

## THE A.B.C. OF REVELATION

### Chapter 1

Prophetic in character, the Book of Revelation can be made difficult to understand, and as a result many people do not read it. However, it is the only book in the Bible which promises, <sup>1:3</sup> Blessed *also 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14* is *he* that readeth, and *they* that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for *the time is at hand*. ... It is not meant to be confusing or complicated, but to be taken as it is, <sup>22:18</sup> For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: <sup>19</sup> And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. ... It means what it says and says what it means ('formal equivalence'), and where we meet verses and passages which we now see as 'through a glass, darkly', and we cannot understand, we receive them as the truth of God's Word, and when we see Him face-to-face, then shall *I/we* know even as also *I/we are* known (1 Cor. 13:12).

The opening chapter sets before us a simple A.B.C. which stands us in good stead for the exploration of the book.

The **Aim** of the book is the 'revelation' (ἀποκάλυψις), the 'revealing' of Jesus Christ in relation to the near and distant future, things which must shortly come to pass (v.1). It is the unveiling of the otherwise unknown and unknowable God to His Church throughout the ages. Its message is not a mystery, containing cryptic symbols and terms which are not explained. Rather, it is God's revealed Truth as presented from Genesis to Revelation. Since it was the chief purpose of God to create language to communicate with human beings, He expects us to understand what He says as literal, and in its plainest sense.

The **Background** to the book is the only remaining apostle John being exiled for his faith to the prison island of Patmos, in the Aegean Sea, off the western coast of Asia Minor. It takes place approaching the conclusion of the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, c. 95-96 AD. He was exceptionally cruel, having executed his brother, and also some of the Roman senators simply to confiscate their lands. His grandfather (Vespasian) besieged Jerusalem in 68 AD and became emperor when Nero died in 69 AD. One year later, Vespasian's son, - Domitian's brother, - Titus destroyed Rome. In 79 AD Titus became emperor, but on his death (81 AD) Domitian became emperor ... and rumours abounded how Domitian might have hastened Titus' demise! His persecution of the Jews also included the persecution of the Christians, and it was under Domitian John

was exiled to Patmos.

The **Christ** of the book is the theme throughout. In it He is revealed and presented. He is its Subject and Object for the revelation was initially given to Jesus (v.1) from the Father, to and through the angel to John, and from John to the seven churches and the saints of all ages (καίρός). The purpose is singularly to bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that *[John]* saw (v.2). This is a series of prophecies to be brought to all believers, and their fulfilment are guaranteed by God Himself, <sup>4</sup> from him which is, and which was, and which is to come *[the eternal Father]*, and from the seven Spirits *[the Holy Spirit]* which are before his throne; <sup>5</sup> And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness *[cf. 19:11]*, and the first begotten of the dead *[not by generation but by His position]*, and the prince of the kings of the earth *[a Kingdom, by Divine proclamation]*.

The good news of these prophecies is relayed through the Lord Jesus to the Redeemed for their praise and adoration, Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood (v.5) ... *[He]* hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever (v.6) ... and with the promise of His glorious (shekinah) coming (present tense) He will descend in the clouds, exalted, at the head of those who will accompany Him, at a time already decided by God in the future when *every eye [global, Jews and Gentiles] shall* see him, and they also which pierced him *[Mt. 27:25]* and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him (v.7). He confirms this powerful announcement with unsurpassed authority, <sup>8</sup> *I am* Alpha and Omega, the *beginning* and the *ending*, saith the Lord, which *is*, and which *was*, and which *is to come*, the Almighty. ... The past, present, and future ... the Eternal Godhead, identifying with Jehovah in the Old Testament (Is. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12,13), and with the Man of Galilee in the New Testament (Jn. 8:24,28,58). ... The purpose of these prophecies, therefore, is for God's people to read, study, accept, and be assured of the company of the Lord Jesus throughout every period of the Church until He comes again.

At this point, John, humbly recognises his unworthiness and inadequacy in serving as the chosen vessel for such great revelations. He does not complain about his incarceration on Patmos (95-96 AD), but to his brethren in the faith, in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, he is grateful for being counted worthy of being faithful for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ (v.9). ... He was indeed drinking from Christ's cup and being baptised with His baptism (Mt. 20:22).

He now describes how he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day (v.10). He entered a spiritual experience, not manipulated or aroused by himself, but which had the

Holy Spirit as its origin, and he immediately heard *a great voice* (φωνή) behind him, ‘like the sound of’ a mighty trumpet blast. ... And the great voice spoke, - it was the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, v.13, the Son of Man, and He declared His Godhood, <sup>11</sup> I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven *[the number of completeness]* churches which are in Asia *[in their organised order]*; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And in an instant, John turned round to see Who was speaking behind him, and he saw <sup>13</sup> in the midst of the seven candlesticks *[the seven churches, v.20, unbroken fellowship]* one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. <sup>14</sup> His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; <sup>15</sup> And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. <sup>16</sup> And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. ... Jesus is risen as Saviour and reigning as Sovereign as His Church continues to minister on the earth in His absence. He is the High Priest interceding on their behalf in Heaven (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 9:24), as He holds the seven stars, - the messengers to the seven churches (v.20), - in His right hand, from which none nor nothing can snatch away (Jn. 10:28-29), and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength (v.16).

This is the second occasion John has witnessed the glorified Christ (Mt. 17:2). On the previous occasion, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John fell on their faces, and were sore afraid (Mt. 17:6). As on that occasion, the Lord Jesus knelt and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid (Mt. 17:7). ... It is happening again. On the island of Patmos, - hundreds of miles away from Galilee, in a different country and a different age, - when John saw the risen Lord he fell at his feet as if he was dead (Rev. 1:17; also Is. 6:5; Ezek. 1:28; 3:23; Dan. 10:8,9). As before, the King in all His beauty and glory again knelt down, <sup>17</sup> And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: <sup>18</sup> I am he that liveth, and was *dead*; and, behold, I am *alive for evermore*, Amen; and have the keys *[symbol of authority]* of hell *[Hades, Sheol]* and of death.

John is then instructed, <sup>19</sup> Write the things which thou hast seen *[past - the vision of the glorified Lord Jesus among the candlesticks]*, and the things which are *[present - in relation to the seven churches, chs. 2-3]*, and the things which shall be hereafter *[future - yet to come, chs. 6-23]*; <sup>20</sup> The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. ... And it is to these seven churches we shall be introduced, the things which are (v.19).