

Revelation Class 6

1:17-2:7

I am very grateful for Rev. Nabhan standing in for me while I was visiting and studying in Israel with my traveling companions. I reread my version of the notes from last week and found some typos. I am not sure if my proofreaders caught and fixed them but I am sorry if they caused any confusion.

Tonight, I want us to look at John's experience of receiving 'the revelation', to hear the words he heard during the revelation, and to look at how his mind works as he processes what he sees and hears. What he hears interprets what he sees, and what he knows of God's Word interprets his experience. This is a lesson, which we all need to learn.

It is important to know that in a world in which there was no TV, movies, books, etc., observant Jewish boys in particular, began to study and memorize the Bible starting at age 5 and by age 11, were expected to have memorized the entire text of the OT so that they could at 13 enter legal discussions of Torah. This is almost inconceivable to us but the Bible was the world and life of the observant Jew and boys were expected to master the text. John, from his earliest memories, has learned and been taught to think and reason theologically or perhaps better Biblically or in terms of Torah, legally. He has learned Jesus' 'yoke' or interpretation of the OT.

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Vv.17, 18 “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades...” John’s experience of the glory of God is quite like other prophets who have stood in the presence of the Lord in glory...inevitably they all fall at his feet as though dead, see Eze 1:28; Dan 8:18, 10:10; Is 41:4.

John follows the precise structure of Dan 10:10-20: 1) the prophet ‘sees’ the vision, 2) then falls on his face in fear, 3) then is strengthened by an angel from Heaven, 4) then receives additional revelation from the angel or Heavenly being which is said to be ‘spoken’. John identifies his experience with that of the prophets before him. ‘The Son of Man’ identifies himself as ‘the first, and last’, like Yahweh in Is 41:4, 44:6, 48:12. In the Is 41 context God’s Servant defeats the enemy with a sword, v.2. The imperative “Fear not” followed by divine words of comfort and aid like, ‘strengthen and uphold’ with God’s righteous right arm see Is 41:10, and Is 48:6. Is 48:12ff gives a similar picture. These allusions create a bridge or connection to Dan 10, which gives a picture of comfort by God of Israel. The link to the ‘living one’ is an alliteration to Rev. 1:4, also note the tripartite expression drawn from the Divine name YHWH...‘was, is, is to come.’ The point being that Jesus is who YHWH is.

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V.19 “Now write what you see, what is said to take place hereafter.” John sees Jesus in glory in the midst of the Heavenly scene including lampstands, etc., in the court or throne room of the King. The word translated ‘hereafter’ is debated between schools of interpretation. Some views see this as a reference to the distant future. Others, including me, see this as a reference to Daniel and a sense that John is writing of the fulfillment in his time of the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy. Daniel’s use of this phrase is in Daniel 2, also used in Joel 3:1 and referred to in Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:17. Note that Rev chapter 17 uses intentionally similar language to describe the Beast so as to parody his false claims. The assertion is that Jesus is what the Beast is not and can never be.

V.20 “As for the mystery of the seven stars, which you saw in my right hand, and seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” This now explains what John saw and its meaning. The word ‘mystery’ is loaded and occurs only in Daniel 2 in reference to what YHWH disclose to Nebuchadnezzar. This suggests further that John understands that what Jesus is doing is revealing what was not revealed in or to Daniel...and that the Kingdom language, the vision language, the hereafter language and especially the ‘mystery’ language is designed to unfold in John’s time the establishment and unfolding of the ‘mystery’ revealed but not fulfilled in Daniel’s time.

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Chapters 2 and 3 give us the letters to the churches. They are literally letters from Jesus, the great head of the Church to the churches but in the context of a larger 'epistle'. The number seven is never coincidental. It is an indication of the fullness of the Church. In each case Jesus is introduced with an element from the initial vision and often elements of the 'letter' to a church contains elements that John intends to bring back later in the book of The Revelation as fulfillments and demonstrations of the continuity of God's work start to finish.

2:1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.'" We see the sevenfold spirits=The Holy Spirit, the seven stars=angels, and the seven lampstands= seven churches. The lampstand image appears in Ex 25:31 as Moses saw it and Zech 4:2, which is directly in view for John. There is debate as to the identity of the angels...are they the pastors or actual angels like guardian angels. I used to think they were pastors but I have become persuaded that based on Daniel 10 which is clearly in John's mind that they are better understood as actual angels. Dan 10 has angels representing nations in the Divine Council, who act as mediatorial figures between Heaven and Earth, see also 19:10 and 22:10, they are representatives but are not divine themselves. Notice how Jesus is depicted as directly drawn from the vision in 1:13; 16.

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2:2, 3 “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false; I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.” Ephesus is likely the leading city and the ‘seat’ of ecclesiastical authority. It was certainly a leading city in Asia Minor. It was a dangerous place to be publically identified with Jesus, see Acts 19 and the riot that ensued there in reaction to Paul’s ministry. See Acts 15:28,29 and the risks associated with public identification with Jesus by Gentiles and the issues of internal disputes with the Synagogue. Ephesian believers know truth and defend it, they have taken seriously defending the church from the dangers of false teaching and false teachers. They have paid a price for it but have not backed off or quit. This is very commendable.

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2:4,5 “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.” What is Jesus’ complaint? It would seem that what they have lost is their commitment to bear witness to the world outside the church. His statement that he ‘walks among the lampstands is intended to remind his readers that their primary role in relation to their Lord should be that of a light of witness to the Lost outside world dwelling in darkness in which they live. This was Israel’s mission and ministry as well. We should look at Mt 24:12-14; see also that this loss of faithfulness to witness will be accompanied with a rise in false teachers in Mt 24:10-11; 23-26...just as was happening in Ephesus. Israel had done the same thing and God removed them from their podium or lampstand. For background see Zech 4; Is 42:6-7; 49:6. That the primary meaning behind the image of the lampstand is witness is confirmed in Rev 11:3-7, 10 where the lampstand is referred to and tied to God’s prophetic witnesses.

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2:6,7 “Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” The Nicolaitans taught that some participation in the pagan idolatrous life of the city was acceptable. The pressure to do so was intense in a city known as “Temple Warden” for the goddess Artemis or Diana of the Ephesians, whose Temple was one of the seven wonders of the Ancient world. The city was also awarded the title of “Temple Warden” for two temples dedicated to the Imperial Cult or deification of the emperor and goddess Roma. The temptation to eat meat in idol temples was strong. The other great temptation was participation and entering into the carnal celebrations of the city and society. See 2 Cor 11:13. See also Lev 17:14. False Apostles...

‘Ears to hear...’ recalls Is 6:9,10; Eze 3:27; 12:2; Jer 5:21. This is a phrase Jesus used in His earthly ministry.

Conquers...The Church collectively and believers individually are at war...now not just in the future. But the nature of the war is spiritual not physical, see 2 Cor 10:3ff, now. Food offered to idols see 1 Cor 10:14-22 Some things cannot be compromised. Conquering is accomplished by standing fast against the tide, through patient endurance and faithfulness even at great cost.

Notice the reward is the repeal of the curse of the fall in Gen 2:9, see also Rev 22:2,14.