

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. Today we will introduce Revelation chapter 1. Part 1 of the book of Revelation consists of chapters 1-3.

**REVELATION CHAPTER 1** teaches that **Christ is present among all the Christian churches in the world.**

The number “seven” is a symbol representing *divine perfection and completion and always attaining God’s purpose*. It occurs several times in the book of Revelation. Revelation chapter 1 may be divided into seven sections.

**Section 1. Revelation 1:1-3 contains the title of the book, the statement of its origin, the time of its relevance and the first blessing.**

One. The title of the book of Revelation is “The revelation of Jesus Christ”. It is a revelation (G: αποκαλυψις) or *unveiling by means of visions* of God’s plan for the history of the world and especially of the Church. The origin of this revelation is not any human source. It is “the revelation which God gave to Jesus Christ”. For example, in Revelation 5, God the Father gave to Jesus Christ, the Mediator, “a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals”, which only he had merited to open. This scroll is a symbol representing *God’s plan for the history of the present world and Church*. God committed to Jesus Christ the government of the whole world in the interest of the Church (Eph 1:22). In his turn, Jesus Christ “showed” (G: δεικνυμι)(1:1), that is, *communicated this revelation by means of visions* and he “made it known” (G: σημεινω)(1:1), that is, *communicated this revelation by means of signs, symbols and figures* via an angel and via the apostle John to his Church. ***The first key to the explanation of the book of Revelation is to realise that the “symbols” in the book are not to be understood literally, but symbolically. The symbols represent literal realities that far surpass the literalness of the symbols themselves.*** For example, Jesus Christ himself interprets the symbol of “the lampstands” as *real churches* (1:20) and “the stars” as *real messengers* (angels) or leaders of the churches (1:20).

Two. When do the things that are revealed in the book of Revelation begin to happen? Verse 1 says that God’s plan “must soon take place” and verse 3 says that the time for this “prophecy” or proclamation to become reality “is near”. This cannot refer to a very distant future, but begins at the time Christ gave this revelation to John. ***The second key to the explanation of the book of Revelation is to realise that the things revealed in the book begin to be realised immediately after the first coming of Christ and continue to be realised throughout the centuries until the second coming of Christ.***

Three. The blessing is to those who read the book 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 (1 Tim 4:13). The book of Revelation was also read aloud in public to the churches. ***The third key to the explanation of the book of Revelation is to realise that the message of the book is relevant for Christians in every century, a blessing to read and its message a great encouragement for every Christian in every age.***

**Section 2. Revelation 1:4-6 contains the recipients, the greeting and words of praise to the Triune God.**

One. Who were the recipients? Jesus Christ first of all revealed God’s plan to the seven historical churches in Asia Minor, which is modern Turkey. But in Revelation chapter 2 and 3, Jesus Christ commands all the churches in the whole world to read all his letters. He says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to *the churches* (plural)(2:7).” Thus, the number “seven” is a symbol and represents *all the churches in the world and in history*. ***The fourth key to the explanation of the book of Revelation is to realise that also the numbers in the book are symbolical. The numbers represent literal realities that far surpass the literalness of the numbers themselves.*** These 7 churches represent the entire Church throughout the New Testament period from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. And the 7 letters as well as the whole book of Revelation is intended as a warning and encouragement to all the churches in the world. 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. They occur throughout all centuries between the first and the second coming of Jesus Christ. The beginning and the end of this book (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 first century, but to “every one who reads and hears the words of this prophecy of this book.”

Two. The greeting comes from the Triune God. The Trinity follows the order of the Old Testament temple: God the Father dwelt above the ark in the most holy place, God the Spirit was *represented* by the lampstand in the holy place and God the Son and his atonement was *symbolised* by the blood under the altar of burnt-offerings in the court of the temple. God the Father is called “who is and who was, and who is to come” because he is the unchangeable God of the covenant (Ex 3:14). God the Spirit is called “the seven spirits before the throne” to indicate that he is completely God in his being and in his work. And God the Son is called “the faithful witness”, indicating his work in the history of this

world. He is called “the firstborn” to indicate, not that he was created, but that he is pre-existent, unique, superior over all creation and the first to be resurrected from the dead. He is called “the ruler of the nations” to indicate his present exalted position and authority in heaven. He only presides over the destinies of all the nations.

Three. The words of praise refer to Christ’s completed and perfect work of salvation. Jesus Christ did not simply wash away our sins, but “freed” us from our sins by his death on the cross! The implication is that the completed work of Jesus Christ for his people is not limited to their *justification* or salvation, but includes also their *sanctification* and final *glorification* (Rom 8:30)! That is why Christ loves them with a never-ending love.

Christ calls the Church “a kingdom” and all Christians “priests”. In the Old Testament this description was applied to Israel (Ex 19:6), but in the New Testament this description is applied collectively to the Church and to Christians in the whole world! *God’s people, Israel, is not replaced or substituted, but continued and extended to include believers from all the nations.* The Church is called God’s kingdom, because God’s sovereign rule is recognised in the hearts of Christians and is operative in their lives. God’s sovereign rule affects their salvation from beginning to end, their establishment as God’s community in this world, their influence as salt and light in this world and finally the redeemed universe of the new heaven and the new earth at the second coming.

### **Section 3. Revelation 1:7 contains the announcement of Christ’s second coming.**

It says, “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.”

One. The main theme in the book of Revelation is not the second coming. The dominant and main theme in the book of Revelation is *revealing God’s plan for the history of the world and his Church!* Revelation chapters 1-11 reveals the Church indwelt by Christ and persecuted by the world. The Church is avenged, protected and victorious! Revelation chapters 12-22 reveals the deeper spiritual background of this struggle. It is a conflict between the Christ and the dragon and in this conflict Christ and his Church are victorious!

Two. The second coming of Jesus Christ will be sudden and unexpected for both Christians and non-Christians. There will be only *one second coming* of Jesus and that second coming will be *very visible and very audible* to all people on earth! The Bible knows nothing about two second comings of Jesus Christ and it knows nothing about an invisible or secret second coming of Jesus Christ. On the contrary, “every eye will see him”! Matthew 24:27-31 says that all the people on earth 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 (Dan 7:13; Zech 12:10-12). The second coming will be as visible as the lightning comes from the East and flashes to the West (Mt 24:27)! All the people on earth will hear the loud trumpet call announcing the end of the history of this world (Mt 24:31; 1 Thes 4:16).

The opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal in Revelation 6:12-17 announces one great catastrophe at the end of this present New Testament period. 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 second coming will be very visible and very audible to everyone!* The political and military leaders of every country, and 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”, either literally by crucifying him, or symbolically by living a disobedient life on earth (Heb 6:6; 10:26-31). All these people will “mourn” because of Jesus Christ. However, their mourning will not be a mourning of repentance, but a mourning of hopelessness and despair (Rev 6:16-17).

### **Section 4. Revelation 1:8 contains Christ’s self-designation.**

It says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” The context shows that these are the words of Jesus Christ (1:17, 21:6-8; 22:12-13). By comparing verse 4 and verse 8, we can see that Jesus Christ claims that he and God the Father are One (Jn 10:30) and that he is the complete, perfect and eternal revelation of God to people (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). The purpose of Christ’s self-designation is to encourage Christians. He says to all Christians throughout the New Testament period, “Take courage! Your enemies cannot destroy your Christ!”

### **Section 5. Revelation 1:9-11 contains John’s commission.**

It contains a description by John how he received his commission to write down the words and visions revealed to him.

One. The Roman oppressors exiled John to a small rocky island, called Patmos, off the coast of Turkey between 81-98 A.D. He was exiled there because of his faithful proclamation of Jesus Christ.

Two. John received a vision and his commission on the Lord’s day. He was “in the Spirit” means that he saw without his physical eyes and heard without his physical ears what Christ communicated to him. He heard “a loud voice like a

trumpet". Also during the Old Testament times, whenever God wanted to speak to his people, he gathered them by means of a trumpet sound (Ex 19:16).

Three. The Lord Jesus Christ commanded John to record on a scroll what he saw and heard. According to Revelation 1:19 and 10:4, John wrote these visions down while he received them or shortly afterwards.

### **Section 6. Revelation 1:12-16 contains the vision of the Son of Man.**

In his vision, John sees seven golden lampstands and among them he sees someone "like the Son of Man".

One. The lampstands. During the Old Testament period there was only one lampstand with 7 arms with a lamp on each arm. It represented the Holy Spirit and was a symbol of *the unity of the Old Testament church-state of Israel* and that unity was an organisational unity. But during the New Testament period there are 7 lampstands with one lamp on each lampstand. They represent *all the churches in the New Testament period from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ that are individually connected to Christ* and that unity is a spiritual unity (2:7)! Thus, during the New Testament period the Christian churches find their unity no longer in outward and visible organisation, but in the spiritual unity with one another through their connection to Jesus Christ, who is present and active among all the churches in and through the Holy Spirit (Mt 18:20; 28:20).

Two. The Son of Man is a self-designation of Jesus Christ (Dan 7:13). He was clothed with power and majesty, with awe and terror, so much that it hurt the eyes to look at him. He appears as the High Priest King (Zech 6:13; Ps 110) in "a robe tied with a golden sash around his breast" as a symbol of *majesty and judgement* (cf. 15:6). His eyes is reading every heart and penetrating every hidden corner. His feet are strong and glowing in order to trample down the wicked people. From his mouth came a large "double-edged sword", which is a symbol of *his Word that exposes and condemns the false teachers and preachers in the churches* (2:16) *and that strikes down the wicked and persecuting powers in the world* (19:15). Here Christ does not appear at the end of the ages for the final judgement, but appears throughout the New Testament period to purify his Church and to punish the enemies that persecute his Church as is evident from the seven letters. His Word never misses his target (Isa 55:11).

### **Section 7. Revelation 1:17-20 contains the comfort and instruction of Christ to John.**

It describes the effect this vision had on John and the comfort and instruction Jesus Christ gave to John.

One. What effect did the vision of Christ have on John? When John saw this awesome vision of Jesus Christ, he fell down as though dead. The vision totally paralysed him. But Christ comforted him and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; (literally) *I became dead and behold I am living for ever and ever!* And I hold the keys of death and Hades." As to his divine nature, Jesus Christ is the eternal living one, who has no origin and no end. Besides his divine nature, he took on the human nature, entered creation and human history about two thousand years ago. As to his human nature, he was put to death on earth once in history for all people, but nevertheless "continually lived" (G: ζῶν εἶμι). This means that his soul or spirit was alive all the time while his human body was dead. During his death his soul or spirit was in the hands of God the Father (Lk 23:46). Although his human body was put to death by his enemies, his soul or spirit never died and on the third day his body was resurrected from the dead. This fact is a wonderful comfort for all Christians who are persecuted unto death. Death and Hades could not hold the human nature of Jesus Christ captive. Likewise, death and Hades cannot and will not hold Christians captive (20:13-14)!

Two. What are the keys of death and Hades? Jesus Christ holds the keys of death and Hades. "Keys" are symbols of *the authority to open and to lock*. Here Jesus Christ has power and authority over death and Hades. In this passage, "Hades" does not refer to "hell" or to "the grave", but it refers to "*the state of death*", that is, "*to the state of the soul being separated from the body*". Jesus Christ has complete power and authority over dying and the state of being dead. When a Christian dies, his body decays in the grave on earth, but Jesus Christ welcomes his soul or spirit immediately in heaven! At his second coming Jesus Christ will resurrect his body and reunite his soul or spirit with his resurrected or transformed body! Therefore, "dying" and "the state of being dead" holds no more terror for those who believe in Jesus Christ! For the Christian, "dying" means a deliverance from this wicked world and a deliverance from the weaknesses and sufferings of his present body. For the Christian "the state of being dead" means immediately entering into the presence of Jesus Christ and being with Jesus Christ for ever (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23)!

Three. What should John record in his scroll? Jesus Christ commanded John to write on a scroll what he has seen and send it to the churches. What John has seen are "the things which are now" and "the things which are about to happen after these things" The question is whether the things described in Revelation are for the very distant future or for the present of the readers. Verse 19 does not speak of chapter 1 as "what you have seen" in the past, of chapter 2 and 3 as "what is now" in the present and of chapters 4-22 as "what will take place" in the distant future just before the second coming. The visions that are given to John to see are things that were already happening during the 1<sup>st</sup> century and would continue to happen throughout the centuries from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. "The things which are now"

refers to the condition of the 7 historical churches in John's time. Thus John wrote about the conditions of the churches in *our* past. "The things which are about to happen after these things" are the things that would happen throughout John's entire future between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus Christ. Thus, John wrote about the general principles and events that Christians could expect would happen throughout the New Testament period, from the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Christ right up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. According to verse 3, the time for these events to happen began to be realised immediately at the time of the revelation of Jesus Christ to John! *Therefore, the book of Revelation does not exclusively refer to the events just before the second coming, but applies to events that recur again and again during the whole New Testament period and certainly also at 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 Jesus Christ and his Church will be victorious in the struggle between Christ and the dragon! No matter what happens on earth, Jesus Christ is the ruler of the kings of the earth (5).

Four. Who are the seven stars? "The seven stars" that are in the right hand of Jesus Christ are symbols of *the messengers of the churches* (1:20). They cannot refer to seven messengers sent by the seven churches to meet John, because John had to write a letter to each of them. They rather refer to a representative leader or elder of each church. This is a wonderful assurance for these church leaders that Jesus Christ is holding them in his hand (cf. Jn 10:28) as they exercise their responsibility to lead the churches! Jesus Christ exercises absolute authority over church leaders and church leaders are only his ambassadors and servants! Jesus Christ protects church leaders and they are safe when they obey Jesus Christ and are faithful in his service!

#### **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Read Revelation 2-3. Tomorrow we will introduce Revelation 2-3.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".