

# Revelation: an Introduction

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Date: 11 January 2015

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[ 0 : 00 ] Does that show up? Yes. So what I'm going to do this morning, what I hope to do, is to give an introduction to the talk, and then to give us enough to get us going, to give us a map of the chapter, and look at the four key figures in the chapter.

And it strikes me that this will be a little bit bitty. It'll be a little bit like the first day of a holiday abroad, where you spend the time unpacking and finding out where the nearest ATM is, and trying to work out what your money adds up to, and things like that.

So it's a little bit that sort of thing this morning. So here's an introduction to the book of Revelation. I looked on the Daily Mail website about ridiculous complaints about hotels. These are apparently real complaints. Somebody went on holiday and said, I wish to complain the sea was too blue, and I wish to complain the ice cream was too cold.

And of course, there were ten of these, as there always are on websites, ten ridiculous complaints about hotels. Those are rather classic. Complaining. Complaining comes really to do with your expectations, doesn't it? It depends what you had expected, whether you are disappointed and complain about it.

And it seems to me that on a holiday, I would be really happy if there was any sea at all, and it was any shade of blue, really. And I would be happy with more or less any ice cream, with one or two possible exceptions, but basically I think I would be happy.

[ 1 : 45 ] And the place where the sea is exactly the right shade of blue, and the ice cream is exactly the right temperature, not too warm and not too cold, is not real.

It's not real life, is it, to get things exactly right. And I wanted to compare that with our expectations of the Christian life. Because that's a very important thing, that if people are Christians, or thinking of becoming Christians, or trying to live the Christian life, that they have right expectations of what the Christian life is like.

So what did it say in the travel brochure? Did it promise you that the sea would be a particular shade of blue? Well, it probably didn't.

And what does it say in the Bible about the real nature of the Christian life? So there is a glossy, unreal version, in which, I've written this all down in the script, which I've managed to leave behind as well.

So, unreal versions of the Christian life, that everybody's happy all the time, that you always have a smile on your face, that everybody thinks you're wonderful, that God always answers your prayers immediately, and it's happy and plain sailing all the way.

[ 3 : 11 ] If that was what you thought the Christian life was, you won't get very far, because that isn't what the Christian life is like, that is not a real version.

The book of Revelation is quite sober, or stark, or brutal with us, about what the Christian life can include.

It doesn't always include the extremes, but it can. And that, I'm introducing us to the book of Revelation, that's the sort of thing it teaches us.

It teaches us, as we go through it, that the Christian life is a warfare, a conflict, a battle.

That's not the only thing it is, but it is that. And there are real enemies. There are enemies that intimidate. So we will meet this beast, this frightening beast.

[ 4 : 17 ] Are you very frightened by the picture on the screen? I hope you're really scared by that. But we meet in the book of Revelation, a frightening beast, who makes it his job to frighten the people of God.

So intimidation is a real thing. There are enemies that beguile and seduce, to bewitch, to tell you things that are almost true, and to try and bring you in that way.

So you see this really glamorous woman that I've drawn up there. She's got a cup. She's asking us to drink. She's very beautiful.

And as you look at her, you're dazzled by her beauty. She's in the book of Revelation. And she's not what she appears to be. If you look into that cup, you find something quite nasty.

We have enemies like that. We have enemies who deceive us and mislead us. And they too might come in a shape which doesn't tell us that's what they're going to do.

[ 5 : 29 ] So I've drawn a priest. And in the book of Revelation, there are people who bring you to various gods, or teach you how to approach various gods, and they're all enemies.

And they can come in different capacities. They can be leading you to worship as the god Jupiter, or the goddess Diana, or whatever it was.

That's how it would have been in those days. Or they could come into the church and say, well, this is how you worship the god of the Bible, and they'll tell you the wrong thing.

So these deceive and mislead, and they're real deadly enemies. And in the book of Revelation, we also meet the power of the government, the power of the state to kill.

So we find the soldier with the spear and the sword. And we find in the book of Revelation that Christians who have been killed already, for, well, for what?

[ 6 : 34 ] We'll find out in a moment. So this is the way the book of Revelation portrays the situation. It is a warfare. And the book of Revelation will keep saying, to him who overcomes, who fights the fight of faith, and who does not give in to intimidation, and who isn't tricked and deceived by the pleasures and wealth offered by the beautiful lady, and who isn't deceived and misled by the false teachers and the false gods, and who doesn't mind if he or she is killed, they will still believe in Jesus.

That's tough, isn't it? But that's the Christian life as it is shown to us in the book of Revelation. And that is what the book of Revelation says to him, to the one who overcomes, I give the promises.

Well, what have I got here? Yes, the current experience then, the current experience is of warfare and suffering. If you look down to verse 9, for example, you'll see John says, I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering kingdom, patient endurance that are ours in Jesus.

So he links himself with us, and he says that's what we have in common. That's the Christian life. The suffering, sometimes translated tribulation, just means suffering.

Kingdom, patient endurance, patient endurance means keeping on, keeping on, hanging on in there. And he says that's what, that's the sort of kingdom that we're in.

[ 8 : 41 ] The battleground, the battleground in the book of Revelation, you could boil it down and say the battleground is worship. Not how you worship, it isn't a battleground as to whether you sing songs by the Gettys or by Fatfish or Timothy Dudley Smith.

It's not that sort of battle. It's the battle of who you worship. Whether you're going to worship Diana of the Ephesians or Jupiter or Jesus Christ. That's the battle.

Or the emperor. That's the battle. Not so much how we worship as who we worship. And the battleground of witness. Witness, testimony, same word in Greek, what you say, what you're prepared to say when push comes to shove, who will you worship?

Give us your answer. And the witness of the Christian to say, I worship Jesus Christ. And when the intimidation comes, you still say, I worship Jesus Christ.

And if you look in verse 9 again, John says, I am on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

[ 10 : 00 ] You know, see how he links those two together. The message of God, the word of God, is closely linked with the testimony of Jesus. I believe in Jesus Christ.

I put my trust in him. He's the one I'm worshipping. So I've already quoted John himself in verse 9. So, there's a little introduction.

That's what the book is about. That's where it's going. And let's put enough in our bags just to get us onto the easy jet.

We're not going to put a lot of luggage in the hold. It's all going to be hand luggage. Let's see what we have. Enough to get us going. Well, verse 10. It says, On the Lord's day, I was in the Spirit and heard behind me a voice like a trumpet which said, Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

And I haven't delayed to put a map in, but these are all churches in what we nowadays call Turkey. They're written in the order, in a sort of circular order. So if you're a messenger going one by one,

that's the order you'd go around the loop.

[11:18] Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Have I put them in the right order? E-S-P-T-S-P-L. Yeah, that's right. So that's where this letter is headed to these seven churches.

And we need to know that there are seven churches in the Roman Empire. That's who it's first addressed to. And in those days, their situation was, exactly as I've described already, that the Roman Empire was very wealthy.

And if you're on the right end of the stick, you could make a lot of money by being in the Roman Empire. So wealth and glamour, you know, their, if we think our sexual ethics are lax these days, I think the Romans could outdo us, really, in their, the sort of glamour, power, wealth, all of that. that's, that's one of the things that the Christian churches had to deal with. It would be a mistake to think that all they had to deal with was persecution. That's not the case.

The wealth and the power and the attractions of the Roman Empire were something they had to deal with as well. And I put polytheism, which is the correct word, but let me tell you what it means. [12:47] Poly means many. Theism means gods. So having many gods. I've already mentioned that, but I put it up on the list there too.

And emperor worship. Historically speaking, as the Roman emperors progressed, progressed is the right word, they began to build themselves up and say, you know, I'm so good that not only do I expect you to send me a Christmas card, but I'd also like you to worship me.

And it's a stupid thing, isn't it? Fancy allowing yourself to think you're so great that other people ought to worship you.

The emperor Nero had coins produced and the stamping on the coin said, Nero, saviour of the world.

Not terribly humble, is it? And you might think, I thought someone else was saviour of the world. But emperor Nero put saviour of the world on his coins.

[14:03] And they had misleading teaching in the churches which we will see in due course. So that's something to help us get going.

Here's another thing to help us get going. There is a style in the book of Revelation. It's not like the letters of Paul. It's not like the Gospel of Mark. It uses a particular style.

The technical name is apocalyptic. You don't have to worry about that. But there is a name for it. It is a style which uses visions and angels and pictures and symbols and beasts and numbers.

There's all these sorts of things. In the same way that if you did look at a cartoon in the paper you would almost certainly understand the language of the cartoonist.

So he doesn't draw a photograph does he? He draws a sort of picture to represent something. And I don't know whether they would do this nowadays but perhaps in the war time a cartoon of a bulldog would represent Britain.

[15:24] The British bulldog. Bulldog spirit. That sort of thing. Or Britannia the lady with the shield and the spear.

She'd represent Britain as well. So you have those coded pictures meaning something. That's the way cartoonists work and it's the way apocalyptic works.

John uses it in his own particular way but I want you to know he hasn't made this up himself. No, let me be more clear about that. He hasn't made up this style himself.

He's using a style that already exists. So in verse 1 it says the revelation of Jesus Christ the apocalypse of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John who testifies to everything he saw. In verse 1 it says he made it known the word is to sign to signify and it sort of warns us that signs are going to be used in this book and it's served via an angel and that prompts us to think oh we might find angels cropping up through here and we do.

[16:48] And what else have I got verse 2? I can't remember why I put a reference to verse 2 I wish I brought my notes with me. Verse 4 is the beginning or I think this is the first incident where a number starts to be used.

Verse 4 to the seven churches in the province of Asia and you might have noticed that the number seven crops up and numbers are going to crop up through the book.

So did you notice the seven churches? Do you notice seven anything else's? Seven spirits yeah? Seven lampstands?

There's seven something else's as well if you've spotted it. Verse 20 stars seven stars. Apocalyptic uses this style of writing uses numbers in a certain way to say a certain thing and I would if I cut to the chase and tell you I think the number seven means the full amount of something in all its variety the full so when he writes the seven churches he doesn't really mean there are only seven churches many more than that but he's writing to the entire church in all its variety the whole thing and he uses the number seven to signify it.

Now have any of you ever been to Newcastle? Yeah. Did you understand what they were talking about? Because you talk like that don't you?

[ 18 : 34 ] Something like that. If you go somewhere and somebody is speaking with a certain accent you have to listen and then you gradually pick up when they said oh he meant hello and when he says man he means me chap or whatever I mean that's a very if anybody here was from Newcastle they would say we don't speak like that at all but you get the idea you listen and you gradually tune in and you think oh that's what they mean that's what they mean let me give you another example of traffic once when I was a long time ago went to Paris and was involved with driving a car round the what's that well it was it was around the Arc de Triomphe and I talked to a colleague afterwards and who done the same thing I said it's pretty hair raising wasn't it and he said yes what I did he said before I drove around the

Arc de Triomphe I went and stood there for quite a while and I watched how the cars did what they did you know do you suddenly change course do you indicate do you beep do you just go ahead there is a way of doing it and if you watch you pick up the way of doing it and I would like to suggest the same thing with the book of Revelation let's not make up our minds beforehand what it's all about let's listen let's listen to the accent let's observe the way he makes points and how he weaves his way through things let's learn it that way that's my suggestion I think that's and I should have said some of the symbols are interpreted so in verse 20 what's this seven stars business what are these seven lampstands is this what does it mean it signifies something and we're given an interpretation here the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches well I think we might get a bit stuck on what does he mean by the angels of the seven churches but at least we've got an explanation that the lampstands are the churches at least we understand what a church is and there's some symbolism that's explained to us it isn't all explained but that it was and let me also say just to get us going that one quality of this writing is an extraordinary amount of precision so here's one example of it in verse three it says blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it because the time is near so Chris was blessed this morning by reading aloud the words of this prophecy and we were blessed by hearing it and we will be blessed if we take to heart what is written to that you've been blessed I hope you realize that because that's what it says and in the book of revelation the idea of somebody being blessed blessed is this or blessed is that is written down a number of times would anybody like to suggest how many times if you were to work your way through how many times it says blessed is such and such seven it is correct if you get a computer out or do it with pencil and paper you'll find there are seven and I find it interesting that you know that's just one example of the precision he's made sure that as he's gone through there are exactly seven blessings is that enough to get us going yes it is right let's look at a map of the chapter now

I'm just going to turn around see how visible that is can you see it at the back yeah okay and I've also forgotten to bring my little pointy thing so I'm doing well today this is I've tried to do a map of the chapter to say what the main features are there's a lot of detail and it's easy to get bogged down in the detail so top left forget the trumpet because that's just part of the background next top left is the introduction and that's what John starts us off with doesn't he the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place and he introduces it he says this is what it is this is where it's come from this is how important it is you're blessed if you read this it's an important text there is important words God is in on this and if you read it you're blessed so there's an introduction and then he starts it off in the form of a letter now if you're writing a letter how do you how do you begin a letter

Tim? if you're writing a letter how would you bring it in? Dear Sir Dear Sir yeah exactly we have a convention for writing a letter we put Dear Sir at the beginning and at the end of it we put Yours faithfully I think if you put Dear Sir you put Yours faithfully you put Dear Mr Fry you put Yours

sincerely we have a convention of beginning and ending a letter it's different in those days in those days you began a letter by putting at the beginning of it grace and peace to you so this is John begins a letter John to the seven churches in the province of Asia grace and peace to you and it's an interesting grace and peace because it well we'll come to that in a moment so he begins it as a letter and then we get a couple of quotes with an amen at the end to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood has made us to be a kingdom and priest to serve his God and Father to him be glory forever and ever amen number one look he is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him even those who pierced him and the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him so shall it be amen so you've got those two sort of statements quotes with an amen at the end of them then God says something verse 8

I am the Alpha and the Omega says the Lord God who is and who was and who is to come the Almighty so you get that quote then John starts in a sort of autobiographical way so I've got down to around here I John your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus I was on the island of Patmos so I've put him I've tried to put him on an island on my screen that's green on this on this big screen it's turned out yellow but there's John he's on the island of Patmos and why is he there he's he's sort of well he's either in exile or in prison or on parole or something he doesn't particularly want to be there but he's been put there he's on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ so there he is and on the Lord's day

[ 26 : 19 ] I was in the spirit and I heard behind me a voice like a trumpet so that's the trumpet you should take notice of that one there so he hears this loud voice behind him a voice like a trumpet and he's told write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches so there's his scroll and he's going to write it down so he's looking the wrong way isn't he because the trumpet's behind him so he turns round to see the trumpeter and he doesn't see a trumpeter he sees this amazing figure he turns round verse 12 when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands and among the lampstands was someone so notice all these quotes it's like a son of man dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet with a golden sash round his chest his head and his hair were white like wool as white as snow his eyes were like blazing fire his feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace his voice was like the sound of rushing waters in his right hand he held seven stars from his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword his face was like the sun shining in its hall is brilliant this is the picture that he sees and the emotional reaction is bang he falls down as dead

I was thinking about this because people generally don't want to come to church to be given an emotional reaction of intense fear so much that they just fall down as if they were dead I think people would come to church to be given an emotional reaction of feeling good and positive and happy but I can't do that from this chapter this is the emotional reaction when he sees this person bang awful terrible I fell down at his dead but he does get the reassurance stand up and the person introduces himself and tells him again to write down what you have seen so that's I try not to get too much into the detail of it although I did get carried away a bit but this is the map of the chapter an introduction it's a letter there's some quotes God says something John tells us about being on the island here's a trumpet looks around to see what it is gets told to write something that's a map of the chapter so I thought we would then look at the key figures in this chapter and this is the last thing that we're going to do on this first day of our outing what can we say about

John so this is John the same John that was a disciple of Jesus and we can say that he's a Christian like us verse 9 he says I am your brother and companion and he says the things that I experience are the same things that you experience we're in this together we're the same and I think I've already commented on that but he's also different from us and that he is able to write scripture he is given words from God to write down and give to us that's exactly what he's telling us isn't he he's saying my book is not just like you know a book you might write if you wrote your autobiography you know one day I was standing in Worthing and I heard a car horn behind me and I turned around to see who it was and it was somebody I knew it's not like that that's that's on a different level

I'm telling you words from God this is the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John who testifies to everything he saw that is the word of God the testimony of Jesus Christ write down what I show you and John says that's exactly what I'm doing he's writing scripture I read a quote and I didn't follow it up I think it was by the former Archbishop of Canterbury who had said that the

book of Revelation is something like the ravings of a madman I think did you really say that and maybe I think he did but somebody said it I think it's not the it's very some of it is very bizarre the pictures given are very bizarre but this is the word of God it's the word of God and we're blessed if we treat it as such listen to it as such take it on board as such and he is testifying to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus that's so important testimony of Jesus

I'm going to move on God is shown to us in this first chapter and there are some really grand sentences so we're told in verse 4 grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come it's a present who is and it's a past who was and who is to come if you if you're learning English and you think what tense is that it's actually a present isn't it who is to come but it's expressing a future and this we're talking about the God who is the Lord of time the God who is you can't get rid of him from now he is the God who was he's back at the beginning of everything and who is to come there's more of God for us yet to learn he has more things to do and he's not going to absent himself and he's not the God who's going to be less and less relevant but he's the God who is to come the future is God

[ 32 : 45 ] Amen we have God described we have just touched on but I might as well touch on it the sevenfold spirit it says in verse in verse four grace and peace to you from him who is who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits before his throne if we take it that the seven means the whole thing in all its variety it's saying the sevenfold spirit the spirit who has an entire work a very varied work but he's there around the throne of God and the spirit is sending this letter to where John says I was in the spirit I think that comes up if I click that yes he was in the spirit and as we go on into the next chapters it keeps saying hear what the spirit is saying to the churches so the spirit is not put center stage but the spirit is there and he the third person of the trinity is there quietly but vocally so he's not silent quiet doesn't mean silent it means sort of unobtrusive he's speaking hear what the spirit says to the churches he's he works variously different ways in different people different situations but he's actively present throughout this is a book about the spirit as much as anything else and we have center stage

Jesus and some awesome descriptions of him in verse 5 he too is the writer of the letter or the sender of grace and peace from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness and if he expects us to be faithful witnesses it's only because he was a faithful witness first that's who he is he is the faithful witness the one who speaks the truth and has never been intimidated has never deceived has never backed off what needed to be said he is the faithful witness he is the first born from the dead implying that there will be more who rise from the dead in fact he will bring all his people with him but it's an important keynote here because one of the subjects of the book of Revelation is death death is not the end death is the next step onwards to the resurrection and

Jesus holds the keys of death and he told us he is the first born from the dead and he's the ruler of the kings of the earth and that's just quietly stated as the last phrase here but how subversive how radical that is because the emperor Nero will be saying I'm the savior of the world I'm the king of kings and lord of lords and Jesus will be saying actually you're not I'm the king of kings and lord of lords and you are under my thumb you may not realize it but I insist that I am Jesus Christ the faithful witness the first born from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth even Caroline Lucas is ruled by Jesus Christ he is the figure of sacrifice we'll see more of this later on but in verse in verse five to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins how by his blood that's how he did it that's the great victory he's achieved he didn't give up under threat of death he died for the salvation of his people and we have this vision of the risen

Christ which we'll just look at before we close the vision of the risen Christ take a look at it and yeah if you're able to perhaps you'd like to flip back to Daniel chapter 10 so one of the things about the book of revelation is it quotes lots of the bible and the more of the bible you have read the more likely you are to pick up on what is being said but let's go for a moment many many hundreds of years before to the time when God's people were in exile in Persia in Iran there's Baha here he's from Iran anybody here from Iran okay this was where he was and Daniel was on the bank of the great river the Tigris Daniel 10 verse 4 and he is in a great perplexity about the situation of God's people in exile there and he sees a person Daniel 10 verse 4 I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen with a belt of the finest gold round his waist his body was like chrysolite his face like lightning his eyes like flaming torches his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze and his voice like the sound of a multitude and I Daniel was the only one who saw the vision but the men with me did not see it but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and

