

# CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 can be divided into two major sections. Verses 1 through 8 are devoted mainly to greetings and salutations. The main emphasis of this section is to show that Jesus Christ is the author of Revelation. The second section, verses 9 through 20, is a figurative description of Jesus Christ. Various symbols are used to describe his many different characteristics. Verse 20 gives a brief description of the church.

## GREETINGS

**Verse 1. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:**

Revelation begins with the glorious declaration that the writings and visions of this book are from Jesus Christ. Many commentators interpret this book by trying to decide why the apostle John used certain symbols. This is a mistake. The visions and symbols used were not thought up by man; they were given to him by God. The apostle John received these visions from Jesus Christ, and John wrote down the things he saw. (See v. 11.) This understanding takes us away from trying to apply these symbols only to the people in the time of John and puts us in the realm of trying to understand how Jesus used these symbols to speak to Christians all through the Christian age. To understand these symbols, we must study how they are used by God in our only source from him – his inspired Word, the Bible.

Much emphasis has been placed on the phrase “shortly come to pass.” Many try to prove that the visions in this great book were fulfilled almost in their entirety by the time of the destruction of Jerusalem or the fall of the Roman Empire. This type of interpretation renders the vast

majority of Revelation inapplicable to Christians today. We believe that Revelation applies to Christians today just as it did to those living in the first century. God speaks to all Christians throughout the ages through the use of these symbols.

The phrase “shortly come to pass” must mean that the events described in this book are about to begin. Jesus stated in Mt. 3:2 that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. This meant that the church was about to be established, but it was also to continue until the end of time. The phrase “shortly come to pass” should be viewed in the same manner. The events of this book were ready to begin, but they are not to end until Christ’s second coming. Some of these visions even take us into the time of Judgment and eternity.

Rev. 20:6 indicates that Christians are to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. This is certainly not, in man’s view of time at least, a time that will shortly come to pass. If we are to view this book as being fulfilled in a short period of time, then a thousand years must be a short period of time. To limit the fulfillment of Revelation to a couple of years or a few hundred years keeps us from understanding the messages in this book, which are directed to Christians of all ages.

Jesus also said, “Behold, I come quickly” (22:12). It has been about two thousand years since this was written, yet Christ has not appeared the second time. Therefore, if we interpret this as we view time, it is hard to understand two thousand years as being “quickly.” We should interpret this as God views time – short in comparison to eternity. Jas. 4:14 says that our life is but a “vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” We strongly believe that Revelation is for all Christians of all ages and can be logically interpreted in that manner.

**Verse 2. Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus *Christ*, and of all things that he saw.**

John is stating that he recorded all the things that he saw

and heard. It seems likely that this is a reference to the visions of Revelation instead of the testimony of Jesus while he was here on earth because of the phrase “all things that he saw.” John obviously did not record all the things he saw Jesus do while he was on earth. This again points out that Revelation is God’s message to man recorded by John. The symbols were not devised by John; they came from God.

**Verse 3. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.**

A blessing is pronounced upon all those who read or hear the words spoken in this book. “This is the first of seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation. For the other six, see 14:13, 16:15 19:9, 20:6, 22:7 and 22:14. In this interpretation, we hope to show that these blessings are just as great for us today as they were for Christians of the first century.

“The time is at hand” is similar in meaning to the phrase must shortly come to pass” in verse 1. Obviously, some of the things foretold in Revelation were to happen shortly after the book was written, but we should not limit everything in the book to a few hundred years after the time of John. The time was at hand for the things written in Revelation to begin taking place. Some of the writings that refer to the church were already taking place because the church had already been established at the time of the writing of this book. This phrase “the time is at hand” refers to the beginning of events that would affect the church in many ways.

**Verse 4. John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;**

This letter is addressed to the seven churches of Asia that are named in verse 11. Even though it is addressed specifically to these seven churches, we should not

consider these things inapplicable to us anymore than we should consider the book of Romans inapplicable to us because it was addressed “to all that be in Rome” (Rom. 1:7). All Christians of all ages are to read, study and apply the messages of Revelation to their lives just as with any book in the New Testament.

This book comes from the one “which is, and which was, and which is to come.” This must be a reference to God Almighty because the next phrase tells us he has the “seven Spirits” before his throne. According to 4:8, chapter 4 is a picture of the throne of God, and in 4:5 the seven Spirits of God are pictured as being before this throne. Also, in 4:8, God is called the one “which was, and is, and is to come.” The seven Spirits that are before the throne must represent the Holy Spirit. (For a complete interpretation, see comments on 4:5.)

Verse 5 explains that these greetings also come from Jesus Christ. Therefore, in verses 4 and 5 we have a statement, which when interpreted reads, “Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come [God]; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne [the Holy Spirit]; and from Jesus Christ.” This message of grace and peace came from the entire Godhead.

**Verse 5. And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,**

Jesus is described as a faithful witness, first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

To be a faithful witness is to completely carry out the will of the one who sent you. This is exactly what Jesus did. He completely carried out God’s will here on earth. Therefore, he was raised from the dead never to die again and was given a place on the throne in heaven at God’s right hand. We also have our reward if we carry out God’s will faithfully. We, too, will be raised from the dead and given an eternal home with God in heaven.

Concerning Christ, Col. 1:18 states, “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” Rom. 8:29 says he was the “firstborn among many brethren.” To be the firstborn indicates there are others to follow. When Christ was raised from the dead, he became the head of the church. When we are baptized, we are raised from spiritual death to become members of that church. (See Rom. 6:4; Eph. 2:1,5-6.)

Christ is also called the prince of the kings of the earth. The word “prince” means first in rank or power. Jesus ranks higher than any other king. In 17.14, he is called, “Lord of lords, and King of kings.”

The last phrase of this verse goes with verse 6. John is praising Jesus as he says, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,... to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.” Jesus is worthy of this glory and dominion because he gave his life in order that we might have forgiveness of our sins. Chapter 5 is an elaboration of this particular subject.

**Verse 6. And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.**

The ASV translates the term “kings” as “kingdom.” This means that we are a kingdom and we are priests unto God. The church is the kingdom and Christ is our king. (See Eph. 1:22.) All Christians are priests today because we have the ability to communicate directly with God through prayer to ask for forgiveness of our sins. We offer our own sacrifices to God. According to Rom. 12:1, Christians offer themselves to God as living sacrifices. Under the old law, only the Levitical priests could offer sacrifices to God for the sins of the people.

It is difficult to know which term, “kings” or “kingdoms,” is more appropriate because their meanings are virtually identical. We are pictured as reigning with Christ in 20:4. A king is one who reigns. Therefore, Christians are kings who are reigning with Christ. This

concept is important in understanding Revelation. According to verse 6, Jesus has made us kings and priests. In 5:10, we have a similar statement, but we are also told that our reign will be upon this earth. Since we understand and believe that we are in the last time that will exist upon this earth (1 Jn. 2:18), and that there will be no future one thousand years with Christ ruling on an earthly throne; then Christians must be considered kings and priests today. We are presently reigning upon this earth, (Also see 5:10.)

Understanding this concept is important because it defines the time being dealt with in Revelation. It helps us understand some very controversial passages such as 20:4 where those people were spoken of as reigning with Christ for a thousand years. If we are reigning on this earth today as Christians, this period of a thousand years must refer to this present Christian age.

**Verse 7. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.**

Acts 1:9-11 says that the apostles beheld Jesus as he was taken up in a cloud and that he would come again "in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Therefore verse 7 must refer to the second coming of Christ. "Every eye shall see him." All people on this earth will be fully aware that Christ has returned. There will be no secret rapture, secret resurrection of the church, while leaving those in sin on the earth to undergo a period of tribulation. When Christ comes again, all people will see him. Those who have been faithful will be taken up to be with the Lord forever, and those who have not known God will be punished with everlasting destruction. (See 1Thes. 4:16-17; 2Thes. 1:7-9.)

This is why the verse states that "all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." All those who have been disobedient to God's commands will be frightened beyond imagination. It will be the most fearful time ever. Rev. 6:15-16 describes the unfaithful at this time as seeking to

hide “themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains.” They even bid the mountains and rocks to fall on them so they might flee the imminent destruction and torment. This is why we must always be careful to keep ourselves in the fold of God. We can avoid these terrible events because he has “washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God” (v. 5-6).

**Verse 8. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.**

The first question often asked about verse 8 is: Who is speaking, God or Jesus? In verse 11 Jesus calls himself the “Alpha and Omega.” In 4:8 God Almighty is called the one “which was and is, and is to come.” Therefore, we have two phrases. One is used to refer to God, the other to Jesus, yet they are both used here to refer to the one called “Lord.” If there is anything we can learn from this, it must be that Jesus is God. This proves the deity of Christ. In many ways it is impossible to distinguish between God and Christ. They are one in mind, spirit, and purpose. Jn. 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We know from Jn. 1:14 that the Word was Jesus. From this we see that Jesus is God. Jn. 10:30 says, “I and my Father are one.”

All the phrases used in this verse that refer to the Lord show his completeness. He has always existed; he exists today, and he will exist forever.

## **JOHN'S VISION OF CHRIST**

**Verse 9. I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.**

John was in the isle of Patmos when he received this

revelation from God. “Patmos, a small island near the southwest coast of Asia Minor, has rugged terrain of volcanic hills and is only about thirteen square miles in area. Many think that John was banished to this island because he was preaching the gospel, but information concerning this is uncertain at best.”<sup>1</sup> We do know that John was experiencing some type of persecution because he told the seven churches of Asia that he was their companion in tribulation for the Word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ. Whatever these tribulations were, John had remained faithful to the Lord. Our faith must also be strong enough to endure any trials that we might encounter. We may not suffer the same types of severe physical persecutions that John suffered, but we are faced each day with temptations that test our faith. In order to withstand these trials, we must be able to draw strength from our “companions in tribulation,” or other people who are attempting to live a Christian life.

John says that he is “in the kingdom... of Jesus Christ.” This should eliminate any idea of Jesus establishing a kingdom at the end of this Christian dispensation for a thousand years. The kingdom has already been established. It was established on the first Pentecost after Christ’s crucifixion. (See Acts 2.) John was in that kingdom, and we become a part of that same kingdom when we obey the gospel and are added to the Lord’s church.

**Verse 10. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,**

It is hard to determine exactly what is meant by “in the Spirit.” Possibly this was some miraculous state that the apostle was in as he received the writings of this book, but we believe this probably was not the case. The statement also shows this took place on the Lord’s day. It seems that John was simply stating that he was in the act of worshiping the Lord. Jn. 4:24 says that we must worship “in spirit and in truth.” Since this was the Lord’s day, John would have been worshiping, and in that respect he was in the Spirit.



As John was worshiping God, he heard a great voice behind him. This voice sounded like a trumpet, which indicates that words of great importance were about to be spoken. All through the Bible, a trumpet is used to warn of the approaching of great events. These would range from the sounding of the trumpet before a battle in the Old Testament to the announcement of the second coming of Christ in 1Thess. 4:16. This voice must have been Christ's because in verse 18 he describes himself as "he that liveth, and was dead," and is "alive for evermore." Therefore, Christ's voice is described as a great trumpet because the things he is about to speak are extremely important.

**Verse 11. Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.**

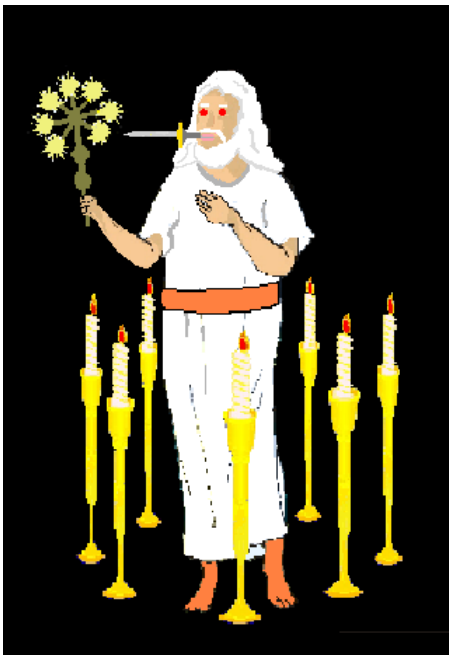
Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The similar expression we might make today would be "from a to z." This simply means that all things are included. Nothing exists that was not made by our Lord, and everything is under his control. Jn. 1:3 says that "all things were made by him." It should be noted that this phrase, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last," is omitted in the ASV, but it can be found in 1:8,17; 21:6, and 22:13.

The things that John was about to see and record were to be sent unto the seven churches of Asia. It must be significant that this book is addressed to "seven" churches. The number "7" represents divine completeness. The complete church of God includes all those congregations of Christians that exist from the time the church was established until Christ comes again. Although this book was addressed specifically to these seven churches, its message is certainly relevant to all churches of all times.

**Verse 12. And I turned to see the voice that spoke**

**with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;**

As John turned to see who was speaking to him, the vision describing our Lord began. The first items he saw were seven golden candlesticks. Verse 20 gives us the definition of these seven candlesticks. They represent the seven churches. We should not limit the meaning of the seven golden candlesticks strictly to the seven churches to which this book was addressed. This book, just as all other books of the New Testament, was written



so that all Christians of all ages might read it and apply the things written therein to their own lives. The number “7” is the divine complete number and is used to represent the church in its completeness throughout the gospel age.

We might also look at why “golden” candlesticks were used to represent the church. The candlestick itself is used for light, and the church should definitely be the spiritual light unto the world. It was gold because gold is a metal of great value. There is nothing more valuable on this earth than the church. The church on this earth today is the most precious thing in the sight of our Lord, and we should be shining forth as lights in this world by spreading the gospel. Therefore, the seven golden candlesticks represent the complete church of all ages, which has value beyond compare and is lighting the world spiritually with the gospel of our Lord.

**Verse 13. And in he midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.**

In the midst of the seven candlesticks, John saw someone he described as being like the Son of Man. This description is figurative as it describes the characteristics of Jesus. If this had been Jesus as John knew him in the flesh, he certainly would have recognized him immediately and would have been more emphatic in his identification than the phrase “like unto” allows.

It is important that Jesus was standing in the midst of the seven candlesticks since they represent the church. This is exactly what he said concerning his dwelling with the church today. In Mt. 18:20 Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Jesus dwells with his people today. This dwelling cannot be physical because he has already ascended to heaven. Therefore, his dwelling with us today must be spiritual. In 2Cor. 6:16, we read, “As God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Christ was also clothed with a garment down to his feet. In Revelation the clothing or garments are always used to indicate a covering of righteousness. The garments of faithful Christians are always white, indicating a state of holiness or sinlessness. Our garments are white because we have washed them and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (See 7:14). Therefore, Christ being completely clothed down to the feet would indicate total righteousness or complete holiness.

He was also wearing a golden girdle. The only way we have of determining the meaning of these symbols is by looking at other passages in the Bible that contain similar symbols and using those passages to draw conclusions. In this instance, Eph. 6:14 contains the definition needed to determine the symbolic meaning of the golden girdle. It states, “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with

truth.” If Christians are told to be girded with the truth, it is reasonable to assume that this same symbolism would apply to our Lord. Gold is a pure metal of great value, and the truth or the gospel is also pure and of great value. Therefore, this golden girdle must represent the truth or the gospel of our Lord.

**Verse 14. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;**

The white color is the key to the symbolism used in verse 14. White has always been used to represent purity. This shows that Christ is totally pure or completely void of sin. This same type of symbolism is used in 1Pet. 1:19, which describes Jesus as “a lamb without blemish and without spot.” Heb. 4:15 states that he was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

His eyes are described as a “flame of fire.” Fire is a symbol often used in connection with the judgment of God or major events that God performed. Some examples of this are:

- (1) The Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Ex. 3:2-3).
- (2) When God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai, he descended upon the mountain in fire (Ex. 19:18).
- (3) The Lord will return from heaven the second time in flaming fire (2Thes. 1:7-8).

In addition to this, Deut. 4:24 says, “For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.” God will not tolerate those who claim to be his children following other gods. Nothing escapes the eyes of our Lord. He knows all and sees all. The acts we perform in the sight of our Lord will either approve or condemn us before God.

**Verse 15. And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.**

Two more characteristics of Jesus are symbolically described in verse 15. First, his feet are like fine brass that

has been burned in a furnace. Mic. 4:13 metaphorically describes the church as having hoofs of brass that it will use to “beat in pieces many people.” Also, in Ezek. 22:18, the house of Israel is described as being the “dross,” which is the scum or waste that forms on brass as it is burned in a furnace. The feet of Jesus in this passage are like polished brass that has been burned in the fire to remove all impurities. Jesus is totally pure and holy, but he will eventually use those feet of brass to crush all who are disobedient to the gospel.

Second, his voice was as the sound of many waters. Water is used in Revelation to represent the teachings and instructions we receive in order to sustain our spiritual lives. Just as water is necessary to sustain our physical lives, the Word of God (gospel) is the spiritual water necessary to sustain our spiritual lives. The voice of Jesus is the source of all our spiritual waters. Everything needed to obtain spiritual life comes from him.

**Verse 16. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.**

Verse 20 defines the seven stars. They are the “angels of the seven churches.” This does not answer the question of the meaning of the stars because we now have to determine the meaning of the “angels of the seven churches.” There is a great deal of discussion among commentators concerning the meaning of the “angels.” We will address that question in verse 20. However, we would like to emphasize the fact here that the seven stars are held in our Lord’s right hand. Therefore, the seven stars must represent someone who Jesus holds in his hand. From this we should be able to draw some conclusions about the stars and the angels. (See v. 20.)

Jesus is also pictured as having a sharp two-edged sword proceeding out of his mouth. This symbol is clearly defined in Eph. 6:17. It states that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. (Also see Heb. 4:12.) Therefore, the sword

proceeding out of the mouth of Jesus must be the Word of God.

The countenance of Jesus is described as the sun shining extremely bright. This reminds us of the transfiguration of Jesus in Mt. 17:2 where the following description is given: "And his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Jesus is the spiritual light of this world. In 1Jn. 1:5 we read, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." The spiritual light man walks by today is the gospel. Obedience to that gospel will bring us out of the darkness of sin and into the glorious light of his kingdom. (See Col. 1:12-13.)

**Verse 17. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last**

When John saw this figure of Christ, he fell down before him "as dead." This must indicate a state of fear, awe and complete submission because as Jesus touched him with his right hand to comfort him, he said, "Fear not." Jesus then identifies himself as the "first and the last." This is another way of stating the same thing as was stated in verse 8: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending." These phrases indicate that Jesus is complete in every way. (See v. 11.)

**Verse 18. I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.**

This proves conclusively that the one being described in chapter 1 is Jesus because he is the only one who has ever been resurrected from the dead to live eternally. We have accounts in the Bible of other people being resurrected from the dead, but they all eventually died again. Christ was raised from the dead by God to live forevermore. (See Acts 2:24.)

Jesus says that he has the "keys of hell and of death." He controls them. "Hell" in this passage is used to mean the grave. Therefore, Jesus has power over the death of man

and has the ability to raise him from the grave. The “key” to this power was the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for man’s sins. When Jesus died on the cross, he made atonement for man’s sins and gave us the hope of a resurrection unto eternal life.

**Verse 19. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter,**

John is instructed to record the things that he had seen, the things which are, and the things hereafter. This would include the vision seen prior to this statement, the things that he is seeing and hearing at present, and those visions that he is to see later. Jesus told John to record these things by writing them down. At this time he had not recorded anything because he was struck with fear while viewing the first vision and had fallen “as dead” at the feet of Jesus (v. 17).

If this verse can be used as a clue to help determine the period of time covered in Revelation, it would signify all things during the Christian dispensation – past, present, and future. If the phrase “things which shall be hereafter” refers to the events recorded in the book, it definitely would not limit Revelation to a few hundred years after its writing. Since events concerning Judgment are recorded several times in the book, then why should we assume events occurring between the fall of Rome in AD. 476 and the end of time are completely left out? They are not left out. Revelation is written to Christians of all times.

**Verse 20. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.**

Verse 20 gives the meaning of the seven stars and the seven candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks represent those seven churches. We should not confine the meaning of

these seven candlesticks to the seven specific churches to which this letter is addressed and named in verse 11. Since the number “7” represents divine completeness, we should understand that this is a figurative way of addressing all true churches throughout the history of the world. The candlesticks, as discussed in verse 12, represent a source of spiritual light to all people of the world. Therefore, any church that is true to our Lord and spreads the gospel is a candlestick in the sight of God. Rev. 2:5 shows the possibility of a congregation having its candlestick removed. This means that when a church becomes unfaithful to our Lord by being disobedient to him or by failing to proclaim the truth, it is no longer a spiritual light unto the world. It is not a true church. Its candlestick has been removed. A message of this type is definitely not limited to the seven churches of Asia. Every congregation, regardless of when it exists, must constantly strive to serve our Lord and keep its candlestick in place.

The symbolism most difficult to understand in this verse is that of the seven stars representing the seven angels of the churches. Many different ideas have been proposed concerning the meaning of these seven angels of the churches. Some include:

- (1) Heavenly beings that oversee each church
- (2) Elders that oversee the local congregation
- (3) Ministers of individual congregations  
because the word “angel” means messenger

All of these interpretations have some merit, but we believe the stars or angels represent each individual Christian in any true church. In verse 16, Christ is pictured as holding the seven stars in his right hand. From this we should be able to ask the question: Who does Jesus hold in his hand? Without any doubt the answer to that question is Christians. In Jn. 10:28, Jesus says concerning Christians, “Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” When anyone is obedient to the commandments of Jesus, he holds them in his hand. They are in the spiritual care of Jesus. As long as we are faithful, no man is capable of taking us away from the Lord. He is the supreme power.



There are “seven” stars in the Lord’s right hand and “7” is the number indicating divine completeness. Therefore, by these seven stars in his right hand, Jesus shows us that he holds all Christians of all ages in his hand. See the introduction to chapters 2 and 3 for more information on the use of the word “angel.”

<sup>1</sup>James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), pp. 27-30.