

Bible Studies

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Revelation- Victory Book Chapters 1-11

Introducing

The beauty, glory and testimony of Churches of God in the Fellowship

From Study Groups

'Blessed is the one who reads aloud ... this prophecy, and ... those who hear.'
(Revelation 1)

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Revelation 4:3

THE BEAUTY, GLORY AND TESTIMONY OF CHURCHES OF GOD IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SON OF GOD, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

First of all, a very warm welcome to faithful readers and contributors to *Bible Studies* magazine, without whom it simply would not exist. As editors, we wish you the compliments of the season and look forward to times of spiritual uplift, edification, challenge and comfort throughout a new year of God's grace, all being well.

The study of the lampstand in the tabernacle of God's glory of old provides a fascinating insight into what meaning it carries for us today in churches of God, which are to be beacons of divine light in an increasingly spiritually and morally darkened world (cp. Phil. 2:16; 1 Thes. 1:3, 8; Mat. 5:14).

Its first occurrence is found in the book of Exodus, an inspired record that has so much to say about God's will and desire to dwell among His people, whom He redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb from servitude and suffering at the hands of a nation totally opposed to Him. This integral part of the furniture of the tabernacle (Heb. *menorah*) was made of pure gold all through and had seven lamps lit by pure olive oil, emitting light, and burning continually. Its location was in the

holy place beside the table of showbread and golden altar of incense, in front of the veil. All this was under the supervision of Aaron's son, Eleazar, who was 'prince of the princes' of the Levites, having the oversight of those charged with looking after sanctuary vessels, while stationary, and also on the move (Ex. 25:31, 37; 35:14; Lev. 24:2, 4; Num. 3:32; 4: 9).

Can we see lessons for the present time in all this? Surely, we can. The fact that the number 7 is mentioned a number of times in our study has relevance. The seven lampstands of Revelation 2:2 are symbolic of churches of God, divinely constituted and in unity with others elsewhere in other countries of the world. It is conjecture to state that these were the only churches of God in existence. The mere fact that they were all geographically close to one another, and to the apostle who was exiled on an island in the same area of West Turkey, would indicate they were a selection of churches of God in that particular region, chosen to receive the apostle's message as it could be quickly circulated around them (Rev. 1:11).

Would it be too far-fetched to take from the tabernacle setting of the table and altar alongside the lampstand, the truth enumerated in Acts 2:42 of the significance of the breaking of the bread and the prayers, the latter expression appearing in its full explanation of what the golden altar of incense stands for in this era of grace (Heb. 9:2,4)? Moreover, responsibility

for divine order and exercise came under the control of a recognisable leadership, as already seen with Eleazar and others. The truth of a 'united elderhood' is no less emphasised today where Spirit-appointed leadership is necessary to uphold God's way of service (Acts 14:23; 1 Cor. 14:40; Tit. 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:1-3).

R.B.F.

From Study Groups ...

'BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO READS ALOUD ... THIS PROPHECY, AND ... THOSE WHO HEAR.' (Revelation 1)

From Aberdeen: Perhaps the dual fulfilment principle which applies to a number of prophetic scriptures (e.g. Acts 2:17) should also be kept in mind when interpreting some of the bold statements made in the Book of Revelation. John indicated to the seven churches that specific things would 'shortly come to pass' and also that 'the time is at hand' (Rev. 1:1-3). Consider the church in Smyrna: how would the disciples understand the word 'shortly'? Surely the apostle John was preparing them to face up to a particular trial that would shortly come upon them: 'Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried' (Rev. 2:10 RV). This could be understood as being an initial fulfilment of 'the things which must shortly come to pass'. The prophecies from Revelation chapter 4 onwards, however, clearly point to the yet future time of the Great Tribulation.

In view of those future prophecies how should we interpret the language that John uses, like 'shortly' and 'at hand'? One possible way to interpret this language is from the relative perspective of eternity. In God's calendar the Great Tribulation events are relatively soon: from God's perspective these events will shortly come to pass. Indeed, Jesus' promise to His own towards the close of Revelation is, 'Yea: I come quickly' (Rev. 22:20). Nevertheless, the application of these Great Tribulation prophecies will make timely sense to disciples of Christ whose lifespan coincides with future tribulation days. Such disciples of that time will be comforted by the word of God which is 'living and active' and will give them

discernment and understanding of the times through which they must endure. At that time, 'none of the wicked shall understand: but they that be wise shall understand' (Dan. 12:10).

John ascribes 'the glory and the dominion' to Jesus Christ who 'loosed us' from our sins (see Rev.1:5; 'loosed' (RV) is reckoned to be the accurate translation rather than 'washed'(AV); (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words).

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: What more fitting way for God to close His book than with the Revelation of Jesus Christ? We note that it is 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ' (v.1) and not of John the Divine as indicated in the heading of some translations. It was not written to frighten, confuse, frustrate or even entertain us, nor was it to satisfy any curiosity about the future, but rather to encourage those who were passing through difficult times, even facing trial and persecution. God was showing (revealing, uncovering and unveiling are meanings of 'revelation') to His servants by John the things that would happen shortly. The source of this information is the all-knowing, sovereign God, so we can be sure it will come to pass. The Old Testament prophets wrote of the suffering Christ (the Messiah); the Gospels set Him forth in humiliation. Here the Holy Spirit draws back the curtain to give us the privilege of seeing the risen, glorified Christ in heaven. God has given us the opportunity to observe the fulfilment of His sovereign will in the world.

Daniel was instructed to 'shut up the words, and seal the book' (Dan. 12:4 RV), but in contrast John was told 'Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand' (Rev. 22:10). The phrase 'the time is at hand' is also used in 1:3. The Greek word *engus* means 'near', i.e. it could happen at any time, and brings before us the thought that Christ could return at any moment, so we have to be ready.

The salutation of grace and peace is from the Trinity. When sinners come to Christ through faith, believing that the penalty for their sins was paid by His death on the cross, they receive eternal salvation through grace. God doesn't save us because of any good thing we have done, or will do. It is as a result of this precious grace that we receive true peace which overcomes any trial that the world can bring. It comes from the self-existent, eternal Jehovah, One who is, who was, and who is coming, the elaborate triadic formula for the Trinity to whom past, present and future are an eternal *now*.

Seven and Three The number seven, which signifies fullness and completeness, features prominently in this book. The number three is also very much to the fore

and rightly so. The titles of our Lord Jesus are also very evident. Why? He is ‘the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and ruler of kings of the earth’ are three such titles and verse 7 changes to one of praise and adoration because ‘He loveth us and loosed us.’ We note the tense of the verbs, loveth—present, and loosed us—past tense, once for all.

‘Behold He cometh with the clouds’ brings before us in a graphical portrayal the coming of the Son of Man to earth in judgement. We, of course, will have been caught up when He comes previously to the air. When His feet step upon the Mount of Olives there will be no applause from those who rejected Him. No red carpet will mark His glorious descent when He comes to judge the world: instead it will be marked by ‘all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over Him’, for every eye shall see Him, even those who rejected Him [Comment 1].

Bill Paterson

From Belfast: *Each church a lampstand* ‘Christ Jesus brought the light of Deity into the poor lantern of our humanity, and then set it upon the candlestick of His church that the whole house of the world might be lit up thereby. So indeed it is’ (Spurgeon). A lamp is not light in itself; it is only the instrument of dispensing light. The lamp must receive both oil and fire; no church has in itself grace and glory. This must be from Christ. The lampstand is made of one piece, as Christ is one with those of His own who are linked with Him in the service of God, represented by the six branches, 6 being the number of man, plus the main shaft, equal seven lights, 7 the number of completion’ [Comment 2].

In the Old Testament tabernacle, there was one lampstand with seven lamps: here in the New Testament we have several lampstands, each representing an individual church linked together with other churches of God. In the tabernacle there were no windows, only one source of light which was the lampstand—a type of Christ as Son over God’s house (Heb. 3:6; Rev. 2:1). The lampstands are golden, not a shapeless lump of gold since they are designed so beautifully according to the pattern, and hammered out to the perfect accuracy of God’s decree. The shape of the lampstand signifies the excellencies of the Son of God and the gold signifies His divine nature. He is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). Christ is with His own right to the end of the world, filling them with light, life and the warmth of His love through the oil of His Holy Spirit. Churches of God receive this from the Lampstand, the Lord Jesus, and they in turn, should be precious and pure so that their light will shine before humankind so as to ignite others to give glory to God (Mat. 5:16). [Comment 3]

With this greatness comes great responsibility. Jesus calls us ‘light of the world’, so we are not only light-receivers but also light-givers and should walk as He walked, being Himself the Light of the world (John 8:12). A church shining with the light of Christ only does so as Christ is in its midst. There is no contrast-control for darkness. Darkness is merely the absence of light. Our challenge is to have the brightness of the light reflecting from our being turned up to its fullest measure so others will be moved by the light of the gospel of Christ. These lampstands have their lamps kindled and therefore shining. Every kindled lamp will be an extinguished lamp some day, and for a season only do men rejoice in its light.

But the uncreated, unkindled Light, which is Jesus Christ, shines by His own energy alone, and therefore shines on forever.

Sean Johnston

From Cromer: *The purposes of prophecy* The word used in Scripture for ‘prophecy’ means the speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God (W.E. Vine). In Old Testament times prophecy was often but not exclusively the foretelling of future events. As the canon of Scripture was being completed during the time of the apostles, prophecy became predominantly the teaching of existing Scripture, for the strengthening, encouragement and comfort of believers (1 Cor. 14:3-5).

The Lord Jesus is referred to as a prophet (Deut. 18:15; Mark 6:46). He was the very embodiment of the mind and counsel of God. He was the Word become flesh. When He spoke it was God speaking. No wonder it was said of Him, ‘They were amazed at his teaching because his message had authority’ (Luke 4:31 NIV). The Lord Jesus said, ‘For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.’ Today teachers in churches of God teach the revealed will of God found in the Scriptures, thus following the example of the Lord Jesus. We have the Holy Spirit who guides into all the truth (John 16:13).

A kingdom and priests The function of a priest is to offer to God worship and praise on behalf of others. The people of Israel offered many different sacrifices to God according to the Law, the high priest and priests of the tribe of Levi acting on their behalf. Israel as a whole was intended to be a kingdom of priests. They were subject to the rule of God within the kingdom of God. In their midst was the tabernacle, then later the temple, which was God’s house on earth. Where there is a priesthood we should expect to find God’s house. If there is no priesthood, worship cannot be offered in the house. It cannot function. This applied in Old Covenant times and applies now. It is God’s pattern.

Today God's people are able to draw near to worship God and to offer spiritual sacrifices; these are not repetitive animal sacrifices as were offered under the Old Covenant, which could never take away sin, but praise for Christ, the one great sacrifice for sin. We offer sacrifices of praise through our great high priest, the Lord Jesus. Hebrews 13:15 states, 'Through Jesus therefore let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.' As the people of God draw near, functioning as priests to God, the Lord Jesus as the great high priest over God's house takes the offerings and makes them perfect through the perfections of His own person. This experience is a great privilege indeed, and one not to be taken lightly. Can we dare to appear before Him empty of praise?

Every eye shall see Him When the Lord Jesus comes for His church (all believers) it does not say in Scripture that this event will be known and seen by everyone on earth at that time, whereas Revelation 1:7 indicates that Christ's appearance will be visible to all. This therefore is likely to refer to the time when Christ shall come in judgement to take up His rule on earth for a thousand years (1 Thes. 5:2-3).

John Parker

From Greenock: 'There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the sun' (Eccles. 3:10 NIV). The book of Revelation foretells the end of the dispensation of the day of grace. At the present time we may be living on the cusp of the Rapture and in the time leading up to the Great Tribulation. The European Union will be superseded by the kingdom of the Antichrist. 'Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him' (1:7). When those words are fulfilled the Rapture will have already taken place and the great tribulation will have ended. It will be one of the great watershed moments of all time.

Meanwhile the Bridegroom waits patiently, longing for His bride and for His wedding day. Believers should be keenly awaiting the Rapture and yearning to see their Lord and Master, their Bridegroom. Other Jews will have to go through the fiery furnace of the tribulation before they shall at last see Him for whom they have waited so long. Having met His people in secret and having been reconciled to each other, the Lord will see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied. King Messiah, having vanquished His enemies, will set up His millennial kingdom and will rule the world in righteousness and peace.

The generation from the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus to the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD, saw great growth in the churches of God. The generation after that saw steady decline and eventual cessation of many of the churches. The lampstands that had once shone so brightly in testimony for God were extinguished. The apostles in all likelihood, except for John, had died; some,

if not all, giving up their lives willingly in martyrdom for the sake of the Name of their beloved Lord and Master. John would not see the end of the generation from 70 AD. One constant throughout all the time that there were churches of God in existence was the opposition of the Devil, and the persecution of the saints. Eventually the foundation of the apostles' teaching, upon which the churches of God had been built, was diluted and corrupted by wrong teaching and false prophets.

John Peddie

From Halifax: The author John and his brother James, the sons of Zebedee, were Galilean fishermen, called by Jesus to be His disciples (Mat. 4:21-22; Mark 1:19-20). Jesus named these two, 'Sons of Thunder' (Mark 3:17 ESV), and it was to beloved John that Jesus recommended His mother Mary for care (John 19:27). In Revelation we find John, a brother and companion in tribulation with fellow Asian saints, had been exiled to Patmos. One of the Sporades Islands, Patmos is about thirty-seven miles from Miletus. Eusebius records that John was exiled there by the emperor Domitian in A.D. 95 and released eighteen months later by Nerva (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, 1981, p.424).

The Revelation of Jesus Christ The word 'revelation' as used in the title of this book, is from the late Latin *revelatio*, which here means (as does the Gk. *apokalupsis*) 'disclosure of that which was previously hidden or unknown' (C. I. Scofield); it signifies the unveiling of that which is soon to take place. For 'the time is at hand' (Rev. 1:3 RV). To those who read the words of this prophecy, and to them who hear and keep the things therein written whereby there is attendant blessing (cp. 22:7; 1 John 2:4), John uses the usual epistolary greeting of grace and peace. The source of this blessing is described by using an elaborate triadic formula for the Trinity (Rev. 1:4-6).

When in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, John heard a trumpet-like voice, and turning he saw the glorified Lord—the Alpha and Omega—standing. He fell as one who was dead (cp. Ezek. 1:28) and the risen Lord laid His right hand on him saying, 'Fear not' (v. 17). As the 'seven stars' were within the care and powerful protection of His right hand, John also was protected by the one who has 'the keys of death and of Hades' (v.18).

Robert J. Butler

From Ibadan (Alawaye): *The purpose of the prophecy* is to warn people ahead of time and to prepare and establish the saints (cp. Rom. 16:25) and to edify, comfort and exhort them. This book of Revelation will prepare saints ahead of time. The gospel of Jesus Christ is another revelation (Heb. 1:1-2). This will equally make the saints to be obedient (Rom. 16:26). Everything in God's timetable that is

yet to happen in this world has been recorded in the Bible, so nobody will have an excuse when it occurs.

Revelation of God is different from sooth-sayings. 'Jesus is coming soon' is a revelation. The birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a prophecy in itself as well as is His second coming. Therefore Christians know these in order to inform the people of the world.

The 'kingdom' refers to where the will of God is done perfectly, whilst the mention of 'priest' speaks about our sacrifices of praise and worship as Christians. We are to offer our spiritual sacrifices both here on earth and in heaven. Part of our priesthood service is what we do each Lord's Day, when we are gathered for holy communion (1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15) [Comment 4]. Our Lord Jesus Christ also instructed the woman by Jacob's well concerning spiritual worship (John 4:24). The kingdom of God has to do with rule and authority in God's house, comprising the aggregate of churches of God. When Jacob saw the vision of the angels at Luz, he changed its name to Bethel. So many other people, however, passed by after the re-naming and still thought it was Luz. Likewise, so many people don't know that God dwells here in churches of God and receives the worship of His people. As believers we should witness faithfully to the house, but also stay within our security zone (Ps. 91:1), fleeing from sin and heeding the warnings of the Holy Spirit.

Samson Ogunleye

From Mount Forest: Verses 4 and 10 captured our attention. In verse 4 there is an unusual reference to 'seven spirits'. A rationale for assuming that this expression relates to the Holy Spirit is well documented in John Miller's Notes on The Epistles, 'Revelation', Hayes Press, 1986. This takes the meaning as 'sevenfold', capturing attributes of the one Holy Spirit. Some scholars point to Isaiah 11:2 as illustrating multiple capacities of the one Spirit, although only six are mentioned there and 'Spirit' is singular [Comment 5]. Others point to Zechariah 4 where there is reference to a lampstand with seven lamps and seven pipes (or 'lips' ESV) and later 'these seven, which are the eyes of the LORD' are mentioned (v.10 RV). In this passage the Lord says 'not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit' (v.4, singular again). What might be a more compelling reason for seeing the Holy Spirit represented in Revelation 1:4-5 is it neatly completes the Trinity in the words 'from ... and from ... and from', where the first and third clearly reference deity.

An alternative view among scholars is that 'seven spirits' (plural) refers to elect spirit beings in heaven. Of 88 uses of the word 'seven' in the New Testament, the

normal meaning is a group of seven people or things; 55 occurrences are in Revelation, where most of them are easily understood in the normal way. Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6, however, would be the exceptions, if they indeed represent, using plural words, 'spirits', 'lamps', 'horns' or 'eyes' for aspects of the singular Holy Spirit. But why then are the Father and Son never likewise represented in sevenfold imagery? The other references to sevens in this chapter (churches, lampstands, stars) are not interpreted as meaning sevenfold characteristics, but are expressly declared to be seven separate entities. Those of the view that seven spirits are therefore literally in view here would also note that they are distinguished from the Godhead by being 'before' the throne, not on it (but see Rev. 5:6 regarding the Lamb). Including the Holy Spirit in Revelation 1:4-5 may be questioned if here 'him who is and who was and who is to come' and 'the Almighty' is the Son rather than the Father, both equal in such attributes, but the Son being repeatedly the focus in this overall context. The connected description 'the Alpha and Omega' are clearly ascribed to the Son as well as the Father (here in Rev. 1:11—some manuscripts; 1:17 by similar words; and again in 22:13)

Arguments supporting either of the above viewpoints could be multiplied. It might be profitable to seek a reconciling view. For instance, seeing the seven spirits as the recognizable agents of the Holy Spirit's action; seeing them is seeing Him (cp. Mat. 5:8). We could then look for evidence of such an agency in work attributed to the Spirit (e.g. Luke 1:19; Acts 13:2-4; Rev. 1:1; 2:7, etc.), and we might also see an imitation of this in the work of the evil one. [Comment 6]

Although the *hapax legomenon* 'on/in the Lord's day' in 1:10 is commonly understood to mean the first day of the week, there may be explanatory value seeing it as referring to the visions of the Lordly Day of divine judgment—given while John was in the Spirit taken to that time (cp. Rev. 4:2; 17:3; 21:10) [Comment 7].

Geoff Hydon

From Podagatlapalli: Reading aloud and hearing prophecy is a prediction of what will happen in the future [Comment 8]. Biblical prophecy comprises the passages of the Bible that reflect communications from God to humans through the apostles and prophets. Near the end of his life the apostle John received visions from Christ which he recorded for the benefit of the seven churches in Asia and for Christians throughout history. This is the only book in the Bible that promises a blessing to those who listen to its words and do what it says. Revelation is a difficult book, yet there are many reasons for reading it. There are seven 'Blesseds' in this book. Here are four to begin with:

(1) It is a revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ our dear Saviour. (2) This revelation is given by Him to His servants. (3) It speaks to us not about an uncertain and distant future, but of things which must happen soon. (4) Finally, let us not forget that serious reading of a portion of scripture brings a blessing to our souls (Rev. 1:3).

The Revelation is a book containing prophecy that is both prediction and proclamation (preaching about who God is and what He will do.) Prophecy is more than telling the future: behind the predictions are important principles about God's character and promise. Each prophecy in the book of Revelation has present implications—the reader is urged to trust God to move and conquer sin. (See 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:5, 12, 21.)

The Lord Jesus is mentioned here not simply as the Son of Man—which title He loved so well; not simply as the only begotten Son—the only person physically begotten of God [Comment 9]. He is also the first begotten of the dead—the One raised from the dead; He is the Prince of the kings of the earth. This looks forward to His coming to put down all earthly kingdoms and take over the rule of the world.

About Christians Verse 6 does not simply mention that we are children of God, but that we have been born again to carry out the Great Commission, for God has made us kings and priests. Yes, we believers on our Lord Jesus Christ are kings and priests (1 Pet. 2:9) [Comment 10]. The scripture says 'If we endure we shall also reign with Him' (2 Tim. 2:12 ESV, NKJV). In the parable of the minas (Luke 19:16-19) Christ is pictured as coming back to set up His kingdom. He required a report by His workers, especially from the man whose fund has gained 10 minas. He said 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little have authority over 10 cities'. To the man whose mina gained five minas He said, 'You have authority over 5 cities'. When Peter asked what rewards the disciples would have, Jesus said 'I say to you that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel' (Mat. 19:27-28).

We are made priests as well. This means that we should intercede for sinners by trying to lead them to be saved [and also intercede for fellow-saints: 1 Tim. 2:2—*Eds.*]. It may mean that in the Millennial age believers will have some special service as priests. But the emphasis in Revelation is particularly on the return of the Lord Jesus with His saints. Those who are to reign with Christ and who are to rejoice at His coming are born again ones whose sins are all blotted out. It is a past-tense salvation, now to be reflected in our own efforts to live a daily sanctified life (Phil. 2:12). It is not that Christ is little by little washing us and

making us fit for heaven, but by a one-time regeneration Christians become children of God, born into God's family, all sins blotted out, and we receive a new heart as the Spirit of God moves into our bodies as temples (1 Cor. 6:19). There is a one-time transformation, and the one who is a true Christian has already been born again, and has been washed in the blood with all sins forgiven. As priests in a holy priesthood we minister to God in the sanctuary offering up spiritual sacrifices. This is our highest privilege.

Christ is 'Alpha and Omega', the beginning and the ending (v.8). That means infinity in power, righteousness and deity before the worlds began and into the infinite future. But it seems also to remind us that the cross and Christ's rejection by a wicked world are not the end. He is the ending as well as the beginning, and He 'who is and who was and who is to come' (1:4).

B.V. Prasada Rao

From Ravulapalem: *A coming of Christ* God is revealing through the Spirit to John the main theme of this book in verse 7, i.e. the second coming of Christ for all who have trusted Him [Comment 11]. It was repeated in 2:25 (NKJV), to the church in Thyatira, '... hold fast what you have till I come'; 3:11 to the church in Philadelphia'... Behold I am coming quickly', and at the close of the book in 22:20. Here too we have graphically portrayed the coming of the Son of Man to earth, in judgement of which Matthew 24:27-31 speaks. John 14:3 and many other portions speak of His coming again to the air for His saints. Jesus gives direct clues to events that will precede His coming to the earth in Matthew 24. Notably almost half of the chapter consists of warnings that no one can predict the precise time of His coming—like lightning (v.27); like Noah's day (v.34); and like a thief's coming (v.42; cp. 2 Pet. 3:10). Every eye on earth shall see Him then, including those who pierced Him, as in Zechariah 12:10 and Psalm 22:16

In clouds Psalm 97:2 and Isaiah 19:1 are given as oracles, the first about God's presence on the throne; and the second about His coming in judgement in the day of the Lord. Before transfiguration Jesus told the disciples that the Son of Man is going to come to the earth in His Father's glory with His angels (Mat. 16:27; 26:64; Dan. 7:13; Rev. 14:14-16).

'He will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven' are the words spoken by two men dressed in white to the disciples (Acts 1:10-11). But why delay? Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 answer this, that 'one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day'. So the fulfilment of the Lord's promise to return again is not regulated by our times. We have to watch and pray as two thousand years have already passed.

Christ's second coming denotes the certainty of it. 'Behold' is prefixed to it to excite attention, for things of great moment and surprise will then be done: the faithful dead will be raised; His personal kingdom will shortly begin, and the general judgement of the great white throne after the Millennium. So every one of us must be ready and say, 'Maranatha!' (1 Cor. 16:22) and 'Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!' (Rev. 22:20).

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *The purposes of prophecy* In not a few places today there is a pandemic of 'prophecy'. As it were, modern day prophets and prophetesses presume to speak in the name of the Lord, of future things. It ranges often from the mundane as it relates to the weather and the outright bizarre, as they speak of the outcome of elections and the lives of celebrities. Very seldom do the prophecies relate to the lives of 'ordinary people'. These are men and women who deem prophecy or *prophēteuō* to be simply a matter of foretelling.

Prophecy has been defined as 'a miracle of knowledge, a declaration or description or representation of something future, beyond the power of human sagacity to foresee, discern or conjecture'. Peter puts it aptly: 'And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Pet. 1:20-21NIV). This shows there is a body of fulfilled prophecies, and some yet to be fulfilled, from which we 'forth-tell' the truths of our Lord and Saviour.

Peter provides three key components of prophecy: holy men, spoke of God, and moved by the Holy Spirit. It is the case sometimes, that corrupt and carnal men and even demon-possessed people, in God's sovereign overruling, have spoken prophetically that which is true (Balaam in Numbers 22-24, 2 Peter 2:15, Jude v.11, the Philippian girl in Acts 16:17—the latter a sample of not foretelling.

The intriguing and refreshing fact about the book of Revelation, as it regards prophecy and every other thing connected with it, is the opening words: 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place' (Rev.1:1). Although it is the revelation of Jesus Christ, yet it was God who gave it to His Son demonstrating the eternal harmony between the Father and Son. One clear purpose of prophecy is to edify or comfort the saints, strengthening their faith in God (1 Cor.14:3-5). It would, as the great prophets of old often did, speak comfort and peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: 'Comfort, yes, comfort My people, says your God' (Is. 40:1).

Prophecy, whether forth-telling or foretelling, ensures we are rooted and established in our most holy faith. Whether we are taken up with what Paul refers to as ‘the prophetic scriptures made known to all the nations’ (Rom. 16:25-26) or we are poring over the times and seasons which the Father has put in His own authority (Acts 1:7) as detailed in the Revelation, everything is undergirded by this: ‘To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles what are the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:27). It is deeply reassuring to know that “‘All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name’” (Acts 10:43).

The whole essence of prophecy is rooted in Christ Jesus: ‘At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus”’ (Rev. 19:10). As all true prophecy is of God, it will invariably serve this vital purpose: ‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work’ (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Frederick F. Ntido

COMMENTS

1. (Aberkenfig): This looks forward to Chapter 6, where we find that ‘those who rejected Him’ will include “kings, great ones, generals, the rich and powerful, and everyone, slave or free”. These will flee in terror and find no hiding place “from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:15-16 ESV).

J.J.

2. (Belfast): In the phrase ‘the candlestick of His church’ C.H. Spurgeon doubtless has in mind the church which is the body of Christ. The Lord, however, is concerned here with seven lampstands as the regional expression of the church of the living God, pillar and ground of the truth—lampstands of the house of God, as the paper makes clear below. Those believers who compose that house are of course part of the Church the Body, so we agree with the further points made, but that is distinct from being committed to a church of God.

M.A.

3. (Belfast): J.L. Ferguson, writing about the seven lamps of fire that John saw ‘which are the seven spirits of God’ (Rev. 4:5), says ‘This was the Spirit of God in

the sevenfold perfection of uncreated light—the great heavenly Lampstand’ (*The Parable of the Tabernacle*, p.77). He refers to the seven eyes of the Lamb ‘which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth’ (5:6), and interprets the golden lampstand in the Tabernacle as representing the work of the Holy Spirit, revealing ‘the glories of the Son of God’ to the hearts and minds of men. In the lampstand we see the indivisible unity that exists in the Godhead as well as the distinctive character and work of the Holy Spirit.

J.J.

4. (Ibadan—Alawaye): More commonly we would employ the expressions ‘The Breaking of the Bread’, ‘The Remembrance’, ‘The Lord’s Supper’, or the Lord’s Table’ when we speak about the worship and holy priesthood service of God’s people (Acts 2:42; cp. 1 Cor. 11:24-25; 1 Cor. 11:20; 1 Cor. 10:21), but certainly ‘Communion’ would not be altogether out of place scripturally (1 Cor. 10: 16) in referring to this service of the highest privilege.

5. (Mount Forest): It could also be understood that there are seven attributes with the mention of ‘rest’ not simply carrying the meaning of dwelling or residing, but also that of having a quiet effectiveness as a result of His presence in and with the Lord in His earthly sojourn.

R.B.F.

6. (Mount Forest): I would favour the traditional view, that 1:4-5 bring before us the three persons of the Trinity: God the Father as the great, eternal ‘I AM’, God the Holy Spirit represented by ‘the seven spirits that are before his throne’ and God the Son, Jesus Christ. John Miller’s thought that ‘the seven lamps upon the lampstand in the Tabernacle are ... symbolic representations of the seven lamps of fire, which are the seven Spirits’ also accords with the interpretation given in Comment 2.

J.J.

7. (Mount Forest): Reference of ‘the Lord’s day’ (Rev. 1:10) Verse 10 describes John’s situation before he sees the visions, so ‘the day of the Lord’ does not seem a tenable understanding. The verse reads more naturally as a result of John’s exercise of remembrance that had been his habit since Pentecost on the first day of the week. Further, the phrase in Revelation 1:10 is *tē kuriakē hēmera*, lit. ‘the Lordly day’, whereas ‘the day of the Lord’ (as in 1 Thes. 5:2; 2 Thes. 2:2) is *hē hēmera tou Kuriou*—as also in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Hebrew for ‘the day of the Lord’ (though the article ‘the’ is omitted: e.g. Is. 13:6,9; Ezek. 13:5).

8. (Podagatlapalli): See 'Feature' article below, Cromer para. 1, and Surulere paper.

M.A.

9. (Podagatlapalli): The term 'only begotten' with reference to the Lord Jesus is a title of deity rather than a physical act of birth and is underlining the truth of the Lord's eternal sonship (John 1:14; Heb. 1:5; 1 John 4:9).

R.B.F.

10. (Podagatlapalli): *A kingdom and priests (1:6)* The text here, *basileian, hierais*—lit. 'kingdom, priests' is so certain it has no footnote offering alternatives from variant manuscripts in *The Greek New Testament*, U.B.S., 4th Ed. 'Kings and priests' comes from the King James Version, sadly perpetuated in NKJV alone of modern versions (though their footnote shows the sounder text), from the later manuscripts which were all that was known to 17th century Western Europe.

The same is true of the parallel expression in 5:10—*basileian kai hierais*, 'kingdom and priests'. The crucial difference is that believers do *not* reign as kings on earth, either in God's intention or in our own experience. The day is yet to come when the King of kings will take power and reign over the world that once rejected Him. Then it shall be that those who have endured with Him here will reign in positions of authority under His beneficent rule (2 Tim. 2:12). Thus the song in 5:10 reads in its closing line, 'And they shall reign upon the earth' (*basileusousin*, future tense). The text in 1 Peter 2:9 is *basileion hierateuma*, 'a royal priesthood', again without variants, quoting Exodus 19:5 and LXX 23:22.

11. (Ravulapalem): *The coming of Christ in 1:7* will be seen by every eye, and all tribes of the earth shall wail for Him (ESV), so this cannot be the first coming to the air for believers, which will be heard and visible only to them, while, at least at first, a mystery to others. The further references, however, 2:25, 3:11 and 22:12, could perhaps include the coming to the air, since their mention is less specific. 2 Peter 3:10, to be exact, takes place *after* the return of Christ in judgement on the rebellion at the close of the Millennium, at a later point when the old heavens and earth will be destroyed, and replaced with the new.

M.A.

Feature

THE PURPOSES OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY

The opening of 1 Corinthians 14 guides us to understand that prophecy in the New Testament was given through the Spirit to build up, encourage, and, we may add from a survey of examples, to warn. For example, a passage of prophecy such as Romans 13:11-14 illustrates that encouragement to realise that their salvation from the presence of sin was nearer than when they first believed, can shade into challenge to wake up to their true situation, with a warning against negligence or failure.

This exposition is helped by observing that the Greek word *prophēteuō* meant in N.T. times—

‘to speak an inspired message, sometimes to encouraging obedience to God, sometimes proclaiming the future as a warning to preparedness and continued obedience’ (NIV Concordance, J.R. Kohlenberger, 2015).

Clearly the word is used in the New Testament to cover more than foretelling. For instance, Paul revealed the mystery that Gentiles should be fellow members with Jews of the church which is Christ’s body through faith in His work of salvation. Or consider James’ address to the Jerusalem council,

deploying Scripture from Amos 9 to guide towards a decision about limits to the relevance of Old Testament law. Neither of these is foretelling: they are interpreting the mind of the Lord about the nature of current events. As former teachers observed, in this case the elements of ‘prophesy’ in Greek could be expressed as ‘tell (-*phēteuō*) forth (*pro-*)’, as when used of interpreting the written Word, as well as conveying a message direct from God.

This wider range of ministry that often emerges in the apostles’ writings, often without the word *prophēteuō* needing to be used, is the reason Paul commends prophecy as of more worth than speaking in languages or tongues, the gift he chooses for comparison. So also it is significant that prophecy is allied with ‘understand[ing] mysteries and all knowledge’ (1 Cor. 13:2).

A useful test of this view is to examine Old Testament prophecy, which would undoubtedly shape the apostles’ understanding of the word. Isaiah’s book opens with God’s view of His people at the time of writing (Is. 1,3,5), interspersed with passages foretelling judgement or future restoration (most of 2,4)—and so on.

Think also of the intended effect of Isaiah 52-53 on Judah when the prophecy was first given. The purpose was to cause the people to realise how far they fallen away from God, to repent, and to seek assurance of forgiveness in the cleansing and mercies that will come through the sacrifice of the Suffering Servant, as described later in the chapter. Similarly, recall how Jeremiah's prophecy, which we have been studying over two years, sandwiches foretelling the spiritual power of the New Covenant in Chapter 31:23-40 and future restoration of Israel (31:1-14) with passages warning of imminent judgement (vv.15-22; 32:1-5). Threaded through all this are messages of appeal and exhortation towards repentance and trust in the only true God. A short scan of the Book of Micah will show the same pattern—and that there is more instruction, appeal and encouragement for the people first addressed than foretelling. So whether foretelling or ministry, whether in Old Testament or New, the purposes of prophecy are the same. Further, the word includes the interpretation of the mind of the Lord for the present time that we

find today in ministry that instructs, encourages, comforts or builds up, the gift of foretelling having been withdrawn now that we have the completed canon of Scripture (1 Cor. 13:8).

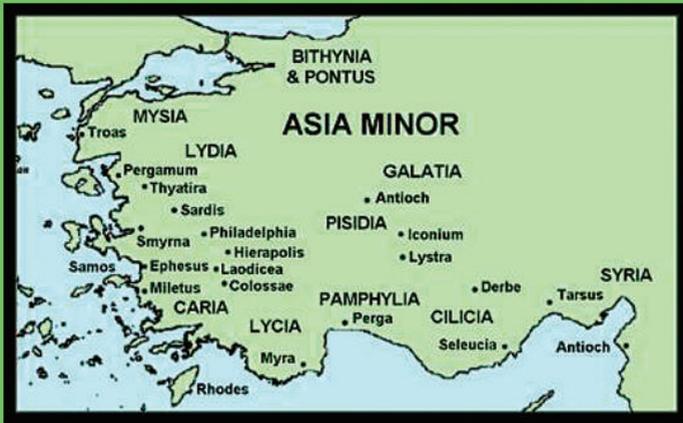
Some will ask, if in the last verse cited Paul said prophecies were to pass away, how can the word have the wider meaning argued for above? Think, then what the word would mean to the Corinthian saints, as they heard the Letter read. In Chapter 13, to them 'prophecy' would mean the excitement of foretelling the future, because that was the preoccupation most had while exercise of the outwardly impressive sign gifts held pre-eminence in their meetings. Only in Chapter 14 would they begin to realise that they would benefit much more from prophecy in its wider sense of the variety of ministry of the Word described above. Likewise we today will miss a great deal of spiritual food and meat in our Bibles if we think prophecy is foretelling alone.

M. Archibald, Glasgow

FAREWELL

Our dear sister **Mrs Betty Hickling** retired in September 2019 from her post as our chief Typesetter, following the stroke she had suffered. It was a wise and necessary decision, but we greatly miss her contribution: no longer can we launch the technical problems of layout that have defeated us on Betty. Fortunately Jo Johnson's IT skills have proved equal to the task, to our much relief. Betty's work was capably and timeously sustained over 37 years, from the days of manual typewriters when her husband Ron completed editing *Intelligence*, while Betty did so for *Bible Studies*, and the family lived with the house at Kingsdown Mount becoming like Fleet Street as the monthly deadline loomed. We wish Betty a true rest, and join many in prayer that she will be granted full mobility again from the Lord in due course.

Editors



New Testament churches in Asia Minor

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