

## **Revelation – Introduction Rev 1:17-20**

### **The First and the Last**

...But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and Death. V 17-18

The expression the First and the Last is drawn from the Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. In both Isaiah and Revelation Chapter 1 it occurs on three occasions.

I the Lord am the first; and with the last I am he. Isaiah 41:4

I am the First and I am the Last; besides me there is no God. Isaiah 44:6

I am he, I am the First, I am also the Last. Isaiah 48:12

The significance of this term is that originally it was used by God expressly to encourage and comfort Israel in the time of Isaiah. The prophet was shown that Babylon would become a threat to Israel. Isaiah 39:1-2 records the visit of the Babylonians to Jerusalem to enquire about Hezekiah's healing. Overcome by the occasion, Hezekiah disclosed everything he possessed to the Babylonians. The Babylonians would shortly thereafter invade Judah taking away the spoils that Hezekiah had shown them.

Already Hezekiah had experienced a devastating invasion by the Assyrians only to be miraculously delivered (Isaiah 36-37). Now, in Isaiah 42-45, the prophet declared that though Babylon would conquer God's people, God would ultimately, in time, overthrow the Babylonians. (Isaiah 43:14; 44:26-28).

In the midst of this message of deliverance God titles Himself the First and the Last. The term means that in the great controversies between Jerusalem and Babylon, between Christ and Satan, God would be both the first and the last on the field of conflict. In other words, He would be completely victorious over His enemies and ultimately destroy them.

This same message is conveyed in the book of Revelation. The great controversy between good and evil - the conflict between the church and her enemies - is the theme throughout the book. This theme should underpin the interpretation of every prophetic outline. Thus in the introduction to Revelation, the First and the Last is a most fitting and appropriate symbol.

Jesus declares Himself as victor over the enemies of His people. He is the first on the battlefield - He is fully prepared, He is never taken by surprise. He is also the last on the battlefield, meaning that the enemy has either been put to flight or destroyed. Jesus has been and will be victorious always. Therefore His saints will triumph: the powers of evil will be overcome. Jesus will always be eternally the First and the Last.

### **The Source of eternal life**

I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen...

The Greek renders this passage I am... the living one (yet) I became dead and behold I am alive (or I am living) forever. Here Jesus speaks of Himself as the living one. This conveys the notion of continuously living, indicating that Jesus has eternal life in Himself.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. John 1:4

That was the true Light, which gives light to every man coming into the world. John 1:9

As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself. John 5:26

In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. I became dead... and I am alive forevermore. (Greek) What a world of experience is packed into this verse! It alludes to Christ's agonies in Gethsemane and at Calvary, as well as to His glorious resurrection and His ascension.

### **The holder of the keys of death and the grave**

...And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. The possession of keys represents the possession of authority and power. This passage tells us that Jesus has authority over death and the grave. In Scripture the grave is likened to a prison – the prison house of Satan. Satan is the author of death. ...him who had the power (or dominion) of death, that is the devil. Hebrews 2:14

The grave is Satan's arsenal and stronghold. On this rock will I build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it (the church). Matthew 16:18

The gates of Hell represent the stronghold of Satan. The great deceiver claims the dead as his property because they have transgressed the law. In order for Christ to conquer death and the grave it was essential that He enter the stronghold of Satan and seize the keys of that grim precinct. When a strong man fully armed guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoils. Luke 11:21-22.

By His death Jesus invaded Satan's stronghold. He took part of the same (flesh and blood), that through death, He might destroy him that had the power (or dominion) of death, that is the devil. (Hebrews 2:14) This is a defining experience, one of the most dramatic episodes in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. It almost goes without saying that Satan mustered all his forces, principalities and powers to keep Jesus imprisoned in the tomb. Not only were Roman guards keeping their watch, there were unseen

watchers as well. Those superhuman angelic powers of darkness were present, unseen to the human eye. Had it been possible, the Prince of Darkness with his hosts would have kept forever sealed the tomb that held the Son of God.

On Calvary Jesus displayed the marvelous love of God. It was in the tomb that He displayed the omnipotence (power) of God. In the tomb, the prison house of Satan, Jesus demonstrated His supremacy. Having disarmed principalities and powers (of Satan) He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Margin – in Himself) Colossians 2:15 ...he disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in Him. The devil and all the powers of hell were conquered and disarmed by the dying Redeemer. The Redeemer conquered by dying.

Thus His resurrection and ascension are a public, solemn triumph over the principalities and powers of death. It is striking that the heathen oracles were silenced soon after Christ's ascension. During His earthly ministry prior to His resurrection, the creative power of Jesus, His deity, was dormant or quiescent within Him, otherwise He could never have experienced life as we know it. The miracles He performed at that time were performed by the power of the Father.

The Father who dwells in me does the works. John 14:10 Jesus chose not to use His own divine power. That would have given Him advantages over His fellow human beings, to whom He is the great exemplar. Jesus was totally dependent upon His Father. And, undoubtedly, heavenly angels played a part in the miracles of Christ.

In His resurrection, however, Jesus displayed His deity, His creative power, His omnipotence. He was ...declared to be the Son of God with power... by the resurrection from the dead. Romans 1:4

### **Christ's deity**

Jesus raised Himself from the dead, raising His humanity from death by the power of His divinity. He declared: I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. John 10:17-18

This means that the deity of Jesus did not die at the cross, for one of the attributes of the deity is immortality or deathlessness. It was never possible for His deity to suffer death. It was Jesus' humanity alone that died. He was, after all, the God-man. The deity of Jesus did not die otherwise it would not have been deity.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to the God who alone is wise 1 Timothy 1:17

...which He will manifest in His own time...the King of kings...who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light 1 Timothy 6:14-16

For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself John 5:26

As the Father raises the dead, and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. John 5:21

On that Sunday morning, when the mighty angel descended from heaven and rolled the stone away, he conveyed the Father's call for Jesus to come forth. A corpse could not respond to such a call. It was the deity in Jesus that responded. At that call, the deity of Jesus sprang into action and brought His humanity back from death. It was a formidable display of His power. Thus, through this action, Jesus Christ declared with great power that He was the Son of God – God the Son. Christ had entered the stronghold of Satan, captured his armor, and seized the keys of hell and death from the enemy's grasp and broken Satan's power forever.

Consequently the opening chapter of Revelation is a fitting prelude to this book, which foretells the life and death struggles of the believers in Christ. The One in charge, the One who leads the church, its Director, is He who has broken the power of death and the grave. It is a comforting image for the millions of martyrs who are portrayed as sacrificing their lives for Jesus Christ.

### **Revelation's scope**

Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. v19

This verse informs us about the scope of the Book of Revelation. Notice that all three tenses are used: past, present and future. As one commentator has declared: In the Revelation given to him there was unfolded scene after scene of thrilling interest in the experience of the people of God, and the history of the church was foretold to the very close of time. In figures and symbols, subjects of vast importance were presented to John, which he was to recall, that the people of God living in his age and in future ages might have an intelligent understanding of the perils and conflicts before them. This revelation was given for the guidance and comfort of the church throughout the Christian dispensation...on Patmos the disciple received a message, the influence of which was to continue to strengthen the church till the end of time.

### **The seven stars**

The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lamp stands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lamp stands which you saw are the seven churches. v20

The word angels in the Greek means messenger. In Revelation the stars are the messengers of the churches. But what do the stars represent? A clue is found in the book of Daniel. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. Daniel 12:3

The term star refers to 'teachers of righteousness' – those who turn men and women away from sin through the preaching of the gospel of Christ. They are God's true and faithful ministers, teachers and servants. This verse concludes the opening chapter of Revelation. It also introduces us to the great lines of prophecy that commence in Chapter 2 and which continue to the end of the book.