

## The One who is, who was and who is to come

The book of Revelation was never designed as a manual in systematic theology, let alone as a chart by chart timeline of future events. John was suffering on Patmos, and the Lord sent him a vision to encourage him to focus less on himself and his circumstances, and more on the One who is from everlasting to everlasting. The Lord 'introduced Himself' to Moses as being **I am who I am** (Exodus 3:14,15).<sup>1</sup>

The whole thrust of the book of Revelation is that the Lamb of God is ushering in the fullness of the Kingdom of God, overseeing the ultimate overthrow of death and evil, and making use of *everything* to accomplish His purposes – even the suffering of His saints that the forces of darkness have engineered. Suffering is one of the crucial keys to understanding the Revelation. It was, and is, essential for Christians experiencing some measure of tribulation to know that these sufferings are by no means random and meaningless.



The Revelation was given to inspire believers to hold firm to receive their full reward – and not to give in and so risk being written (literally 'scraped out', as with a knife from the parchment) out of the book of life. Those who follow the Lamb are not fighting a lost cause. Because

<sup>1</sup> He is the Lord who heals us, who is our Banner, and who deals with us in very different ways, according to His purposes. cf Exodus 15:25-26, 17:15, Ex. 8:23, 9:26, 10:23 11:7

He has overcome we, as 'a kingdom of priests' will, for all eternity, be overcomers with Him.<sup>2</sup>

If you missed the opening edition, Sally has sharpened the formatting and posted it [here](#).

## Revelation 1:4-8

*John, to the seven churches which are in Asia.*<sup>3</sup>

*Grace and peace to you from the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come; from the sevenfold Spirit before His throne;<sup>4</sup> and from Jesus Christ.*

<sup>2</sup> A kingdom implies something united, whole and organised. We are not isolated individuals ploughing our own furrow; we serve together one king of one kingdom. The Old Testament introduces us to the idea of there being a royal priesthood. In Exodus 19:4-6 we read: You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Peter and John simply develop this concept, thereby linking Sinai with the new Zion. The truth is, of course, that the Jews, once settled in Canaan, very rarely showed themselves to be a worthy 'kingdom of priests.' They easily followed false gods and dishonoured, rather than magnified, Yahweh. They were meant to have stood in relation to all the nations round about in much the same way that the tribe of Levi stood to themselves; they were designed to be witnesses for the Almighty to the rest of the world, instructing spiritually unaware nations of the truths about God. Despite our many faults and failings, may the Christian church succeed where the Jewish nation failed – and may we perform the services He leads us to as His faithful 'priests.'

<sup>3</sup> Modern day Turkey

<sup>4</sup> This description of the Holy Spirit is unique in Scripture. Seven is the perfect number, and speaks of God's perfection in Himself, and His work. The seven lamps of fire that are mentioned in 4:15 likewise speak of His 'illuminating, purifying and energising ministries' (Spirit

*He is the faithful witness to these things, the first to rise from the dead, and the ruler of all the kings of the world.*

*All glory to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding His blood for us. He has made us a Kingdom of priests for God his Father.<sup>5</sup> All glory and power to Him forever and ever! Amen.*

*Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven, and everyone will see Him—even those who pierced Him.*



*And all the nations of the world will mourn for Him. Yes! Amen!*

*“I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end,” says the Lord God. “I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come—the Almighty One.” NLT*

## **The glorified Son**

Worthy though the Victorian Sunday school system was, it imbued many with a false picture of ‘Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.’ The opening chapter of Revelation goes a long way to dispel such sugary images.

We will look in more detail at the appearance of the Risen Christ in the next edition. Here we are concerned to hear again His word to His suffering people: ‘Grace and peace from the Living One’ whose work of redemption is complete. The emphasis now is on the fact that He

filled Life Bible, p1957) – cf the seven eyes of the Lamb in 5:6. There is perfect oneness between the members of the Trinity, with each having their own essential being and distinctive functions.

<sup>5</sup> The reference here is to Israel being called to be a kingdom of priests to God (Exodus 19:6). God had always wanted more than the companionship of the angels: He created man with the unique capacity to be intimate with Him and to be His fellow workers.

is from everlasting to everlasting, and that He is reigning in glory. Amazing truths are stressed: that He loves us (1:5), and that He has made us to be a kingdom and priests unto Himself (1:6), so that we can function in both witness and worship at the very highest level. Ultimately we will reign with Him. (5:10)

## **The Ruler over the kings of the earth (1:5)**

People often ask how the Lord can be King over kings in terms of free will. There are many difficulties to ponder here. For example, was the very godly Dietrich Bonhoeffer right to presume that the proper course of action in the case of a Hitler coming to power was to assassinate him?<sup>6</sup> We know from Proverbs 21:1 *that the king’s heart in the Lord’s hand is a stream of water that He channels toward all who please Him.* Commenting on this passage Matthew Henry wrote,

*Even the hearts of men are in God’s hand, and not only their goings, as He had said in Proverbs*

*20:24. God can change men’s minds, and by a powerful insensible operation under their spirits, turn them from that which they seemed*

*most intent upon, even inclining them to that which they seemed most averse to, as the farmer, by ditches and canals, channels the water through his grounds as he pleases, without in any way altering the nature of the water, nor putting any force upon it, any more than God’s Providence does upon the native freedom of man’s will, but directing its course to serve His own purpose.*



## **He is coming with the clouds**

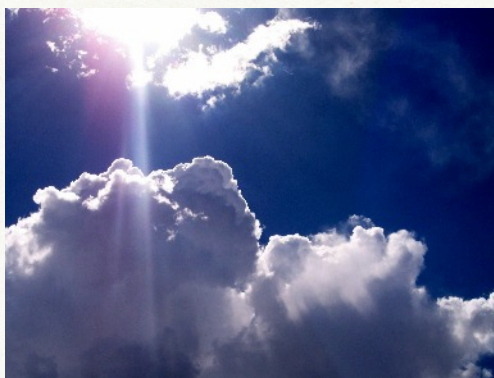
Someone once calculated that something like one in every four or five verses in the New Testament concerns the return of Christ. It is such a central theme of the New Testament that it is all the more astonishing that so few dedicate much time or thought to something so crucial.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4906502.stm](https://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4906502.stm)

<sup>7</sup> For a brief introduction to this subject see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_Coming](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Coming)

The promise of His return is not confined to the New Testament. Daniel dreamed of 'someone like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of Heaven.' (Daniel 7:13) Jesus most commonly spoke of Himself as the 'Son of Man'. He comes to inaugurate an entirely new phase of God's rule on earth in which He is given everlasting dominion and glory, and a Kingdom that shall never pass away in which all peoples, nations and languages will serve Him. (Daniel 7:14)

Clouds speak of the divine presence, and of God breaking through. They speak of His overshadowing protection and leadership, but the primary emphasis here is on the harvest of the ages which separates out the wheat from the chaff.



The coming of Christ will most certainly not be welcomed by all. Zechariah tells us that the Jews will mourn and grieve bitterly for Him whom they have pierced (12:10). Both Matthew 24:30 and Revelation 1:7 tell us that the Lord's return will provoke the most intense mourning throughout the world, as individuals and nations alike realise who He really is (1:7), and how many have failed to respond to His advances.



### For Reflection

Meditate on the thought that He is coming with the clouds, and that every eye will see

Him – even those who pierced Him. What action (as opposed to head belief) do you feel inclined to take as a result of this meditation?

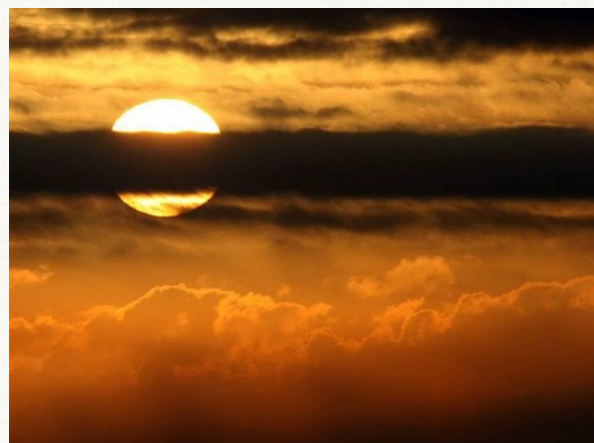
### The Beginning and the End

The Eternal God, the Father declares Himself to be the Almighty, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. There is a suggestion that 'the end shall be as the beginning', a principle that can be seen in Revelation 2:7; 22:1-4; cf Genesis 2:8ff. God, who is the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega, whose power is absolute, is wrapping up human history.<sup>8</sup>

There is no name or title which the Lord God does not freely share now with His crucified and glorious Son. (e.g. Revelation 22:13) What is also striking is that Antipas in Rev. 2:13 is also called the faithful witness – the name given to Jesus in Rev. 1:5.

### For Reflection

Since we are priests for the Lord, may the Lord bless and expand our unique sphere of service. For each of us this will be quite different. We could suggest that the Lord makes us 'priests' for certain types of people, and certain spheres of service. May the Lord make it clear where our particular gifting and 'fields' of service lie, so that like Paul we can be confident to move in the giftings He has given us, and, so far as we understand them, the specific boundaries He has shown us.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>8</sup> See Rev. 22:13 cf Isaiah 44:6, Rev. 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:6, 14; 19:15; 21:22. For references to stars falling from the heavens, see Isaiah 34:4; Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:25 and Rev. 6:13; 8:12; 12:4. As for the title 'Almighty', this appears only once in the NT outside Revelation, and then when quoting an OT passage (2 Corinthians 6:18).

<sup>9</sup> see 2 Cor 10:13-16