

***JESUS CHRIST IS PRESENT AND ACTIVE
AMIDST ALL THE CONGREGATIONS IN THE WORLD***

- PART 1. THE TITLE. THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST (1:1-3)
 - a. Explanation of the symbols
 - b. Different views about the words 'revelation' and 'prophecy'
 - c. Different views about the word 'soon'
- PART 2. THE RECIPIENTS, GREETING AND WORDS OF PRAISE (1:4-6)
 - a. Explanation of the symbols
 - b. Different views about the seven congregations
 - c. Different views about 'the ruler of the kings of the world' and 'the kingdom'
- PART 3. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING (1:7)
 - a. Explanation of the symbols
 - b. Different views about the second coming
- PART 4. CHRIST'S SELF-DESIGNATION (1:8)
 - Explanation of the symbols
- PART 5. JOHN'S COMMISSION (1:9-11)
 - a. Explanation of the symbols
 - b. Different views about the Lord's Day
- PART 6. THE VISION OF THE SON OF MAN (1:12-16)
 - a. Explanation of the symbols
 - b. Different views about the Son of Man
- PART 7. THE COMFORT AND INSTRUCTION OF CHRIST TO JOHN (1:17-20)
 - a. Explanation of the symbols
 - b. Different views about 'the things that will take place later' (1:19)

The introductory words are related to the final words of Jesus himself in Revelation 22:6-20. John summarises the words of Jesus as the introduction to the book. He speaks of the origin, contents and destination of the book. And he speaks about the way the truth of the book was revealed and about the important meaning of the book. The origin of the book is God (Christ), who via an angel and the apostle John made its contents known to its readers and its hearers. The book of Revelation is especially a message to Christ's servants, to Christ's congregations in every century and in every country and to every individual that reads and hears the book. The revelation is made known in visions that make use of pictorial or symbolic language.

PART 1. THE TITLE. THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST (1:1-3)

a. Explanation of the symbols

1:1 "The revelation"¹. The word 'revelation' means unveiling by taking away the veil over things that were hidden. The hidden things are not only *what* will happen in the future, but also *why* these things happen and *to what purpose* those events occur. It is a revelation or unveiling of God himself in Jesus Christ, of God's plan (decree, decision) for world history and especially of Church history within that world history. Thus, it is a revelation of Christ and a revelation of God's plan (decrees) of what he does through the ages until the end in his governing of the world. In short, his plan is to establish the full kingship or kingdom of God throughout the universe and thus to enable his elect (God's people) to live in full salvation.

"of Jesus Christ, which God gave him"². The book of Revelation says from whom this book originates: it originates from God who sent Jesus Christ (John 3:16; 5:20-30; 6:38-40). This revelation is given by God to Christ. The book of Revelation also says of whom it speaks: it speaks of Jesus Christ as the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). It reveals who Jesus Christ is and it reveals his work as King of God's kingdom. It especially reveals the victory of Jesus Christ and of his Church in world history. Thus, the book of Revelation is *not* meant to be a prediction of future history, but *is* rather a self-revelation of Jesus Christ and his work in the present time (cf. John 16:14).

¹ Αποκαλυψις

² Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἣν ἔδωκεν (viaa) αὐτῷ ὁ θεός. For (viaa) see supplement 8: footnotes.

“to show his servants”³. The revelation is shown or made known by means of apocalyptic visions. The words ‘apocalypse and apocalyptic’ mean the grand decisive or violent events which God (Christ) executes and controls.

The word ‘servant’ refers to ‘slaves’ serving in the household of their master. The emphasis is on their love for their master and on serving him for life (Exodus 21:5-6)! It is intended to refer, not to a special group of Christians like fulltime workers, but to every Christian who trusts, worships and obeys God through Jesus Christ! Thus the revelation in the book of Revelation is meant for every single Christian to read, to understand and to be encouraged by its message!

The servants of Jesus Christ (all the believers) receive this revelation so that in everything that happens in the history of this world and in their personal history they will recognise God’s eternal plan and hand and recognise Christ’s work and coming. Consequently they will be able to trust him amidst all the crises and anxieties and look with unshakeable faith forward to his coming which will inaugurate God’s kingdom in its final phase.

“what must take place”⁴. What must take place is God’s eternal decree (plan, decision) for this world and for his Church in this world. It *must* take place, because it is not controlled by inexplicable fate or by the irrational forces of the universe or even by a god that keeps changing his will, but is determined and controlled by the God who has revealed himself in the Bible and in Jesus Christ. Because God determined that his plan *must* be carried out, it *shall* be carried out (cf. Isaiah 14:24,26-27)! Everything that happens in the world and in history happens either by God’s decision or by his permission! This is an encouragement for Christians!

“soon”⁵. God’s eternal plan (decree) for world history and Church history will take place, *not* in the very far away future, but will begin to take place *soon*, in John’s life already. The word may mean ‘quickly’ (James 1:19; Acts 22:18) or ‘soon, shortly’ (Romans 16:20; 1 Timothy 3:14; Acts 25:4). The context must decide. The translation ‘soon, shortly’, ‘not a very distant future’ is correct, because the immediate context says that “the time is near, the time is at hand” (1:3). *The symbols begin to be realised immediately*. This is confirmed by Revelation 22:10, which says that the words of the prophecy of this book must not be sealed up, because the time is near. God’s plan *began* to be realised in the first century A.D.

“He made it known once for all time⁶ by sending his angel to his servant John”. The word ‘to make known’ in the original Greek language means literally *to make known by means of signs or symbols or figurative language or imagery!* That is why we find so many symbols and numbers in the book of Revelation. And that is why we must understand what each symbol refers to.

1:2 “who testifies to everything he saw -”. John *saw* visions and what he saw were ‘signs’ (12:1,3; 15:1; 21:19) consisting of symbols and numbers. The appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ to him was *not literal but symbolical*. Therefore we may not interpret the book literally, but, as Revelation 1:1 says, figuratively (cf. 11:8). Christ speaks directly to John in 1:8 and 22:7 ff. Christ appears to John in 1:12 ff. But in the rest of the book Christ is spoken of or he speaks through his angel.

“that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ”⁷. John is not the author of this book. It is Jesus Christ. John did not invent the contents, but really saw and heard these things in visions. These visions were set before his eyes objectively. John testified (bore witness) to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ. John testified to the objectivity of what he saw and heard. That is why he calls it ‘the word of God’. It means that God speaks in and through these words and thus reveals his will and purpose to us. And Christ himself stands behind John and bears himself witness about his past, present and future work in this world and its history and guarantees its truth and value. That is why it is called ‘the testimony of Jesus Christ’. Any one who rejects this word of God and this testimony of Jesus Christ and any one who changes its contents by adding material to it or removing material from it will be seriously punished (22:18-19)!

³ δειξαι > δεικνυμι (vnaa) τοις δουλοις

⁴ α δει (vīpa) γενεσθαι (vnam)

⁵ εν ταχει

⁶ εσημανεν > σημαινω (viaa). The aorist tense emphasises doing something once for all time.

⁷ εμαρτυρησεν (viaa) τον λογον του θεου και την μαρτυριαν Ιησου χριστου

1:3 “Blessed is the one who again and again reads and those who again and again hears the words of this prophecy and again and again keeps what is written in it”⁸. The blessing is given seven times in the book of Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14). The first blessing is to those who publicly read the book to others and to those who hear it and take it to heart. Because books were still hand-copied in those days, there were only a few copies available and readers were appointed to read the Bible books in public meetings of the congregation. The book of Revelation was also read aloud in public in the congregations. Justin Martyr (140 A.D.) says that the Gospels were read publicly from the beginning. One of the earliest tests for canonicity was the public reading of a Bible book, because only those books which the Church considered as authoritative were read openly to the whole congregation and were made the basis for exposition (doctrine) and exhortation (behaviour). When the apostle John commands the public reading of Revelation in the congregations he recommended it for canonical status!

‘To take to heart’⁹ means to pay attention to and keep or obey the contents of the book. There is hardly a blessing in reading a book which has no message or significance for the people in their present lives. The book of Revelation is *not* a book predicting future history, which would have no bearing on the personal lives of its readers. The book of Revelation *is* a book revealing God’s will for his Church struggling in the world and encouraging them to persevere because they are struggling together with Christ and will conquer. To read and take to heart such a message is a blessing indeed!

The book of Revelation should be read publicly in the congregations, because it determines the inner and outer life of Christians. It stimulates their faith in the midst of their persecution and oppression and causes them to be encouraged and courageous. The book of Revelation is not simply future historical facts, a Christian time-table of future events, which must be remembered, but is a present significant message for every generation of Christians. It is a Christian philosophy of history until its end-time, which must be lived out within every decade of history!

‘Prophecy’ (1:3; 22:7,18,19) is God’s revelation that is spoken forth (proclaimed)¹⁰ with regard to the past, present and future. The Spirit of Jesus Christ rested on the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 59:21; 1 Peter 1:10-11) and they revealed the word of God by direct revelation. The words: ‘Thus says the Lord’, which are spoken by the prophets of the Old Testament, are pre-fixed 359 times to individual prophecies in the Bible. These prophets were the organs of fresh revelation and spoke the very words of God himself! All their words were God’s authoritative words. Their function was to communicate revelations of truth from God. Their proclamations revealed who God is (Isaiah 40:11-31) and what God’s will is in specific religious, moral and social issues (Isaiah 1:2-4,10-20). Their proclamations were not simply predictions of the future, but served to explain the past (Isaiah 48:3-6a; Jeremiah 2:1-13), or to throw light on the present (Isaiah 48:17-18; Jeremiah 23:16-32), or to disclose the future (Isaiah 48:6b-7; Jeremiah 23:2-8; 29:10-11). The prophecies contained in the book of Revelation reveal the principles of God’s eternal plan operating within world history in the present and also in its end.

“because the time is near”¹¹. The contents of this whole book are about to be realised, even if it will take centuries before the complete fulfilment has been reached! The things, which Jesus revealed to the Church, began to happen from his first coming and will continue to happen until his second coming! That is why every generation of Christians must read the book of Revelation and take it to heart! They must take serious notice of it and let themselves be determined by its message. The content of the book of Revelation is relevant for every congregation in the world at any time between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming!

⁸ μακαριος ο αναγινωσκων (vppa) και οι ακουοντες (vppa) τους λογους της προφητειας και τηρουντες (vppa) τα εν αυτη γεγραμμενα (vppr). The present tense emphasises doing something continually or again and again.

⁹ τηρεω (vppa)

¹⁰ προφημι

¹¹ ο γαρ καιρος εγγυς

b. Different views about the words ‘revelation’ and ‘prophecy’ (1:1,3)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The revelation is the unveiling of (only) those events that shall precede and accompany Christ’s so-called future second return. It is a prophecy (prediction) of events in the future end-time.

Second view. (The correct explanation) The revelation is the unveiling of God’s plan (decree, decision) for Church history within world history throughout the whole New Testament period, from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming. The book of Revelation is the proclamation (prophecy) of God’s plan with regard to the past, present and future of God’s Church within world history.

c. Different views about the word ‘soon’ (1:3)

There are two views. See supplement 6.

First view. (The futurist view) The events described in the book of Revelation are for the greater part future and only begin to be realised after the Church has been removed from the earth (after the so-called rapture).

Second view. (The correct explanation) The events described in the book of Revelation begin to be realised from the time they were revealed in the first century A.D. – thus throughout the whole New Testament period. The translation ‘soon’, ‘shortly’, ‘not a very distant future’ is correct, because the immediate context says that ‘the time is near’, ‘the time is at hand’ (1:3). The symbols began to be realised when they were revealed. This is confirmed by Revelation 22:10, which says that the words of the prophecy of this book “must *not* be sealed up”, because the time is near. God’s plan had already begun to be realised!

PART 2. THE RECIPIENTS, GREETING AND WORDS OF PRAISE (1:4-6)

a. Explanation of the symbols

1:4 “John, to the seven churches (congregations) in the province of Asia”. The apostle John is so well known to his readers that he only needs to mention his name. He does not call himself an apostle, but a servant (cf. 1:3), because in conveying the revelation he is not working as an apostle, but as a prophet, a seer of visions (cf. Isaiah 20:3).

All seven congregations (churches)¹² were located in the Roman province of Asia, which was in the western part of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). The seven congregations formed a kind of irregular circle. There were more congregations in that area: in Troas (Acts 20:5-12), in Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13), in Colosse (Colossians 1:2) and according to Ignatius (20 years later) also in Magnesia and Tralles. However, these seven congregations were chosen because of the spiritual conditions and circumstances of these congregations, so that all congregations of that time and in the future centuries may recognise themselves in them.

Jesus Christ first of all revealed God’s plan to the seven historical congregations in Asia Minor. But in chapter 2 and 3, Jesus Christ commands all the congregations in the whole world to read the book of Revelation. He says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations (churches) (plural)(2:7).” Jesus Christ intended all seven letters with its warnings and encouragements in chapter 2 and 3 as well as the whole book of Revelation for all the congregations in the world throughout the whole New Testament period. He did not intend the messages to be limited to a particular group of Christians in the first century or to a particular group of Jews living in the last days just before Christ’s so-called future second return. These seven congregations represent all congregations in the world throughout the whole New Testament period.

The persecution and sufferings to which the Christian Church in the days of John were subjected, are typical of the persecution and sufferings of Christian congregations throughout the New Testament period (2 Timothy 3:12) and will be typical of the future persecution and sufferings just before Christ’s second coming (Matthew 24:1-31).

¹² ταις επτα εκκλησιας

The revelations in the book of Revelation concern principles and events that are so broad in their scope that they cannot be confined to one definite year or time period or century. For example, the seven congregations in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 do not represent seven identifiable periods of Church history between the time of John and our present day. Nor do the events in Revelation chapters 6ff. represent identifiable historical events in the world of the past two centuries. These principles operate and these events occur throughout all centuries between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming.

Finally, the beginning and the end of the book of Revelation (1:3 and 22:18) make it clear that Jesus Christ addresses himself not merely to one group of people living in one decade in the 1st century A.D. and also not to another group of people living in the last days just before Christ's so-called future second return. Jesus Christ addresses himself to "every one who reads and hears the words of this prophecy of this book", that is, to all people in every age between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming. All people of all congregations in the world who read and listen to this book in any age are called blessed!

"Grace and peace to you". This was the usual greeting with which letters began (Galatians 1:3; 2 Peter 1:2). 'Grace' is God's favour bestowed on those who do not deserve it, forgiving sins and giving eternal life. 'Peace' is God's wholeness of what was broken before, the reflection of God's smile in the heart of a person who has been reconciled to God through Christ.

The order of the Triune God in the greeting.

While the usual greeting is "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; 2 John 3), the greeting from the Triune God is unusual: from God the Father (who is, and who was, and who is to come), from the seven spirits and from Jesus Christ (1:4-5).

In the enumeration of the three Persons of the Triune God (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) the Holy Spirit usually takes the third position in the rest of the Bible, but in verse 4 and 5 he takes the second position. This is because in the book of Revelation God's heavenly dwelling is symbolised by a heavenly temple (7:15). The three divisions of the temple (the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place and the Court) symbolise the Triune God. God was enthroned above the ark in the Most Holy Place, the lampstand with seven lamps representing the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:3) stood in the Holy Place and the altar of burnt-offerings representing Christ's sacrifice of atonement stood in the inner fore court (Exodus 40:21-30). The picture points to God's grace and peace (the greeting) flowing from his heavenly holy temple via the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ to his Church and the believers.

"from him who is, and who was, and who is to come"¹³. The unfolding of God's name in Exodus 3:14, 'I am who I am' or 'I will be who I am', expresses that God is the eternal Unchangeable One and will always remain faithful to his (covenant) promises and threats. As he shows himself to be in the past and present, so he will be in the future. This is also what his name expresses here. 'Who is to come' does not mean that he will come once in the future, but that he is continually 'the Coming One'! He is on his way since the beginning, coming to people in every age, coming to them for salvation or for judgement, until he will finally come visibly in the end, never again to hide his majesty.

"and from the seven spirits before his throne"¹⁴. Also see Revelation 5:6. The number 7 is the number of divine completeness and perfection. This term symbolises the work of the seven-fold Holy Spirit in the seven congregations, that is, in the Church in the whole world. The Holy Spirit equipped the human nature of Jesus Christ with the necessary spiritual gifts needed for his office in the world (Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 61:1-2; Matthew 3:16; Luke 4:18-19). Although the sevenfold Spirit is present and active in the congregations all over the earth, he is before the throne in heaven and thus represents God who sits on the throne in the centre of the universe. Christ is "God with us" at his first coming (Matthew 1:23). The Holy Spirit is 'God with us' and 'God in us' (John 14:16-17; 16:7,16) in the present time after Christ's first coming. See also Romans 8:9-10.

1:5 "and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness"¹⁵. What Jesus himself had seen and heard from the Father, namely, God's eternal plan and word (John 5:19,30), he has communicated faithfully to his followers while he was on earth, even if he had to seal it with his death. And now in the book of Revelation he bears

¹³ ο ων (vppa) και ο ην (viia) και ο ερχομενος (vppn)

¹⁴ και απο των επτα πνευματων α ενωπιον του θρονου αυτου

¹⁵ ο μαρτυς ο πιστος

witness about his own past, present and future work, and guarantees its truth and value. As such Jesus Christ is the faithful witness.

“the firstborn from the dead”¹⁶. The word ‘firstborn’ certainly does not convey the idea that Jesus Christ was created. It is even uncertain whether the force of the element ‘born’¹⁷ in the word ‘firstborn’ is still felt at all. The word ‘firstborn’ expresses priority. Jesus Christ is the first of very many Christians that will be raised from the dead and form the new humanity and the new community of God. He now has all power over the dead (1:18)!

“and the ruler of the kings of the earth”¹⁸. All human beings in history and all their kings and kingdoms belong to Jesus Christ and are subject to him. There is no exception on earth and in history. He has the highest position and highest authority (Philippians 2:9-11). Christ does not become King in the future in a so-called future millennial kingdom on earth (as the futurist view believes), but is already now King in his present kingdom on earth and in heaven (cf. Matthew 12:28; 28:18; 2 Peter 1:11)! Everyone should serve and honour him as such!

Jesus Christ is described in terms of his humiliation and his exaltation (cf. Isaiah 52:13-53:12). His humiliation was his birth, ministry and death on earth. His exaltation was his resurrection from the dead, his ascension to heaven and his enthronement in heaven above all the kings and their kingdoms on earth (Ephesians 1:20-23)!

“To him who continually loves us and has once for all time freed us from our sins by his blood”¹⁹. The salvation work of Jesus Christ is perfect and now complete. He was humiliated, he is already exalted and now he continually loves us today as much as he loved us when he died once for all time for us on the cross! Jesus Christ not only washed away our sins, but set us free by loosening the bonds that kept us in slavery to sin, the sinful world and Satan. He set us free from the guilt, shame, curse, wrath, corruption, confusion and defeat that destroyed us. The implication is that Jesus Christ saves us from beginning to the end: he *begins* his work of salvation by justifying us; then *continues* his work of salvation by sanctifying us throughout our life; and he will finally *complete and perfect* his work of salvation by glorifying us! Romans 8:30 teaches, “Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

His ‘blood’ is a symbol and represents all his suffering on earth while he lived, including his death on the cross, thus satisfying God’s holy and righteous anger against our sins.

1:6 “and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father”²⁰. The description which was formerly applied to God’s Old Testament people (Exodus 19:6) is now applicable to all his New Testament people! All the Christians from all nations in all congregations in the world form together God’s kingdom and priests! What God *began* with his Old Testament people *he continued on a higher plane and extended* to include all Christians from all the nations in the world. Israel was the beginning of the Church (cf. the word ‘church’²¹ in Judges 20:2; Psalm 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:28) and the Church is the continuation and extension of Israel on a higher plane (cf. the word ‘Israel’ in Galatians 6:14-16). What God began to do in one nation since the patriarch Jacob during the Old Testament period he is now doing in all the nations of the world since Jesus Christ in the New Testament period (Ephesians 2:11-22)! Believers among all Gentile nations are now heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:2-6)! This proves that all God’s promises made to Israel during the Old Testament period are also made to all Jews and Gentiles who have become Christians (2 Corinthians 1:20; Galatians 3:26-29)! Jesus Christ makes both Jews and Gentiles who believe in him to be his kingdom and his priests on earth. The Christians from the New Testament period are God’s people (1 Peter 2:9-10), God’s temple (2 Corinthians 6:16), Christ’s Church (Matthew 16:18) and Christ’s kingdom (1:6).

‘The kingdom’ is God’s sovereign rule through Christ that is recognised in the hearts of Christians and is operative in their lives. God’s sovereign rule effects their salvation from beginning to end, their constitution

¹⁶ ο πρωτοτοκος των νεκρων

¹⁷ -τοκος

¹⁸ ο αρχων των βασιλειων της γης

¹⁹ τω αγαπωντι (νρα) ημας και λυσαντι (νρα) ημας εκ των αμαρτιων ημων εν τω αιματι αυτου

²⁰ και εποισησεν (νια) ημας βασιλειαν, ιερεις τω θεω και πατρι αυτου

²¹ εκκλησια means ‘assembly’ or ‘church’

as the one Church consisting of all Christians in the world, their influence in every society on earth and finally their complete and perfect salvation and the redemption of the whole universe in the new heaven and the new earth at Christ's second coming! Christians are already now co-sharers of the kingdom, just as they are already now co-sharers of afflictions (1:9).

“to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.” Christians are already now Christ's priests, exercising the high calling of praising God, praying for the world and living to God's glory here on earth. The word 'amen' is a confirmation of the expression of faith, “So it is and so it will always be!”

b. Different views about the seven congregations (churches) (1:4)

There are three views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The historicist view) The seven congregations literally refer to the congregations in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea during the first century A.D.

Second view. (The dispensational view) The seven congregations represent seven consecutive Church periods clearly defined in Church history between Christ's first coming and the rapture of the Church.²²

Third view. (The correct explanation) The seven congregations were seven historical congregations during the 1st century A.D., but their conditions and characteristics represent conditions and characteristics that can be found in all congregations in the world throughout the whole New Testament period at one time or another.

c. Different views about ‘the ruler of the kings of the world’ and ‘the kingdom’ (1:5-6)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) Christ will only become the ruler of the kings of the earth (1:5) when he takes the throne in the future millennial kingdom at his future second return.²³

Second view. (The correct explanation) Christ is already the ruler of the kings of the earth at his first coming. His enthronement is symbolised in Revelation chapter 5. He has made Christians a kingdom from his first coming (1:6; Matthew 12:28; Mark 1:15). And John cannot be ‘a companion in the kingdom’ if it does not exist on earth (1:9).

PART 3. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING (1:7)

a. Explanation of the symbols

1:7 “Look, he is coming”²⁴. This is an announcement of his second coming. But the dominant or main theme of the book of Revelation is NOT Christ's second coming. The dominant and main theme of the book of Revelation is the revelation of God's plan for the history of the world and his Church! Revelation chapter 1 to 11 reveals the Church indwelt by Christ and persecuted by the world during the whole New Testament period. The Church is avenged, protected and victorious! Revelation chapter 12 to 22 reveals the deeper spiritual background of this struggle during the whole New Testament period. It is a conflict between the Christ and the dragon and in this conflict Christ and his Church are victorious!

“with the clouds”²⁵. In his vision John sees Jesus Christ coming. He comes with the clouds (cf. Daniel 7:13; Zechariah 12:10-12; Matthew 24:30-31). The clouds represent his throne-wagon, just as it is God's throne-wagon (Ezekiel 1:4-28), because God the Son in his divine nature is completely equal to God the Father and he will appear in the glory of God the Father (Matthew 16:27).

²² Larkin, Revelation p. 13

²³ Larkin, Revelation p. 6

²⁴ ερχεται (viph)

²⁵ μετα των νεφελων

“and every eye shall see him”²⁶. Christ’s second coming will be sudden and unexpected! There will only be *one second coming*. It will be very visible and very audible to all people on earth, including Christians!

The Bible knows nothing about two returns of Jesus Christ in the future as the futurist view believes. The terms: his ‘coming or presence’²⁷ and his ‘revelation’²⁸ both refer to one and the same second coming (compare Matthew 24:39-41 with Luke 17:30-35)!

The Bible also knows nothing of a so-called invisible or secret future first return of Jesus Christ (the so-called ‘secret rapture’ to remove the Church from this earth) as the futurist view believes. There is nothing inaudible and invisible in the description of the second coming in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:42-57.

On the contrary, “every eye will see him”! As every eye can see the lightning flash from the east to the west, so will every eye see Christ’s second coming (Matthew 24:27-31). All people, including Christians, will see Jesus Christ coming on the clouds of the sky with great power and glory and he will be accompanied by an uncountable number of angels. All the people on earth will hear the loud command of Jesus Christ with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God announcing the end of the history of this world. People of all occupations, of social standings and all religions will see him coming - some with joy, but others with mourning.

“even those who pierced him”²⁹. The expression is taken from Zechariah 12:10. The Roman soldier literally pierced the side of Jesus with a spear (John 19:34,37). They pierced his hands and feet when they literally nailed him to a cross (Psalm 22:16; Isaiah 53:5; John 19:18,37; 20:25,27). The Jews deliberately plotted to kill him and crucified him by approval (Matthew 12:14; 27:20-26). Thus, both Jews and Gentiles literally pierced him! All the people in the world caused his death by their sins (1 Peter 2:24; 3:18). They pierced him by living a disobedient life (Hebrews 6:6; 10:26-31). This is a fit symbol for the complete condemnation and rejection of Jesus Christ.

“and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him”³⁰. All nations and peoples will mourn. Some will mourn in brokenness of heart due to their sins which brought Christ to the cross and death. Others will mourn in deep despair due to their foolish rejection of Christ, whom they now see coming to judge them. In this passage the emphasis is on the last.

Revelation 6:12-17 describes the one great catastrophe at the end of this present New Testament period of time. The whole universe will crash and the human race will be thoroughly frightened! There will be a great earthquake, the sun will turn black, the stars will fall out of the sky onto the earth, and mountains and islands will be removed from their places. The political and military leaders of every country, the rich and the influential people as well as all other unbelievers will try to hide from the presence of Jesus Christ and his anger against all the injustice and wickedness they have done on earth! They will see Jesus Christ “whom they have pierced” and they will mourn, because it will be too late to repent (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

“Yes, amen”³¹. The Greek word ‘yes’ affirms this message. The Hebrew word ‘amen’ expresses an unshakeable trust and strong expectation. Universal justice will finally be done (cf. Romans 2:5-11). This is a great encouragement for Christians!

b. Different views about the second coming (1:7)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) There will be two second comings (called ‘the first return’ and ‘the second return’ in order to distinguish them from the one and only second coming of the second view). The first return would take place at the removal of the Church from the earth (the rapture) and would be invisible and

²⁶ και οψηται (vifd) αυτον πας οφθαλμος

²⁷ παρουσια

²⁸ αποκαλυψις

²⁹ και οιτινες αυτον εξεκεντησαν > εκκεντω (to pierce)(viaa)

Another link between the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation is that the author of John 19:37 and the author of Revelation 1:7 both follow the Hebrew text of Zechariah 12:10 and not the Greek translation. This is weighty evidence for common authorship.

³⁰ και κοπονται > κοπτομαι (to smite the chest)(vifm) επ αυτον πασαι αι φυλαι της γης

³¹ ναι, αμην

inaudible (secret). The second return would take place at the end of the seven year long tribulation period and before the establishment of the one thousand year long kingdom on earth. The second return would be visible and audible. Futurists believe that Revelation 1:7 speaks of the second return of Jesus. Every eye, not of everyone that ever lived, but only of those coming out of the great tribulation would see Jesus coming on the clouds. Then the Jews would mourn because they had crucified Jesus and the Gentile nations would mourn because Jesus had returned to judge them for their treatment of the Jews.³²

Second view. (The correct explanation) There will be only one second coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the history of this present world and it will be very visible and very audible. Because everyone will be resurrected at that time, everyone who ever lived will see him coming on the clouds (John 5:28-29; 6:40). All non-believers (Jews and Gentiles) will mourn, because the time of grace and forgiveness had passed and the final judgement of their sins had arrived.

PART 4. CHRIST'S SELF-DESIGNATION (1:8)

Explanation of the symbols

1:8 "I am *always* the Alpha and the Omega", says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty"³³. In Revelation 1:4 God the Father is introduced as the One who is, and who was, and who is to come. This is the essential meaning of the name 'LORD'³⁴ in the Old Testament. He is the eternal Unchangeable One and will always remain faithful to his character, promises and threats. As he shows himself to be in the past and present, so he will be in the future.

In Revelation 1:8 Jesus Christ makes the same claim! The One speaking here is Jesus Christ, because the immediate previous and following context speaks of Jesus Christ. In verse 7, John saw the Lord Jesus Christ coming and in verse 8 he hears him speaking. Revelation 1:13 says that the voice that was speaking belonged to one like a son of man. Verse 8 is therefore a self-description of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ makes this same claim again in Revelation 1:17, 21:6-8 and 22:12-13. In verse 8 Jesus Christ calls himself 'the Lord God'. By comparing verse 4 and verse 8, we can see that Jesus Christ claims that he and God the Father are One (cf. John 10:30), that he is fully equal to God the Father, and that he is the complete, perfect and eternal *visible* revelation of the *invisible* God to people (John 14:9; Colossians 1:15; 2:9; Hebrews 1:3)!

Jesus Christ is the Alpha, the origin of everything (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16a). Jesus Christ is also the Omega, the goal of everything (Colossians 1:16b-17). He is from the very beginning to the very end, that is, he is the Eternal One. He is the One who embraces all, bears all and determines all in the universe. There is only one God, the God of the Bible, and he revealed himself in all his greatness and majesty in Jesus Christ (John 5:22-23,26).

In the Old Testament the LORD is called 'the LORD God of hosts (the armies of angels)³⁵' (Amos 4:13). While the term 'the Lord God Almighty' usually is not separated by 'who is, and who was, and who is to come' (4:8; 11:17), here these words explain the essential meaning of the name LORD (the eternal unchangeable and faithful One). While the Roman emperor called himself 'autokrator' (self + power: he himself determines and executes power), Christ called himself 'pantokrator' (all + power: the One who has all power in heaven and on earth, forever)! 'The Almighty' means that nothing can stop him. He breaks every opposition and all who oppose him have to bend. He rules and overrules.

In Isaiah 9:6, the Messiah (Jesus Christ) is called 'Mighty God'³⁶ and in Isaiah 10:20-22, the LORD is also called 'the Mighty God' and 'the Lord LORD Almighty'³⁷! Thus also the Old Testament teaches that Christ and God are fully equal in nature and in power.

³² Larkin, Revelation p. 6

³³ εγω ειμι (vira) το Αλφα και το Ω, λεγει κυριος ο θεος, ο ων (vrra) και ο ην (vira) και ο ερχομενος (vrrn), ο παντοκρατωρ

³⁴ Hebrew: JaHWeH, which means "I am who I am" or "I will be who I am" (Exodus 3:14).

³⁵ Hebrew JaHWeH Elhe-tsibaath

³⁶ Hebrew 'El gibbor'

³⁷ Hebrew 'Adonai JaHWeH tsibaath'

The purpose of Christ's self-designation is to encourage Christians. He says to all Christians throughout the period from his first coming to his second coming (the whole New Testament period), "Take courage! Your enemies cannot destroy your Christ!"

PART 5. JOHN'S COMMISSION (1:9-11)

a. Explanation of the symbols

1:9 "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus."³⁸ Once more John testifies concerning the historical reality of receiving this revelation. He writes to other suffering Christians, as one who shares their sufferings (the negative), as well as one who shares their position in the kingdom and their persistent expectation (patient endurance) of Christ's second coming (the positive). He was exiled to the island Patmos probably after having refused to burn incense on the altar of a pagan priest as a token of worshipping the emperor.

"was on the island of Patmos". Translation: "had come on the island Patmos"³⁹. The verb indicates that he began recording the book of Revelation while on the island Patmos, fourteen hours sailing from Ephesus.

"because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus". Tradition says he was banned to this island. In any case he was exiled on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. 'The word of God' means the truth of the Bible. And 'the testimony of Jesus' in the first place means what Jesus Christ testified about God, himself and all the truth. John believed in the truth of the Bible and in the truth of the testimony of Jesus Christ! The testimony of Jesus may include the fact that John also witnessed (preached and taught) this truth.

1:10 "On the Lord's day"⁴⁰. The expression never means 'the day of the Lord'⁴¹, the eschatological last day of this present universe. It refers to the first day of the week⁴² (the Sunday) on which the Lord Jesus Christ was resurrected and Christians celebrate the completion of his work of salvation for everyone who believes in him (cf. Acts 20:7).

"I was in the Spirit"⁴³. This condition is also called falling into a trance (ecstasy) or seeing in a trance⁴⁴ (Acts 10:10; 11:5). It is a state brought about by God in which consciousness is wholly or partially suspended. John saw, but not with his physical eyes, and he heard, but not with his physical ears. Through the Holy Spirit his human spirit was in direct, spiritual contact with Jesus Christ. He was wide awake and every avenue of his soul was wide open to the direct communication coming from the Lord. He saw and heard what happened in the spiritual world. It is seeing and hearing without the physical organs of eye and ear (cf. Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 1:4; Daniel 8:2,15-18). While Daniel was in a deep sleep, John was wide awake and well aware of what he saw and heard. The changing visions (groups of symbols and numbers) were not something he made up with his own imagination, but were given to him by divine inspiration. Often the interpretation of the symbols was also given to him (1:19-20).

"and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet". Also in the Old Testament whenever God wanted to speak to his people he gathered them by means of a trumpet sound (Exodus 19:16,19; cf. Joshua 6:5; Isaiah 58:1; Revelation 8:7ff.).

1:11 "which said, 'Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches (congregations): to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.'" The Lord Jesus Christ commanded John to record what he saw and heard on a scroll⁴⁵ and to send it to the seven congregations.

³⁸ συγκαινωνος εν τη θλιψει και βασιλεια και υπομονε εν Ιησου

³⁹ εγενομην (viam) εν τη νησω

⁴⁰ εν τη κυριακη ημερα

⁴¹ η ημερα του κυριου

⁴² The 1st day of the week is called 'the Lord's day' in Didache 14.2 and Ignatius ad Magn. 9.1 about 20 years later.

In the New Testament the word 'kuriakon' always means 'belonging to the Lord'.

⁴³ εγενομην εν πνευματι

⁴⁴ εγενετο επ αυτον εκστασις οφ ειδον εν εκστασει

⁴⁵ ο βλεπει γραψον > γραφω (vmaa) εις βιβλιον

According to Revelation 1:19 and 10:4, John wrote down these visions while he received them or shortly afterwards. The seven congregations lay more or less in a circle. John later probably travelled along that circle to deliver the letters.

b. Different views about ‘the Lord’s day’ (1:10)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The Lord’s day is ‘the Day of the Lord’, the final ‘day’ in this present age, which will last a very long period of time (cf. 2 Peter 3:8) and include the future tribulation period, the future second return of Christ, the future millennial kingdom and the events that lead up to the new heaven and new earth⁴⁶.

Second view. (The correct explanation) The Lord’s day is the first day of the week (the Sunday), the day on which Christians come together to celebrate the resurrection of their Lord Jesus Christ and the completion of his work of salvation for everyone who believes in him.

PART 6. THE VISION OF THE SON OF MAN (1:12-16)

a. Explanation of the symbols

1:12 “I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands”⁴⁷.

A lampstand was a kind of lamp containing oil with a wick protruding from a hole in the lamp. There is a difference between the one seven-armed lampstand of the Old Testament temple and the seven single lampstands standing in a circle around Christ. The one seven-armed lampstand represented God’s Old Testament people forming an organisational unity. But the seven single lampstands represent God’s New Testament people – seven independent congregations connected to one another through Jesus Christ and thus forming an organic unity. See the explanation in the introduction to chapter 1. The golden colour symbolises the glory and high status which God has accorded to the congregations.

1:13 “and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man”⁴⁸. Christ’s self-designation is ‘the Son of Man’ (cf. Daniel 7:13, an Old Testament type of Jesus Christ). He was ‘like’ *the* son of man in order to indicate that he resembled Jesus Christ whom John had known on earth. But now Jesus Christ had a heavenly-glorious appearance!

We use the definite article ‘the’ here, because the term ‘Son of Man’ is to be regarded as a proper noun which does not need the definite article in the Greek language. Jesus Christ stood in the midst of the lampstands, symbolising his presence and activity in all the congregations in the world!

“dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest”. Christ was clothed with power and majesty, with awe and terror, so much that it hurt the eyes to look at him. His robe was either the robe of a king (Ezekiel 26:16; 1 Samuel 24:5-6) or of a high-priest (Exodus 28:4,39-41; 29:8-9), probably of the high-priest-king (Zechariah 6:13; Psalm 110:1,4). The sash was bound high around the chest⁴⁹ as a symbol of rest, worthiness and majesty, and not around his loins⁵⁰ as a symbol of work and service (Luke 12:35). The golden sash around the chest also symbolises his authority to judge, like the seven angels with the bowls of God’s wrath (15:6). The message of the symbols in chapter 1 is that Christ comes with authority to purge his Church and to punish his enemies!

1:14 “His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow”. This is probably indicating his white hair and beard. In Daniel 7:13 these characterised God, the ancient of days. Here they characterise Christ. This shows that Christ is in his being the same God. Christ thus appears as the Eternal God. ‘White’ is the colour of heaven (Matthew 28:3), of purity (7:13 ff.) and of victory (19:11 ff.).

⁴⁶ Larkin, Revelation pp. 8-9

⁴⁷ επτα λυχνιας χρυσας

⁴⁸ εν μεσω των λυχνιων ομοιον υιον ανθρωπου

⁴⁹ το στηθος

⁵⁰ η οσφυς

“and his eyes were like blazing fire”. This symbolises that he can read every heart and penetrate every hidden corner. No one can hide or hide anything from Christ. He is omniscient and notices everything (Daniel 10:6; 2 Chronicles 16:9; Hebrews 4:13).

1:15 “His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace”. This symbolises that Christ consumes all impurity and everything that is unholy. He destroys (trample under foot) everyone and everything that opposes him. Christ is ‘a consuming fire’ (Deuteronomy 4:24; Isaiah 33:14; Malachi 3:1-3; Hebrews 12:29)!

“and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters”. This symbolises Christ’s heavenly power and majesty. His voice is loud and reverberates like the sound of the crashing waves against the rocks of Patmos (14:2; Ezekiel 1:25; 43:2), symbolising Christ’s heavenly power and majesty.

1:16 “In his right hand he held seven stars”. The right hand is the hand of power, work and honour. In it Christ held seven stars. Once more a symbol is explained in the book of Revelation (1:20), thus supplying us with the key to explain the book. The seven stars⁵¹ symbolise the seven angels or messengers of the seven congregations. The fact that Christ holds them in his right hand symbolises the great honour and worthiness he accords to them, the high significance they have in his eyes and in his service, and the fact that he controls them and that they are completely dependent on him for everything. If they would loosen themselves from him, they would have no point of support and would fall and be completely smashed.

The fact that Christ holds them together in one hand symbolises that they are connected to one another in Christ’s hand and not in any earthly organisation or over-arching ecclesiastical body! Every congregation in the Bible is independent. However, the members of every congregation are dependent on one another as the members of a body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). And also the messengers or leaders of the congregations are dependent on one another and connected to one another in Jesus Christ! The fact that the true leaders (servants) of the congregations are in Christ’s hand is a great encouragement for Christians.

“and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword”⁵². A sword is a symbol of spoken words that have great effect on people (Isaiah 49:2). This sword is the long (heavy and great) sword used in war. With such a sword, David cut off Goliath’s head. With such a sword, Christ makes war with his enemies, that is, people who do not repent of their false teachings. In Revelation 2:16 Christ says to all people in all congregations: “Repent ... otherwise I will soon come to you and fight against them (those who do not repent) with the sword of my mouth” (2:16).⁵³ With such a sword, Christ will strike down the nations that oppose him (19:15) and kill his enemies in the final war (battle) (19:21). This is the sword of war, of judgement. The double-edged sword symbolises especially Christ’s words of judgement of the Church’s sins (2:16) and his words of judgement of the enemies of the Church (19:15,21; Isaiah 11:4). Its sharp double-edges symbolise that it always hits the mark, always cuts to both sides, in this or that way, but never misses to accomplish its purpose (Isaiah 55:11). No one can ward it off.

Another kind of sword is mentioned in Revelation 6:4, the short sword (knife, dagger)⁵⁴, which is used to slaughter. That is the sword of persecution.

“His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance”. This symbolises that Christ is complete light (21:23; Psalm 84:11; John 8:12; 1 John 1:6) and righteousness (Malachi 4:2).

The message of this vision in chapter 1 is that the Almighty Jesus Christ is present and active among all the congregations in the world! This entire picture is symbolical of Jesus Christ, the high priest-judge and king, the Holy One, who is coming to purge the Christian congregations on earth and to punish all those who are persecuting his people. This is a picture of Jesus Christ coming to fight against false teachers and preachers in the Church (2:16) and against the wicked and persecuting political and religious powers in the world (19:15; cf. 8:5f).

⁵¹ αστερας επτα

⁵² ρομφαια διστομος οξεια

⁵³ μετανοησον ουν. ει δε μη, ερχομαι σοι ταχυ και πολεμησω μετ αυτων εν τη ρομφαια του στοματος μου

⁵⁴ μαχαιρα

b. Different views about the Son of Man

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The Son of Man is Jesus Christ as Judge at the beginning of the tribulation period.

Second view. (The correct explanation) The Son of Man is Jesus Christ as the Prophet, the High priest, the King and the Judge throughout the whole New Testament period. He is present to purge the congregations and to punish all those who are persecuting his people on earth. He has come to fight against false teachers and preachers in the Church (2:16) and against the wicked and persecuting political and religious powers in the world (19:15; cf. 8:5f).

PART 7. THE COMFORT AND INSTRUCTION OF CHRIST TO JOHN (1:17-20)

a. Explanation of the symbols

1:17 “When I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me”. The vision had an enormous effect on John. In his visionary condition he felt as if he fell dead at Christ’s feet (cf. Daniel 10:8). This was due to Christ’s holiness and heavenly majesty, from which angels hide their faces (Isaiah 6:2) and no man can see and live (Exodus 33:20; Isaiah 6:5). But Christ encouraged John. He placed his right hand on John as a sign of fellowship and favour. Through these he poured life and power into John. The real purpose of this vision was not to terrify, but to comfort John!

“and said: (literally) Stop being afraid⁵⁵, I am *always* the First and the Last”⁵⁶. ‘I am the First and the Last’ (Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12) expresses the same as ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega’ (1:8). It is the expression of the absolute Godhead. Although John was banned to an island because of his testimony of Christ, Christ will one day reveal his complete sovereignty and kingship and subject everyone and everything that now opposes him (1 Corinthians 15:25; Philippians 2:9-11). Christ has no beginning and no end. He is the Eternal God. Everything that exists outside him has been created by him, belongs to him and is determined by him. The whole created existence and the whole course of world-history will either find their goal and final destination in Christ or face the final condemnation by Christ. Nothing has a purpose or even a final goal or destiny in itself (Colossians 1:15-20). Everyone and everything will stand or fall because of their relationship to Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:43-44; Luke 2:34)! No one can remain neutral in relationship to Jesus Christ!

1:18 “I am the Living One; I (literally) became dead, and behold I am (literally) the Living One for ever and ever!”⁵⁷ Christ *in his divine nature* never died. Christ’s essential nature is life just as that of God the Father (John 5:26; 14:6). The text literally says that Jesus Christ is for ever and ever the Living One! Christ is also the source of eternal life for everyone who believes in him (John 1:4; 3:16; 10:28; 11:25-26).

But Christ *in his human nature* died. The text literally says, “Christ became dead” – Christ, the God-Man, the Living One, succumbed to physical death, but not in his divine nature, only in his human nature! He died in his human nature in order to atone for the sins of his own people (1:5; 5:9; 7:14). From a purely human point of view, Jesus Christ was indeed put to death by his enemies when he was on earth (Mark 8:31; Acts 2:23; 3:13,15). But from the divine point of view, Jesus Christ freely gave his human life as a ransom, as an atonement sacrifice for sins (Mark 10:45; John 10:17-18; Romans 3:25; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).

Christ *in his human nature* did not remain dead, but his human nature was resurrected and he lives forever. The fact that Jesus Christ had been resurrected from the dead is a wonderful comfort for all Christians who are persecuted unto death or who face death at the end of their lives.

“And I continually hold the keys of death and Hades”⁵⁸. Christ himself was dead and in Hades (Acts 2:27,31). The term ‘Hades’ here cannot mean the hell or the grave. It means the state of death, that is, the

⁵⁵ λεγων, Μη φοβου (vmpm). The present imperative with the negative indicates the stopping of an action in progress.

⁵⁶ εγω ειμι (vira) ο πρωτος και ο εσχατος

⁵⁷ ο ζων (vppa), και εγενομην (viam) νεκρος και ιδου ζων (vppa+) ειμι (+vira) εις τους αιωνας των αιωνων

⁵⁸ εχω (vira) τας κλεις του θανατου και του αδου

state of the soul or spirit being separated from the body. Hence Hades always follows Death (6:8) and will together with Death be thrown into the lake of fire (20:13-14).

'Keys' symbolise authority, power and sovereignty to close and to open a particular domain and to have absolute authority over that domain (3:7; Matthew 16:19). Christ has full power over all the dead and over the state of death. And Christ has been authorised to raise all the dead (John 5:22). This is a great encouragement for Christians!

The message to a persecuted congregation is that Death and Hades could not hold Jesus Christ as a captive and cannot and will not hold Christians captive! When a Christian dies, his body will decay in the grave, but Christ will immediately welcome his soul or spirit in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23)!

At the resurrection from the dead at Christ's second coming, all the dead (their dead bodies) will rise from death at his command (20:11-15; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). The resurrected or transformed body of a Christian will be incomparably more glorious than his present lowly body (Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Corinthians 15:42-57) and it will be united with his soul or spirit that accompanies Christ at his second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:14-16)! For the Christian, 'dying' means a deliverance from this wicked world and a deliverance from the weaknesses and suffering of his present body. Therefore, dying and the state of being dead hold no more terror for those who believe in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:14-15)!

1:19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen, (literally) *that is*, the things that are and the things that are about to happen after these things"⁵⁹. The connective word here is not an addition ("and"), but explicative ("that is"). Jesus Christ commanded John to write on a scroll what was shown to him in revelation and to send it to the seven congregations. The scroll will contain the things that are already happening and the things that are about to happen. The words in verse 19 only make sense when 'the things that are there already' and 'the things that are about to happen' effect the congregations at that time!

What John has already seen was the vision of Christ: Christ was standing amidst the seven congregations (1:12-18). He is about to hear the present condition of each of the seven congregations (2:1 to 3:22) and see visions about things that were about to happen at the time of these seven congregations and would happen again and again with other congregations throughout the whole New Testament period (4:1 ff.).

'The things which are about to happen after these things' are the events that would happen from the time they were revealed to John (after Christ's first coming) right up to Christ's second coming. They will happen throughout the entire New Testament period. As we read the book of Revelation we will see that these things are God's decrees (decisions) that operate in history and have definite effects from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. But Revelation 1:3 makes very clear that these things are about to happen, very soon after they were revealed to John.

Therefore, the book of Revelation does not mainly refer to future events that are limited to the time just before and after the so-called future second return of Christ⁶⁰, but applies to events that recur again and again during the whole New Testament period of time and certainly also at the second coming of Christ!⁶¹ The last two chapters of the book of Revelation even refer to the new heaven and new earth after the second coming of Christ.

The book of Revelation is therefore a book of encouragement to Christians of all ages and in all places on earth. Its message is that in the struggle between Christ and the dragon, Jesus Christ and his Church will be victorious! No matter what happens on earth, Jesus Christ is the ruler of the kings of the earth (1:5).

1:20 "The mystery⁶² of the seven stars in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this:" The fact that Christ explains what these symbols represent shows that John could not have understood these symbols by simply looking at the Old Testament or otherwise. These symbols in the Old Testament and the New

⁵⁹ γραψων (vmaa--ys) ουν α ειδες (viaa--ys) και α εισιν (vipa--zp) και α μελλει (vipa--zs+) γενεσθαι (+vnam) μετα ταυτα

⁶⁰ The futurist or dispensational view. Larkin, Revelation pp. 13-16. He makes Revelation 1:19 the key to divide the book into three chronological periods of time that follow one another: 1:10-20; 2:1 to 3:22; and 4:1 to 22:5.

But the repetition of the tribulation (3:10; 6:9-11; 11:7-10; 13:7-10,14-18; 17:10-11), the final battle (16:12-16; 19:11-21; 20:7-10); the final judgement (6:12-17; 11:11-19; 14:14-20; 16:17-21; chapter 18; 20:11-15); and the final state after Christ's second coming (2:7,11,17,26-28; 3:5,12,21; 7:9-17; 14:1-5; 15:2-4; 19:1-10; chapter 21-22) refute the chronological division of the book of Revelation and point to a reduplicating or parallel division of the book of Revelation.

⁶¹ The biblical view

⁶² το μυστηριον

Testament were a hidden secret, allusive as long as it had not been explained by Jesus Christ! The New Testament revelation is therefore absolutely necessary to understand the Old Testament revelation (2 Corinthians 3:14-16)!

“The seven stars are angels of the churches (congregations)”⁶³. Angels are ministering spirits sent to serve Christians (Hebrews 1:14). The leaders of the congregations are symbolically called angels, because in the Bible all leaders must be servants and not rulers (Matthew 20:25-28; Luke 22:26; 1 Peter 5:2-3)!⁶⁴ Thus the stars probably refer to the representatives or leaders of the congregations: the elders who are the overseers and shepherds of the congregations. The council of elders are appointed by God’s Spirit and are held responsible and accountable to Christ (Acts 20:28; cf. Hebrews 13:17; Ezekiel 3:17). They are in Christ’s hand and therefore completely dependent on him for their ministries and the results of their ministries. The fact that they are represented by stars points to their high calling to radiate heavenly light and give heavenly guidance to Christians (1 Timothy 5:17).

The seven stars that are in the right hand of Jesus Christ cannot refer to seven messengers sent by the seven congregations to meet John, because John had to write a letter to each of them! They are also not THE seven angels of THE seven historical congregations, because Christ simply says that they are ‘angels of seven churches (congregations)’. Thus, they do not refer to only those seven historical leaders of the congregations, but to all leaders of the congregations at that time and throughout all centuries.

This is a wonderful assurance for all leaders of Christian congregations: Jesus Christ is holding them in his hand! Jesus Christ exercises absolute authority over them and they are only his ambassadors. He protects them and they are safe when they obey Jesus Christ and are faithful in his service (Hebrews 13:7)!

“and the seven lampstands are seven churches (congregations)”⁶⁵. Throughout the Bible the number 7 is the number of divine perfection (see the symbolism of numbers in supplement 2). The seven lampstands with Christ in their midst (1:12) symbolise seven congregations (1:20), which have a divine origin, have Christ as head and are intended to share in God’s perfection. But because Christ intends his seven letters to be messages to all the congregations in the world (2:7), they are a symbol of all the congregations at that time and throughout salvation history in the world. This is confirmed by Revelation 1:20 which does not say: “*the seven congregations*” mentioned in the book of Revelation, but simply “seven congregations”.

The congregations are light-bearers, intended to be light in a dark world. Jesus says that Christians must put the lamp on a lampstand⁶⁶ so that it can give light to everyone in the house (Matthew 5:14-16). See the explanation in the background. Through the Holy Spirit each congregation is what it should be - a light in this dark world, called to spread God’s light, that is, preaching God’s attributes (1 Peter 2:9-10; Isaiah 43:21). Therefore the seven spirits before God’s throne are represented by seven lamps (4:5). The golden colour symbolises the glory and high status which God has accorded to each congregation.

b. Different views about ‘the things that will take place later’ (1:19)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) Revelation 1:19 suggest a division of the book of Revelation into three chronological sections.⁶⁷

- the things that happened in the past (1:10-20)
- and the things that happen in the present (2:1 to 3:22)
- and the things that will happen in the future (4:1 to 22:5).

The futurist view regards the greatest part of the book of Revelation to be predictions about future history, that is, the future of people living today.

⁶³ ἀγγελοι των επτα εκκλησιων εισιν (vīpa)

⁶⁴ K. Kuijpers

⁶⁵ αι λυχνιαι αι επτα επτα εκκλησιαι εισιν (vīpa)

⁶⁶ λυχνον ... επι την λυχνιαν

⁶⁷ Larkin, Revelation pp. 13-16

Second view. (The correct explanation) Revelation 1:19 speaks of the things Christ had just revealed to John and which includes two categories:

- (that is:) the things that are already a present reality (like Christ amidst the congregations and the condition of the seven historical congregations)(chapters 1 to 3)
- (and that is:) the things that are about to happen 'soon' (like the proclamation of the gospel, the slaughtering and oppressing of Christians, the onslaught of demons on the world, the destruction of wars in the world, the warning judgements of God and eventually the great tribulation and the final judgement) (chapters 4 to 19).