

## **THE MYSTERY OF THE SEVEN STARS**

Let me introduce you to one of the greatest treasures God has given us in the Bible—the Book of Revelation.

You would naturally suppose that the last book in the Bible would be the easiest to understand. Even the title assures us that God wants us to understand it “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” If God had intended the book to be hard to understand, would He not have given it a different title, such as “The Hiding,” or “The Obscuring of Jesus Christ”? It is a mistake to suppose that it is hard to understand, or without meaning. God will not mislead us!

One Sunday afternoon I was trying to read the Book of Revelation when our pastor called to visit us. “I can’t understand this book,” I pleaded. “Can you explain it to me?”

He put his hand on my head and smiled as he answered, “Do not try to read that book. It is sealed, and nobody can understand it! You should try to read something else.”

But his answer did not satisfy me, for I had already read as far as the third verse, which says: “Blessed is he who reads, and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it.” I had learned for myself already that the book was not sealed. I determined that I would seek this promised “blessing.”

I discovered that God has indeed revealed the Saviour in this book. He never fails to honor that promise of “blessing” to anyone who will prayerfully and diligently study this last book in the Bible.

Like a hot, tired traveller longing to plunge into the dear, cool waters of a river, you are now invited to plunge into the study of this intensely interesting Book written by the apostle John. You will be refreshed and delighted with the understanding you will gain. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” James 1:5.

“Here is wisdom,” says the Book of Revelation (chapter 13, verse 18). What a precious gift! Millions of people are crying out for some sure word from God. What is coming on the earth? What can we do to prepare for the future? To understand is worth everything. Such wisdom is worth more than any material security.

You will soon discover that the Bible explains itself. “Now we have

received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is of God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:12, 13).

Don't be surprised if there are passages in Revelation that no one as yet fully understands. Even great musicians find new wonders in a Beethoven symphony. The Revelation is not merely a work of spiritual genius. It is divinely inspired, and thus will forever challenge our best understanding. But the Holy Spirit will make the reading of Revelation among the richest and happiest experiences of your life.

### **The Mystery of the Seven Stars**

Revelation 1:1, 2: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And he sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John."

The very first words of the book encourage us! God thought about us so much that He wanted to impart this Revelation to us. It is a cruel enemy who wants us to feel that God is content for us to remain in darkness and ignorance. Be thankful that this Revelation is His special gift to you. This "gospel that Christ came in person to present to John on the Isle of Patmos,—the gospel that is termed 'the revelation of Jesus Christ'?" CW 29.

You can easily see the five steps by which He gave us this book:

- (1) It originated with God, the Father, Himself.
- (2) He gave it to His Son, Jesus Christ.
- (3) Jesus "sent and signified it by His angel (Gabriel)." "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God" (Luke 1:19, cf. Rev. 22:9). "Wonderful thought—that the angel who stands next in honor to the Son of God is the one chosen to open the purposes of God to sinful men." DA 99.
- (4) The angel revealed it to the prophet John in holy vision.
- (5) John communicated to God's servants (you and me) "things which must shortly take place." It is intended for us to understand. Its "mysteries" are not truths Christ wants to hide from us, but which He longs to impart to us.

"Things which must shortly come to pass." The scope of the book is for those living in the last days of earth's history as well as those living in the days of John. Some of the scenes depicted in this prophecy are in the past,

some are now taking place; some bring to view the close of the great conflict between the powers of darkness and the Prince of heaven, and some reveal the triumphs and joys of the redeemed in the earth made new. In the Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end. Here is the complement of the book of Daniel. One is a prophecy; the other a revelation. The book that was sealed is not the Revelation, but that portion of the prophecy of Daniel relating to the last days. Dan. 12:4.

“Jesus Christ is the great trustee of divine revelation. It is through Him that we have a knowledge of what we are to look for in the closing scenes of this earth’s history.” 7BC 954.

“Who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to all things that he saw.” Rev. 1:2.

“The word of God” is “the testimony of Jesus Christ.” This is the revelation of the gospel. It is a revelation from Jesus and about Jesus. It was a visual event for John.

Revelation 1:3: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.”

One was appointed by the ancient church to read the sacred scrolls in public. John anticipates the public reading of the epistle addressed to “the seven churches.” The Revelation had a message for the churches of Asia in John’s day.

This is the only book in the Bible that offers a special blessing on those who read it. Even the illiterate person is included if he will only listen to someone else read it to him! Of all the 66 books of the Bible, this is the one that must not be neglected.

“When we as a people understand what this book means to us, there will be seen among us a great revival.” TM 113.

Revelation 1:4-8: “John, to the seven churches *which* are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and *who* is to come, and from the seven Spirits *who* are before His throne.”

If these few verses were all that we had of the Word of God, there is enough in them to give us everlasting happiness. “Grace . . . and peace” are freely given to anyone who will believe these words—even the most sinful. Do not any longer feel that you are shut out from the smiles and favor of Heaven. This greeting comes from the Father “who is and who was and who is to come,” from the Holy Spirit, and from Jesus Christ, the

mighty One who arose from the grave. All Heaven looks upon you kindly and with tender love. Your job is to believe it, to rest in that confidence.

“We owe everything to grace, free grace, sovereign grace. Grace in the covenant ordained our adoption. Grace in the Saviour effected our redemption, our regeneration, and our adoption to heirship with Christ. Let this grace be revealed to others.” 6T 268.

“We should never have learned the meaning of this word ‘grace’ had we not fallen. God loves the sinless angels, who do his service, and are obedient to all his commands; but he does not give them grace. These heavenly beings know naught of grace; they have never needed it; for they have never sinned. Grace is an attribute of God shown to undeserving human beings. We did not seek after it, but it was sent in search of us.” RH Sept. 14, 1896.

“The gospel is a message of peace. Christianity is a system which, received and obeyed, would spread peace, harmony, and happiness throughout the earth. The religion of Christ will unite in close brotherhood all who accept its teachings. It was the mission of Jesus to reconcile men to God, and thus to one another.” GC 47.

“And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.”

“Faithful witness.” Christ is the perfect representative of God’s character, mind, and will to mankind. His sinless life among men and His sacrificial death testify of the Father’s holiness and love.

“First begotten of the dead.” Though Jesus was not the first to rise from the dead in point of time, He may be regarded as first in the sense that all others resurrected before and after Him gained their freedom from the bonds of death only by virtue of His triumph over the grave. His power to lay down His life and to take it again (John 10:18) sets Him apart from all other men ever to come forth from the grave, and characterizes Him as the source of all life.

As soon as you believe this assurance, your heart will join in that glad song of praise “to Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” If anyone wonders if he is ready for heaven, let him consider whether or not he readily and happily offers praise to the Lord. “Praise is beautiful for the upright” (Psalm 33:1). “Be thankful to Him, and bless His name” (Psalm 100:4). “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name

of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17).

The unbeliever knows no joyful feeling of gratitude to God for praise is strange to his heart. He even eats his daily food without realizing who the Giver is, never offers thanks for sunshine and flowers, trees and birds. But he can be taught: “My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes” (Psalm 119:171).

Revelation 1:6. “And has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

Originally God’s intent with the everlasting covenant was that all should be priests. Ex. 19:6. (cf. Rev. 5:10). Because every Christian is a priest, he may approach God on his own behalf, without the mediation of another human being, and on behalf of others. Christ is our mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), our great “high priest,” and through Him it is our privilege to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15, 16).

Revelation 1:7. “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him, and they also who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.”

Matthew 24:24-27, 31; 25:31; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17. “This coming there is no possibility of counterfeiting. It will be universally known—witnessed by the whole world.”

With our own eyes, we shall see Jesus come “with clouds.” These are no ordinary clouds. They will be thousands of angels “He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26). Even those who don’t believe His gospel must watch Him come, and those who crucified Him cannot look the other way. At His trial, Jesus told them, “Hereafter you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64).

Revelation 1:8. “I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

The A-Z. “Christ Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the Genesis of the Old Testament, and the Revelation of the New. Both meet together in Christ.” 6BC 1092.

“Alpha” and “Omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Christ was in the very beginning, the eternal “only begotten of the Father,” and He is the end—He is all in all.

Revelation 1:9: “I, John, both your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

By the emperor’s decree, John was banished to the isle of Patmos . . . . Patmos, a barren, rocky, island in the Aegean Sea, had been chosen by the Roman government as a place of banishment for criminals; but to the servant of God this gloomy abode became the gate of heaven. . . . Though banished from the scenes of his former labor, he did not cease to bear witness to the truth. Even in Patmos he made friends and converts.”<sup>1</sup>

Revelation 1:10. “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet.”

Because the Bible explains itself, it will be easy to determine what “the Lord’s day” is. “The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath,” said Jesus (Matthew 12:8). And what does Scripture say the “Sabbath” is? “The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:8-11). The Lord calls the Sabbath, “My holy day” (Isaiah 58:13). “It was on the Sabbath that the Lord of glory appeared to the exiled apostle. The Sabbath was as sacredly observed by John on Patmos as when he was preaching to the people in the towns and cities of Judaea.”<sup>2</sup>

Revelation 1:11. “Saying, ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,’ and, ‘What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.’”

“The names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian era. The number seven indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages extend to the end of time, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

The seven churches are the first in a series of sevens in the Revelation. There are seven Spirits (v. 4), seven candlesticks (v. 12), seven stars (v. 16), seven lamps of fire (ch. 4:5), a book with seven seals (ch. 5:1), the seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb (ch. 5:6), seven angels with seven trumpets (ch. 8:2), seven thunders (ch. 10:4), a dragon with seven heads and seven crowns (ch. 12:3), a beast with seven heads (ch. 13:1),

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<sup>1</sup> *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 570, 573.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 581.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 585.

seven angels having seven vials containing the seven last plagues (ch. 15:1, 7), and the beast with seven heads, which are also said to be seven mountains and seven kings (ch. 17:3, 9, 10). Seven used in symbolic sense of completeness, perfection.

There were more than seven churches in the province of Asia, for example, Colossae and Hierapolis (Col. 1:2; 4:13). The Lord chose seven churches because they were typical of the condition of the church as a whole—both in apostolic times and throughout the Christian Era.

Revelation 1:12, 13: “Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.”

In v. 20 these lampstands are declared to represent the seven churches, and thus the whole church. They are precious gold in God’s sight. Christ walking in their midst indicates His continuing presence with His church. “Constantly He is imparting knowledge and grace to His representatives; and He expects them to impart to others the gifts they receive.” 2SAT 215. “The stars are used to represent his ministers. . . . He is in communion with his people. He knows their true state. He observes their order, their vigilance, their piety, and their devotion; and he takes pleasure in them if he sees these fruits manifest. Although Christ is mediator in the heavenly Sanctuary, yet he walks up and down in the midst of the churches on earth. He goes about from church to church, from congregation to congregation, from soul to soul.” RH May 31, 1887.

When John saw the seven golden lampstands, he knew he was looking into the temple (or sanctuary) in heaven. But where he had expected to see only heavenly beings, he was surprised to see “One like the Son of man.” How could it be that there was a man in heaven?

When Jesus became our Saviour, He made a sacrifice forever. Although He is glorified (as we shall be when He comes), He will forever remain a man, one with us. “Unto us a Child is born,” never to leave us (see Isaiah 9:6).

John’s description of Christ is almost the same as that which Daniel gives in Daniel 10:5-12. Both saw a “man” who was “girded with gold,” who had “eyes as torches of fire,” “feet like burnished bronze,” and a voice as the sound of many waters.

Both Daniel and John fell before Him as dead men and to both He said, “Do not fear.”

Revelation 1:14, 15. "His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters."

"White like wool and snow." At first sight of the whiteness of the hair of the One appearing to him in vision the whiteness of wool comes to his mind.

"Flame of fire." Emphasizing the brightness of His countenance and the intensity of His gaze.

"Burned." The brass appeared as if fired in a furnace. The feet looked like brass that had been subjected to intense heat.

"Many waters." The roar of the ocean and the crash of thunder the loudest and deepest sounds known to man. In their depth and majesty these are still unsurpassed as symbols for the voice of the Creator.

Revelation 1:16. "He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength."

Those who reject Christ may pretend to despise His word, and may imagine that it will have no effect upon them. But they are mistaken, for it is a sharp two-edged sword piercing to the "division of soul and spirit, . . . a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Jesus says of the rejecter of His gospel, "The word that I have spoken will judge him and save you now if you receive it; otherwise it will judge you at the end."

Sword. Symbol of Christ's authority to judge. The sword has two edges and is sharp, implies the incisiveness of His decisions and the effectiveness of His acts of judgment. "It convinces the reason, strikes directly home to the conscience, and works effectually in the heart that is not barricaded against the truth." BEcho Sept. 2, 1895.

Revelation 1:17. "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.'"

John was so honored and yet completely overcome by a sense of his own weakness and unworthiness. John in his mortal state beheld the glory of God and fell as one dead; he was not able to endure the sight.

Revelation 1:18: "I am He who lives, and was dead, and, behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death."

Have you ever stood by the grave of a loved one? If so, you know how to appreciate this assurance. To us, the grave is a heavy door, securely barred. Not even the world's wisest scientists can unlock it. But Jesus has



the keys. "In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived." DA 530. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." John 1:4.

"Keys." Indicating power and jurisdiction.

"Hell." The abode of the dead, the grave. Christ's resurrection is the assurance that the righteous will rise "in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24) to life everlasting.

"Satan cannot hold the dead in his grasp when the Son of God bids them live. He cannot hold in spiritual death one soul who in faith receives Christ's word of power. God is saying to all who are dead in sin, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead." Eph. 5:14. DA 320.

Revelation 1:19. "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."

God gives the prophet a revelation in vision. Then He inspires the prophet to write. 2 Tim. 3:16.

Revelation 1:20. "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches."

"Mystery." "A secret" from a word meaning "one who has been initiated." "Mystery" did not mean something that could not be understood, as it does today, but something that could be understood only by those who were initiated, those who had the right to know. Christ told His disciples that it was "given" unto them "to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," but not to the multitudes (Matt. 13:11). The plan of salvation is called a mystery (Rom. 16:25, 26).

Here the term "mystery" is used of the seven "stars," a symbol thus far not explained. But now this symbol is termed a "mystery," in view of the fact that its interpretation is about to be made known. In Revelation, a "mystery" is a cryptic symbol about to be explained to those who consent to "keep" the things revealed in this book, or one which God wills to make known to them.

What are the seven stars? The word "angels" in the Greek has the meaning of messengers, or ministers. If the lampstands are the seven churches, the angels of the seven churches must be the leadership of the churches. "God's ministers are symbolized by the seven stars, which He who is the first and the last has under His special care and protection. The sweet influences that ought to be abundant in the church are bound up with these ministers of God, who are to represent the love of Christ. The stars of

heaven are under God's control. He fills them with light. He guides and directs their movements. If He did not, they would become fallen stars. So with His ministers. They are but instruments in His hands, and all the good they accomplish is done through His power." GW 13-15.

Are you one of Christ's ministers? Those seven stars include all who give themselves to the service of Christ as pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, yes, including those who teach the gospel to the children—all who have any part in the leadership of the church. Don't fear, because you are held safely in the right hand of Him who is "alive for evermore." Cherish *your* work; don't try to be relieved of it, for the best place anyone can be is there in the right hand of the Son of God! And let us all respect and honor Christ's ministers.

"We urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13).