see also 2 Sam 23:4, Psa 19:5 and Dan 12:2). This is what the son of man's face looks like to John. There may also be an echo of Malachi 4:2, where the sun of righteousness arises with healing in his wings. Assuming that the John of Revelation is the son of Zebedee, part of Jesus' inner circle of disciples, he would no doubt recall Jesus' Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9 and parallels in Mark and Luke) at this moment. For John, the son of man in this passage is the glorified Christ.

Rev 1:12-16 (conclusion)–

The vision of the son of man echos many appearances of God in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, particularly that of Daniel 10:5-12. Stefanovic notes the multitude of parallels with Daniel in this passage. The son of man here compares with "a certain man" (KJV) in Daniel 10. The robe reaching to the feet echos the linen garment of the certain man. Both figures have golden belts, eyes like fire, and feet like bronze. In terms of each figure's voice, the sound of many waters compares to the sound of a roaring multitude. In each case, the visionary ends up face down on the ground and the divine figure offers encouragement with a touch of the hand and the command to "fear not." The son of man in Revelation 1 is clearly intended to recall the heavenly figure of Daniel 10.

Daniel Whedon helpfully summarizes this picture as follows: "Let us form a mental picture of the personality described. Before the eyes of the seer stands a colossal figure, robed entirely in white, his face and feet alone bare; the former of sun-like splendour, the latter of a white-heat brilliancy. Locks of snowy whiteness crown his head. He speaks, and his words flash like a double-edged sword from his mouth, and his voice resounds through the space like many waters. He extends his arm, and on his palm is resting a circle of seven stars, and he walks majestically between two rows of lamps blazing upon their stands."

The son of man, therefore, is clearly intended to be a divine figure, clothed in the majesty and power of God Himself. The picture of the son of man as a whole is clearly not literal, it is intended to evoke the sense of great majesty and power, which results in John falling down before him like a dead man (1:17). In this vision, the human figure that walked with His disciples on earth, got hungry and tired, is confirmed as the Logos (Greek for "Word") who was God in the beginning, but came down to earth to show humanity what God is truly like. If this claim is true, it is the most important information any human being could know. We become like the God we worship. It is, therefore, important to correct our view of God on the basis of how God treated the human race in Christ. If you have seen Jesus, you have truly seen the Father (John 14:9).

Rev 1:17-18 (Introduction)–

One of the crucial outcomes of our study of Revelation 1:12-16 is the conviction that John here portrayed Jesus as worthy of language that in the Old Testament applied only to

Yahweh. The sense that Jesus is the Yahweh of the Old Testament made flesh is heightened even further by the two verses that follow. John responds to the vision of Christ by falling down before him, an action appropriate to the manifestation of God (Josh 5:14 Ezek 1:28; 3:23; 43:3; Dan 8:17; 10:9, 11; Matt 28:9; Luke 5:8-10). John does this twice later on (Rev 19:9; 22:7) before an angel, but is rebuked for that action. Here there is no rebuke, rather a touch and a word of encouragement. In the Old Testament only God is worthy of worship. In Revelation angels remind John of that fact, while Jesus freely accepts worship from the creation (Rev 5:8-14).

The statement Jesus makes in the latter part of this passage is what scholars call an "oracle of assurance." When prophets in the ancient world (and there were many prophets outside as well as inside Judaism) would encounter a deity they almost always fell flat on their faces. Fairly consistently, the deity would then place his hand on the prophet and raise him up, saying something like, "Don't be afraid. Everything's going to be OK for the following reasons."

John was the leader of all the seven churches. Scholars often call him "the Bishop of Ephesus" (the leading church of the seven). It was the leader of the seven churches of Asia Minor that fell on his face frightened. He was in need of Jesus' assurance. Jesus ministered to John by applying Himself to John's needs. It is through a relationship with Jesus believers find the strength to do God's work. And it is through a relationship with Jesus that John was enabled to speak for Jesus to the seven churches.

Rev 1:17–

John's falling at the feet of the glorious son of man recalls the reaction of Ezekiel to the vision of Yahweh's glory (Ezek 1:28). Daniel has a similar reaction to the appearance of the angel Gabriel after his vision of the ram and the goat (Dan 8:17). Unlike Revelation, Gabriel does not immediately raise Daniel up, but gives a summary of the vision while Daniel is still in the prone position, then raises him up to hear the details (Dan 8:18).

But as we have seen, the clearest allusion to Revelation 1:12-18 is Daniel 10. There Daniel has a vision of a human-like figure dressed in a linen robe with a golden belt (Dan 10:5). That figure exhibits many of the glorious characteristics recalled in Revelation 1 (10:6). Even though they couldn't see what Daniel saw, those around Daniel fled in terror (10:7). As this mighty figure speaks, Daniel falls on his face into a deep sleep (10:9). The glorious figure touches Daniel and raises him to his hands and knees (10:10). After words of encouragement from the glorious figure, Daniel stands up trembling (10:11). The glorious figure then tells Daniel not to be afraid (10:12) and begins to explain the vision (10:13-14). Daniel then begins to sink back toward the ground in weakness (10:15-17). A further touch and words of encouragement strengthen Daniel (10:18-19). He is now ready to hear the explanation of the vision (10:20ff.).

The vision of Revelation 1:12-18 is not an exact replica of Daniel 10 but there is a clear relationship. As we read Revelation we are to track closely with the revelation formerly given to Daniel. There will be many similarities between the two books. They are like a two-volume prophetic edition. See the comments on Daniel in the notes on Revelation 1:1 and also the excursus there on Christ-Centered Prophetic Interpretation. The intentional relationship

between Revelation and Daniel provides guidance for the interpretation of Revelation. In Daniel we find symbolic prophecies that project historical sequences running from the prophet's day to the establishment of God's eschatological kingdom. These sequences of historical apocalyptic use consistent symbolism such as the metals of the image in Daniel 2 and the beasts of Daniel 7. We should expect similar apocalyptic prophecies in Revelation.

The phrase, "I am the First and the Last" is a special phrase drawn from two Old Testament verses. "This is what the LORD says--Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God." (Isa 44:6, NIV) "Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last." (Isa 48:12, NIV) Who is this "Lord" (Yahweh in the Hebrew)? "My own hand laid the foundations of the earth. . ." (Isaiah 48:13). It is Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, the God who created all things as described in Genesis 1 and 2. In the Old Testament, it is Yahweh who says, "I am the First and the Last."

In coming to John as the First and the Last, Jesus presents Himself as the God of the Old Testament. This is the ultimate "apocalypse" (based on a Greek word *apocalupsis*, meaning "unveiling"), the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus was first experienced by His disciples as a human being who walked on this earth like all other human beings. He ate food, He got tired and sometimes angry, He played with children, He eventually died a martyr's death on a cross. But along the way He made some astounding claims and did some amazing things. He healed the sick and resuscitated the dead. He walked on water. Ultimately, He Himself rose from the dead and received a place at the right hand of the heavenly majesty. In case there were any doubts as to who He is and was, He is here identified as none other than the God of the Old Testament.

Identifying Jesus as the God of the Old Testament is not unique to the book of Revelation. The writers of the New Testament often describe Jesus in the light of things that belong to Yahweh in the Old Testament. Often the statements applied to Jesus in the New Testament are drawn from Old Testament texts that limit these descriptions to Yahweh alone. In other words, Jesus is not seen by New Testament writers as a partner of Yahweh, a second God (although the *Logos* ["Word"] concept in John 1 draws on the Greek philosophical tradition of the *Logos* as a second or intermediate God between the high God and the creation), He is accorded all the qualities that belong to the one God of Scripture. He is not a separate God, but is included in the one God of Judaism.

An example of how New Testament writers included Jesus in the one God of Judaism is the use of Isaiah 45:23 in Philippians 2:9-11. Isaiah 45:21 asserts that there is no God besides Yahweh, He is God and God alone. This assertion is repeated in verse 22. Then in Isaiah 45:23 (NRSV), Yahweh God declares, "By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.'" Every knee will bow and every tongue swear to Yahweh and Yahweh alone. In light of this, the language of Paul in Philippians 2 is very startling. In verse 9 Paul states that Jesus has been given the name that is above every name (if that's not Yahweh, what would it be?). Then he goes on to say that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2:10-11). The word translated "Lord" in Philippians 2:11 is the Greek

kurios, the very word that the Greek OT (LXX) used to consistently translate Yahweh (Isa 45:19 for example). For New Testament readers this is essentially calling Jesus Yahweh. For the New Testament writers, He is not only the one who reveals what God is like, He Himself is identified with the Yahweh of the Old Testament. Whatever Judaism meant by the one God (Deut 6:4-5), Jesus is included in that.

There are many followers of Jesus today who don't believe that He is truly equal with God the Father. They use texts like John 14:28, where Jesus says "the Father is greater than I." How do we reconcile a breath-taking text like Philippians 2:9-11 with John 14:28? The best explanation is the humanity of Jesus. As a human being (see the context of Phil 2:9-11 in 2:6-8) Jesus took a subordinate position to His Father in order to reveal the character of God in a form that human beings could understand. He was the Second Adam, Adam as Adam was intended to be. As Adam He could accurately say "The Father is greater than I."

The divine counterpoint to John 14:28 can be found both at the beginning and at the end of the Gospel of John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1. "The Word" in this text is clearly Jesus (1:9-11, 14). He existed from eternity, was always with God, and is fully God in quality. This reading of John 1:1 is compatible with John 20:28 where Thomas calls Him "My Lord and my God!" The divine-human Jesus is both fully God and less than God. It depends on which of His two natures you are looking at.

The vision of Revelation 1 is compatible with the picture of Jesus elsewhere in the New Testament. He is more than just a human being or a prophet. He is God Himself. In Jesus Christ, the very person of God came down to earth and "lived among us" (John 1:14), later visiting John on the Island of Patmos.

Rev 1:18–

Jesus is presented here as the "living one," the one who died and is now alive forever and ever. These phrases are an extension of the phrase in the previous verse, "the first and the last." His death is a one-time event (*egenomên*— aorist tense— He "became" dead— Phil 2:8), His resurrected life, in contrast, is never-ending (*ho zôn, zôn*-- two present participles). "Forevermore" (*eis tous aiônas tôn aiônôn*) is perhaps the strongest expression of eternity in the Greek language. Jesus is the one who gained the victory over death, and as a result, He holds the keys of death and Hades. The first half of verse 18 is the clearest evidence that the son of man in the vision of verses 13-16 is none other than Jesus Christ, the one who died and rose again. From a New Testament perspective, these words could not apply to anyone else. These words are also a reason John is not to fear. Jesus is alive forevermore, therefore death has no more power over Him. The greatest thing to fear is death, once death is conquered fear is taken away. His resurrection is the path to eternal life for all who are in relationship with Him.

It is interesting that this passage not only presents Jesus as the Yahweh of the Old Testament, it presents Him as the fulfillment of (Gentile) pagan longings as well. There was a Greek goddess named Hekate that exhibits many parallels to the picture of Jesus here in Revelation 1:17-18. She was called the first and the last, the beginning and the end. She was the goddess of revelation. She held the keys to heaven and hell, could travel to and from these

realms and report what she experienced there. She was also known as “Saviour” and used angels to mediate her messages. These connections are detailed in the commentary series by David Aune.

John here presents Jesus as making a missionary appeal to the Gentiles of Asia Minor. He is saying, as it were, "Everything you look for in Hekate, you can find in me and much more." The pagans were also searching for truth and for life. They are invited here to come to Jesus rather than Hekate. Jesus provides everything that the pagan needs. This is a surprising extension of the principle that God meets people where they are (1 Cor 9:19-22). We have already seen this in Revelation. To the Jew, Jesus is everything that the Jews sought for in their synagogues, in the Old Testament, in Yahweh, in the sanctuary services, and in the temple sacrifices. In the next two chapters, the churches are reminded that everything they need is also found in Jesus.

Rev 1:17-18 (spiritual lesson)–

Is there a lesson for us in the use of Hekate (pagan Greek goddess) imagery to describe Jesus? How do we follow a Jesus who comes to the pagans as Hekate, to the Jews as Yahweh and to the churches with great foreknowledge and flexibility? If we want to follow Jesus as we reach out to people, we will do so the way Jesus did. We will meet them where they are. We will seek to understand where they have come from, understand their background, we will follow the encouragement of Paul, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." 1 Corinthians 9:22.

A young man in Arizona was searching for Jesus. Laying on his couch, high on drugs, listening to The Rolling Stones (getting "stoned on the Stones" as he recounted it) rather than looking for God, he suddenly saw the face of Jesus looking down on him from the ceiling. In his altered state of mind, Jesus pointed at him and said, "When this song is over, you belong to me." When the song ended, he got up from the couch, turned off the music, sobered up, and applied to seminary to study for the ministry. The story does not surprise me. Jesus finds ways to meet people where they are, even in a drug and rock infested room. Similarly, if we want to reach people, we need to understand where they are and present Jesus in a way that will make sense in their world.

Rev 1:12-18 (spiritual lesson)–

One final point about the introductory vision. Each church is presented as a candlestick and the seven churches as seven golden candlesticks. As we have seen, the candlestick image is drawn from the Old Testament sanctuary and is found inside the holy place of the sanctuary. It is the only light that the priests had as they went about their work in the sanctuary. And so it is that the church is intended to be the light of the world.

In today's secular world, the church can be the light through which the world sees Jesus. That's important because secular people don't tend to respond to arguments based on strings of Bible texts. They come to God when they see God in other people. I find that when a secular person comes in contact with a Christian, sensing God in that particular life, he or she will often become interested. Secular people become interested in a God that is real in the life of

someone they know, or in a group of Christians. Today many churches just go through the motions of religion--meeting once a week, going through rituals, doing it because their parents did it. Secular people have more important things to do than to go through the motions of religion. But when they discover a real God in the lives of other people or find a church throbbing with the living God, secular people are attracted. As the lampstand was the only light in the sanctuary, the church may be the only light about God that some people will ever see.

Rev 1:19 (Introduction)–

This verse is probably the most important structuring passage in the entire book of Revelation. It parallels 1:11, where Jesus (the “son of man” figure in the vision) tells John, “Write what you see (*blepeis*).” The command is in the present continuous tense. This introduces the vision that John is about to see. In verse 19, Jesus says, “Write what you have seen (*eides*).” The aorist indicative of *eides* clearly indicates that the vision is over. So the vision itself occurs between verses 11 and 19 of this chapter. John is told to write down the things he has seen while in the presence of the mighty son of man (1:12-16).

This verse seems to be a nutshell summary of the entire book. It includes in it everything that John is told to write down. As we will see, this verse is a duodirectional structuring device that helps us understand the primary purpose of the two main sections of the book. This also has implications for the meaning of the seven churches.

Rev 1:19–

This verse begins with “therefore” (Greek *oun*). The content of this verse is based on what the son of man said in the previous two verses (1:17-18) and perhaps the entire vision (1:12-18). John is instructed to write down the vision because the vision comes from the glorious son of man, the Yahweh of the Old Testament (“first and last”), the one who died and rose again and the one who has the keys of death and Hades. This vision **MUST** be written down because it not only comes from the God of the universe, it comes from the God/man whose death and resurrection is the centerpoint of history, the one who defeated death and opened the way to the glorious end-point of history that the Book of Revelation describes. This vision is of decisive importance.

This “therefore” makes it clear that the entire vision is about Jesus Christ. In the darkest moments when plagues are rained down on the earth, the central message is still about Jesus Christ and through Him about what God is like. If the interpretation of Revelation does not yield a clearer picture of Jesus, the book has not been rightly understood. And the church’s response to this picture of Jesus is to be the response Jesus called for in John, “Do not be afraid” (verse 17, NASB, NIV, NRSV). The picture of Jesus in verses 12-16 was clearly intimidating to John. Jesus in His heavenly role is truly powerful. He is well able to control events and bring about the outcome He desires. But the words of Jesus in verse 17 also make it clear that all that power is exercised with the heart of a Lamb (Rev 5:5-6). He exercises His power for the ultimate benefit of His creation. There is no need to be afraid of Jesus and there is no need to be afraid of God.

The crucial interpretive question in this verse has to do with the most common word in the Greek New Testament (*kai*), which is normally translated “and.” So “write what you have

seen" in this verse is immediately followed by the Greek word for "and" (*kai*). If translated as "and" (KJV, NASB), John is to write down three things, what he has seen, the things which are, and the things which will come "after these things." That would mean that the things which are (from John's perspective) and the things which come afterward are something separate from the vision, which would make little sense. The vision clearly concerns John's day and after (Rev 1:1, 9-11). So the interpreter needs to explore other possibilities for the Greek "*kai*."

Another use for the Greek *kai* (translated "and" in the KJV and NASB) is that it functions much like a colon. A helpful way to translate that usage would be a word like "namely." In other words, what follows the "and" doesn't add to what was said previously, it elaborates on it. I have retranslated Revelation 1:19 with this in mind: "Write, therefore, what you have seen, namely, the things which are and the things which must happen after these things." Reading this verse accordingly, the things which are and the things which must happen after these things ARE the content of the vision John is commanded to write down. In other words, the entire book of Revelation is made up of two things, the things which are (from John's perspective) and the things which come after John's time.

Revelation 1:19 offers an expansion of an earlier time reference in the opening verse of the book (Rev 1:1). There the entire book of Revelation is said to concern things which "must happen soon." See notes on Revelation 1:1. One could easily get the impression that the entire book of Revelation is solely made up of things that lie beyond the time of John. But that is contrary to the data of the book itself. There are multiple references to the cross in past tense (Rev 1:17-18; 3:21; 5:5; 12:11, etc.). There is the reference to the birth of Christ in 12:5. The letters to the seven churches contain references to some of the churches' past (2:4-5, 13, 21; 3:2-4, 8, 10). So the time reference in Revelation 1:1 is not intended as an absolute, that all parts of Revelation are in the future. A primary focus of the book of Revelation is on future events (from John's perspective), but the entire book is also addressed to the seven churches and rooted in their experience (Rev 1:9-11; 22:16).

Revelation 1:19 elaborates on the time reference of Revelation 1:1. The general focus on future events mentioned there is expanded to include things contemporary with John's time and place. Revelation concerns both "things which are" and "things which will happen after these things." So the next question we need to ask is whether the things which are will be described first, following by the things that will happen afterward (as the order of phrases in verse 19 might suggest), or whether the entire book is a mingling of the two. This question is answered by reference to Revelation 4:1: "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.'" Revelation 4:1, NIV.

"What must take place after this" in 4:1 translates the same words in the original language as one finds in Revelation 1:19. So the comment in Revelation 4:1 is clearly expanding on 1:19. Revelation 4:1 marks a crucial transition point in the structure of Revelation. What happens in Revelation after chapter four is primarily future and what happens before chapter four (the seven letters to the seven churches) concerns primarily things that are present in John's experience. In Revelation 1:19 John is giving us clear insight with regard to his intention (and/or the intention of the one who is speaking to him) for the structure of the whole book.

The seven churches focus on the “things which are” while the majority of the book focuses on the future. From John’s perspective, the messages to the churches are not primarily future or a history in advance of the Christian church. The seven letters are written as messages to seven churches in John’s day with wider implications for everyone who reads them.

Rev 1:20–

The first key word of this verse is “mystery” (*mustêrion*). This introduces an explanation of the stars and the lamps. In Revelation 10:7 “the mystery of God” is finished at the time when the seventh angel is about to blow his trumpet. The phrase seems to be another way of saying “the gospel” (Rom 11:25; Eph 3:3-4). This is confirmed by the verb often translated “proclaimed” or “preached” which is actually the verb form for “gospel” (*euênggelisen*— source of English word for evangelism). See notes on Revelation 10:7. In Revelation 17:5-7 the word mystery refers to the identity of Babylon as a counterfeit of the true gospel which appeared in 10:7 and 14:6-7. Here “mystery” is handled differently. It represents something previously unknown, hidden or obscure that is now revealed and is as clear as any other truth. In this case the mystery is the interpretation of the symbols of the seven stars and the seven lamps. The seven stars are interpreted as the “angels” of the seven churches and the seven lamps are the seven churches themselves. This interpretation sets the stage for the seven letters that follow.

The most debated feature of this verse is the meaning of “angel.” The basic meaning of the term is simply “messenger.” But who is the messenger here? A celestial being who is given responsibility for the oversight of one of the churches? The church father Origen speculated that the “angels” here represented the guardian angels of the seven churches, much as individuals are thought to have a personal, guardian angel (see Matt 18:10; Acts 12:15). On the other hand, how could the guardian angels of each church be charged with the church’s “crimes” in the seven letters?

Another possibility is that the “angels” of the churches are the leaders of each church. But in Greek there is no article. These are not “the” angels of the seven churches, they are simply “angels.” In the absence of the article, this reference certainly should not be used as proof that the church already had “bishops” by the end of the first century. If it did refer to “bishops” one would think the title would have been preserved for that purpose through the centuries.

What were churches like in ancient cities like Corinth, Rome or Antioch? One thing we know for sure is that there is no evidence for formal church buildings before the middle of the third century. The most common form of church in New Testament times was the house church. Ancient dwellings came in two major forms, the *domus* and the *insula*. The *domus* was a fairly large home surrounding an open courtyard, much as one sees in the famous movie *Ben Hur*. These were homes of the wealthy and would often contain extended family, servants, slaves, and independent contractors who would help in the family business. The *insula* was like a large apartment complex (mostly single story, sometimes two story), with a number of “condominiums.” There is abundant evidence for both types of housing in the archaeological site of Pompei near Naples, Italy. The *domus* could usually accommodate a group as large as 50, while the *insula* apartments would more often accommodate 20-30. The poorer classes lived in

tighter conditions, with a shop or workshop in front of or below the living quarters. Most of these “shop-houses” could accommodate groups of no more than 20.

It is quite likely, then, that any sizable city soon had numerous house churches that might occasionally gather in larger groups but would often be rather isolated from each other. By the end of the century, most house churches were led by an elder and/or a deacon. Larger churches might have a board of elders. Scholars believe that by the time of Revelation the churches in a city were united by a council of elders. The fact that the “church” of each city is used in the singular (Rev 2:1, 8, etc.) suggests that such a city-wide concept was in play by then. The concept of bishops would naturally have arisen over time as the chair of a city-wide council gained increasing prominence over the council. Coercive authority, as in the medieval papacy, however, was slow to develop in the early centuries.

These “angels” serve as human or celestial representatives of the churches, but the messages are not directed to them or controlled by them, they are given to the whole church through these representatives. In fact seven times the Spirit is said to directly address the churches themselves (Rev 2:7, 11, etc.). I think it most likely that the “angel” of each church in Revelation was the chair of the city council of elders, who as the delegated representative of all the believers in that city was the one to receive the written message from John and see that its message was properly delivered to all the house churches in the city. Since teachers are referred to as stars in Daniel 12:3, it is possible that the combination in this verse refers to the teachers that John knows will communicate his message with accuracy and care.

Supporting this idea is the fact that the term “angel” could be applied in the Old Testament to both prophets, as messengers of God to the people, and priests as God’s representatives (Hag 1:13; Mal 2:7). The term was also used for the forerunner of the Messiah in Malachi 3:1-2 (so interpreted in Mark 1:2-5 but conflated with Isaiah 40:3-5). So while “angel” often means a celestial being in the Bible, it is actually a more ambiguous term, often referring to human messengers (2 Kings 5:10; Isa 42:19; Ezek 23:40; Phil 2:25). The “angels” of the seven churches refer to human messengers who will deliver John’s prophecy to the churches of their respective cities (one Greek manuscript of Revelation 2:20 even refers to the “wife” of the angel of Thyatira).

Rev 1 (Conclusion)–

The opening of this chapter makes it clear that the central topic of Revelation is Jesus Christ, with a special emphasis on future events (Rev 1:1, 3). The book of Revelation is similar in style to the visions of Daniel, but the visions of John are clearly a “testimony of Jesus” (1:2). While the style is familiar to anyone who knows the Old Testament, the content of the book is overtly Christian.

The book’s greeting comes in the form of a triple trinity (1:4-6), beginning with a trinity of persons, followed by a special focus on Jesus Himself; the qualities that make Him special (His death, resurrection and heavenly reign) and the actions that result (He loves us, freed us from our sins and has raised us to a high status in Him). The Prologue to the Book of Revelation concludes with a reference to Jesus’ Second Coming and a number of further titles for God (1:7-8).

In a real sense the introduction to the book of Revelation comes in 1:9-11. There John gives the location (Patmos) from which he writes, the reason why he is there (the gospel), the time when the vision was given (the Lord's Day, probably the Sabbath) and the audience to whom the book was written, the seven churches of Asia Minor. Up to this point in the book, the language is largely straightforward, but beginning with verse 12 the language of chapter one is largely symbolic.

In verses 12-16 Jesus is portrayed in spectacular apocalyptic language, drawn to a large degree from the description of the heavenly figure in Daniel 10 and other Old Testament references. The glorious Jesus walks among the seven golden lampstands. The characteristics with which He is described form the basis of His approach to each of the seven churches. He meets each church where they are. No church gets the full picture of Jesus, but each gets a unique picture of Jesus (see the introductions to each church in chapters two and three).

This glorious vision of Jesus (1:12-16) is frightening to John, who falls on His face before this "son of man" (1:17). But Jesus reassures Him with a touch and a word. There is no reason to be afraid. The God John serves may be powerful and glorious (as the "first and the last" Jesus is included in the Yahweh of the Old Testament), but He is no threat to those who love and trust Him. This safety is assured by the death and resurrection of Jesus, who now has the keys of death and Hades, whose power over us is destroyed (1:18).

The "therefore" at the beginning of verse 19 indicates that the content of that verse (a nutshell summary of the entire content of the vision/book) is grounded in the previous picture of Jesus (1:12-18). While the book of Revelation concerns both things which were realities at the time of John and things which were future from John's day (1:19), the primary purpose of the book is the picture of Jesus in verses 17 and 18. He is the one who died, rose again and now lives and reigns. The chapter closes with an explanation of two of the symbols in the vision of Jesus, the stars and the lamps. The stage is set for the messages to the seven churches which follow in the next two chapters.

The first chapter of the book of Revelation presents a Jesus that offers "different stokes to different folks." In a vision that is related to the sanctuary, Jesus is portrayed in His completeness. But this picture of Jesus is the introduction to the two chapters which follow. Jesus approaches each of the churches with full knowledge of their condition, but presents Himself in a way that is uniquely shaped to meet each church's need. We see both the flexibility of Jesus in dealing with the churches, and His great mercy in approaching them in such a way as to not induce the kind of terror that John experienced in verse 17. To these messages we now turn.



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