

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

"The Great I Am"
Revelation 1:17-20

Introduction

1. John has had a revelation of the glorified Son of God (vv. 12-16). His single response was to fall at His feet for worship (v. 17). John was overwhelmed with the character and person of Christ.

2. While at His feet, Scripture records that the Lord "laid His right hand upon me" (v. 17). He did the same to those on the Mount (Matt. 17:6, 7). The Matthew passage says He "touched" them, but here the Greek affirms that He "placed or put" His hand on them, hence "laid." Think of the life-energizing of the laid hand of our Lord on John!

3. It is glorious to hear what the Lord then said to John. What infinite encouragement was given! It opens with that present imperative negative: "stop fearing!" There is no need for fear in His presence for those who truly worship Him! Following this injunction, the Lord speaks:

1. ABOUT HIMSELF vv. 17, 18.

a. He is eternal "I am the first and the last."

This is a divine title affirmed of God in the Old Testament (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12) and three times of Christ in Revelation (2:8; 22:13; here). Being "first", He is before all and from Whom all proceeds. Being "last", He is after all and in Whom all things are centered. There is no fear for the one who knows such a self-existent and absolutely sovereign One. Hallelujah!

b. He is true "The Living One."

This is a title also used in the Old Testament and speaks of God as opposed to the false gods (Psa. 115). Christ's incarnation acknowledged His prior existence (1 John 1:2). What the Old Testament says of God (Jer. 10:10) is equally true in the New Testament of Christ (1 Tim. 3:16).

c. He is glorious "I became dead."

The aorist middle verb points to our Lord's voluntary death on the cross. He laid down His own life (Matt. 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30). No man could take His life (John 10:17, 18). The glory of it all is that the self-existent One stooped to give up His life and He did (Heb. 2:14, 15).

d. He is victor "I am alive forever."

Forthrightly it is claimed here that Christ will die no more. The present tense verb shows Christ's eternity in resurrection life! The prepositional phrase used with the verb is the strongest possible to indicate the truth.

e. He has authority "I have keys."

The present tense verb again shows present authority and with continuity! Death demands the body; hades (Greek) the soul, but our Lord has the keys over both. Hallelujah! Hades is the state of departed dead. For believers, it is with the Lord (Phil. 1:23). For nonbelievers it is a place of torment (Luke 16:23).

2. ABOUT REVELATION v. 19.

Earlier John had been instructed to "write" (v. 11). Now again he is so charged. The AV unfortunately omits a Greek participle which should be rendered "therefore." On the basis of Who He is (vv. 17, 18), the charge to write is given. He is to write:

a. Past things.

This is a reference to the vision of our Lord (vv. 10-18). John had seen this.

b. Present things.

The letters to the churches are included here (chapters 2, 3). The current scene is in view. The Asiatic churches were real local independent churches in John's time.

NOTE: It is possible to take the Greek connective "and" in the phrase "and the things which are" in an ascensive

sense, hence "even." The "past" and the "present" of the outline would then be "current things" and the two items would be blended into one single unit. This would support structurally the view that the first three chapters occur within the present age or dispensation.

c. Future things.

The final phrase concerns things which are about to take place "after these things." This gives the book a chronology of events. The entire final chapters of the book fall here (4-22). The first two items are "current things;" this is the "coming things."

3. ABOUT MYSTERIES v. 20.

A mystery in the Bible is both an open and sacred secret. Profane eyes will not grasp it though it is completely explained (1 Cor. 2:14). It is truth made known to the redeemed hearts in the Scripture. Several mysteries are revealed in the New Testament (Matt. 13; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Tim. 3:16). Note that the "church" is distinctly stated here to be a "mystery."

a. Stars

These are the "angels" of the seven churches. The word may be taken to be "messengers" of the local churches. It may also suggest that each church has a heavenly being from the Lord responsible to Him for the condition of the local assembly. Earlier they are stated to be "in" the Lord's right hand. Here they are "on" (Greek) His right hand. Their public relation to Christ is thus enforced. He upholds them.

b. Lampstands (not "candlesticks")

Here are the seven local Asiatic churches (v. 11). They are not symbols but real churches. The lampstand connotes testimony. God raised up the churches for a witness. They are merely seven out of the reputed 450 in that area in John's day.

Conclusion So, our glorious exalted Lord has a word to say to His own (vv. 17, 18). He is ever God of very God! All truth is organized before Him (v. 19). He unveils mysteries to those who know Him (v. 20). Worship Him now and forever.