

# From Beneath the Altar

*A COMMENTARY ON THE REVELATION,  
WITH QUESTIONS  
AND SPECIAL STUDIES*

**By Carl McMurray**

www.spiritbuilding.com for study helps



*SPIRITBUILDING PUBLISHING*  
*15591 N. State Rd. 9, Summitville, Indiana, 46070*  
*Spiritual "equipment" for the contest of life.*

**FROM BENEATH THE ALTAR**

1st printing 1992, 2nd edition 2007

ISBN: 0-9774754-2-5

© SPIRITBUILDING, 2007, All Rights Reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the publisher. Printed in the United States of America.

Scripture taken from the  
NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®,  
© Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973,  
1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation  
Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org))

Archaeology photos in special studies section by Kyle Pope  
Used by permission.

© Copyright 2003, Ancient Road Publications™  
<http://kmpope.home.att.net>

Digital art used throughout by Duncan Long  
Used by permission.

© Duncan Long, All Rights Reserved, <http://duncanlong.com>

COVER: Angel watching over cemetery in Cleveland, OH.,  
Photography by Sarah McMurray. For info or to contact  
about photography email: [Sarah@Spiritbuilding.com](mailto:Sarah@Spiritbuilding.com).

---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Page No.

Introduction to the Revelation.....	9
Propositions Concerning the Understanding of the Revelation.....	12
<b>Section One (chapters 1-11) The Struggle on Earth</b>	
1. Chapters 1-3 (Christ in the midst of the lampstands).....	15
2. Chapters 4-7 (The book with 7 seals).....	45
3. Chapters 8-11 (The 7 trumpets of judgment).....	79
<b>Section Two (chapters 12-22) The Deeper, Spiritual Struggle</b>	
4. Chapters 12-14 (Woman and the man-child persecuted).....	111
5. Chapters 15-16 (The 7 bowls of wrath).....	143
6. Chapters 17-19 (The fall of the great harlot/beasts).....	159
7. Chapters 20-22 (The judgment upon the dragon).....	189
Map of the seven churches .....	214
Special Study #1 - The Time of Fulfillment for the Revelation.....	215
Special Study #2 - The “Comings” of the Lord.....	219
Special Study #3 - Ephesus.....	222
Special Study #4 - Smyrna.....	225
Special Study #5 - Pergamum.....	227
Special Study #6 - Thyatira.....	229
Special Study #7 - Sardis.....	231
Special Study #8 - Philadelphia.....	233
Special Study #9 - Laodicea.....	234
Special Study #10 - Premillennialism in the Book of Revelation.....	236
Special Study #11 - What About Total Annihilation?.....	239
Special Study #12 - The Caesars and Persecution of the Saints.....	240
Footnotes.....	244
Bibliography.....	246

**Revelation 1**

1. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and com-

municated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,  
2. who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

**THE REVELATION**

**chapter 1**

**Section I, 1 (see page 12)**

1. Whatever is written here is given by God to Jesus Christ. This is why it is “the Revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is also a revelation of Jesus Christ because it is a revelation of His glory, rule, and execution of judgment. The Revelation of Jesus is given for the servants of Jesus Christ. The way it was “communicated” (NASB) to them was by His angel to John. The KJV uses the word “signified” here. One of the meanings of the original is that which is given in signs, or made known by symbols. This fact separates Revelation from every other New Testament writing. Where all the other New Testament messages are given in words to communicate the message of the author (that author being God), this book was given in a series of signs, symbols, and pictures that John was told to write down. It is not the words specifically that communicate the message of this book, but the pictures that John describes. Therein will be found the message from God. Though overlooked by many, the time period for the prophetic visions to be fulfilled is given here, i.e., “must shortly take place.” This must limit our interpretation in spite of those who consistently try and apply the visions to our future. (See Special Study #1.)

2. John was one of 13 “witnesses,” 1 John 1:1-4; Acts 1:8, 21-22; 2:32; and 3:15. In accordance with the preceding scriptures, the term “witness” is a peculiar term that applies accurately only to the apostles. A witness is one who has personally observed something. To use the term “witness” today to describe a sharing of the gospel with another is to misuse the term. One might be a “witness” of what he believes the Lord has done personally in his own life, but since our walk is a walk of faith, not sight, there can be no true witnesses for the Lord in our age. There are no “witnesses” today since none living today have 1) seen the Lord personally, or 2) been chosen specifically by Him for that task.

## From Beneath the Altar

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 3. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. | and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, |
| 4. John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you  | 5. and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the                  |

3. “He who reads” refers to the reader in those early public assemblies. “He” is singular while “those who hear” is plural. Manuscripts of Scripture were valuable and hard to come by at that time so the same practice was adopted among Christians as was practiced by the Jews in the synagogues. An individual would read to the whole group from perhaps the only copy of Scripture a congregation might possess. This was because each copy had to be hand-printed. “Blessed” can be translated happy or fortunate. It is absurd to think that one can be made happy by simply hearing without understanding what he hears. However, the one who “heeds” what he hears (understands and acts upon) will be blessed (happy or fortunate). “For the time is near” provides strong motivation for obedience, because the things to be revealed (woes, fears, battles, and the one hope) were in the *near future*. (See Special Study #1.)

4. Asia was the richest of all Roman provinces, located in the western part of modern Asia Minor. The number 7 is used too many times in both the Old and New Testament to ignore. It is used in some manner 54 times in the Revelation. The number 7 symbolizes completeness, the whole, and even perfection probably taking its primary meaning from its connection to Creation and Deity. Here it represents the whole church in every place, the complete body of believers, or all congregations together, by these 7. Peace is a result of God’s unmerited favor (grace). Grace is provided by the Father, dispensed by the Spirit, and merited for us by the Son, hence the mention of all three, John 14:25-27.

5. Jesus is referred to in 3 senses here: the faithful witness while He was living, the first-born in His resurrection, and the ruler of the kings in His present state on His throne. The first refers to His personal knowledge of those things which He taught and held up as a goal for all of God’s children. See 1:2 for notes on “witness.” The second is *not* a description of “origin,” but a description of “position.” Jesus was not born first from the dead. Others had been resurrected (i.e., Lazarus, the widow’s son, and those who left their tombs at His crucifixion and went into the city) before Him (though they died again whereas He defeated death). The point, however, is that He is the “first-born” in “position” or prominence. Just as in Colossians 1:15, He is the “first-born of all creation,” not

## From Beneath the Altar

kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood--

6. and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father--to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

7. BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of

the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

8. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

9. I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testi-

the first created being, because He was not created at all. Instead, He is the head over all creation, having the preeminence in creation is the message of the verse. The third appellation has reference to His position presently, whether recognized and honored as such or not. Psalm 2:9 describes the fact of "the nations" being given to Him as His inheritance upon taking the throne after His resurrection. Our Lord is King of Kings. He rules the disobedient with a rod of iron and He rules His kingdom with a scepter of righteousness.

6. "Made us to be a kingdom" is in the present tense for John and his readers. The kingdom was in existence then (and continues now), and Christians were priests then (as Christians continue to be now), not sometime in the future. See also 1 Peter. 2:5.

7. Here we see the announcement of Christ's coming. "Clouds" may not refer to fluffy vapors in the sky here. Instead, consider that He is speaking of clouds of heavenly hosts. This would be a great crowd of beings that will accompany Him at His return. NOTE: *with* the clouds, not *in* the clouds. He will not come in secret (Jehovah's Witnesses doctrine) but rather "every eye" will see Him. "Those who pierced Him" refers not only to those who hung Him on the cross, but also to those who crucify Him afresh. The mourning will be by all those wicked of the earth who will dread His coming.

8. "Alpha and Omega" are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. They are the beginning and the end. Thus Christ is the beginning and the end, the first, last, and everything in between. I believe it is Jesus who is being called "Lord God" here because of chapter 2:8. If so, then the same descriptive terms used of the Father in verse 4 are used of the Son here, showing His relationship and equality.

## From Beneath the Altar

mony of Jesus.

10. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,

11. saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and

to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

12. Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;

13. and in the middle of the

9. John was on Patmos because of the word and testimony of Jesus. In other words, for publicly claiming his Savior and sharing his knowledge with others. "Patience" (KJV) here means steadfastness or perseverance, especially related to trial (NASB). In his *ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY*, Eusebius declares that the apostle was exiled to the Isle of Patmos by Domitian, p.101. Once more we point out that John was *at that time* a partaker with other Christians in the "tribulation" and "perseverance" which was in Jesus. He was also *at that time* a partaker in the "*kingdom*." It was in existence at that time and continues until now. The kingdom is not something to be looked for in the future.

10. "In the Spirit" means Holy Spirit guidance and influence for the vision. "Lord's day" was the first day of the week (modern Sunday) since this was the day that 1) traditionally Jesus entered Jerusalem like a king on a colt, 2) Jesus was proven to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4), and 3) Jesus established His church/kingdom upon, since the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1) always fell on the first day of the week. If the Lord has a day, this most certainly must be it. The voice John heard was "loud" and "like" a trumpet. The trumpet sound was used to call God's people together, Exodus 19:19; Leviticus 25:9; Joshua 6:5; Isaiah 58:1.

11. John's charge to write and send. See verse 1.

12. In the Old Testament, Solomon's temple had 1 stand with 7 lights. Here we see 7 stands, each one a candle (more accurately a lamp or light). We see the independence of each stand or congregation as well as their similarities; they are all golden.

13. In seeing "Him" who was in the midst of them, John saw the close proximity of Christ to His churches showing intimate knowledge and personal handling. This was the same Jesus that John had walked, talked, eaten, and slept with, but He was changed. Thus he says this being was "like the Son of man." The garment and girdle represent royal dignity that belongs to priesthood and kingship.

## From Beneath the Altar

lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.

14. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow;

and His eyes were like a flame of fire.

15. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

### NOTE:

Let us try to see it thus: Notice that the Son of man is here pictured as clothed with power and majesty, with awe and terror. That long royal robe—that golden belt buckled at the breast—that hair so glistening white that like snow on which the sun is shining it hurts the eye—those eyes flashing fire, eyes which read every heart and penetrate every hidden corner—those feet glowing in order to trample down the wicked—that loud reverberating voice, like the mighty breakers booming against the rocky shore of Patmos—that sharp, long and heavy great-sword with two biting edges—yes, that entire appearance ‘as the sun shines in its power,’ too intense for human eyes to stare at—the entire picture taken as a whole, is symbolical of Christ, the Holy One, coming to purge His churches, 2:16, 18, 23 and to punish those who are persecuting His elect, 8:5ff.

(Hendricksen, MORE THAN CONQUERORS, p. 71)

14. White usually carries an idea of holiness and/or purity. One can just imagine eyes “like a flame of fire”—burning in the intensity of their zeal for the church/kingdom (John 2:17) and their love for each member—a piercing gaze able to “discern the hearts of men” and see into a heart without guile, John 1:47. The one upon whom John looked was a changed person from the one that had walked the earth simply as a man. No longer would Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah’s appearance apply, i.e., “*no stately form or majesty...nor appearance that we should be attracted to him,*” *Isaiah. 53:2.*

15. There is an idea presented here that is reminiscent of God’s promise in Malachi 4:3. “...His feet like...it has been caused to glow in a furnace” makes one think of something that is purified because of fire. Perhaps feet that are pure and walk in the way of righteousness. His voice was like standing in the presence of a great waterfall. It is thunderous, deafening, and all other sounds are pushed aside. There can be no ignoring its power.

## From Beneath the Altar

16. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

17. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am

the first and the last,

18. and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

19. "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after

16. Assumptions about the 7 stars are unnecessary since they are explained later. "Countenance" (KJV) here is "face" (NASB). In the two-edged sword proceeding from his mouth, we see a representation of the word of God described in Hebrews 4:12 in a similar way. *"Living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* At the same time we can also see a two-edged sword from the standpoint of these early Christians. In the same way that we see firearms as an authoritative tool of the modern day policeman, the two-edged sword would have been a symbol of power since it was the most common weapon of the Roman soldier. It would represent a serious type of authority.

17. Overcome with awe and fear, John grew weak and fainted. Not an uncommon reaction when confronted with Deity. Note Isaiah 6:5; Ezekiel 1:28; Daniel 8:17, 27; and 10:8-10. Although it naturally did so, the vision of Christ was not meant to terrify John; therefore, "Do not be afraid..." Jehovah used the same title, Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; and 48:12.

18. Jesus has the keys (power, authority) of death and Hades. Hades literally is the "place of the unseen," the waiting place of the soul after being separated from the body until judgment. Until the last day, death is always followed by Hades, Revelation 6:8; 20:14.

19. Another order to write, but with more detail.

20. 7 stars in His hand are the 7 angels of the churches. Since the lampstands are the churches, the supporters of light, viewed externally, the stars may well represent the inward life or spirit of the congregations addressed by Jesus. This position seems to be confirmed by the letters themselves. Jesus addresses each letter to "the angel of the church..." and concludes with the appeal, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (KJV). Whoever

## From Beneath the Altar

these things.

20. "As for 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 are the seven churches.

is addressed is to hear—the angels are addressed—the churches are to hear. It follows that the angels are that part of the church addressed which is to hear; this would be the spirit or active life of the churches (Hailey, REVELATION). This would also follow since the stars are in His hand. The life of the congregation is in His hand and it is up to Christ to determine whether a congregation lives or dies.

**QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 1**

1. Where does the name “Apocalypse” come from?
2. What does the title of the book (i.e., the Revelation) imply?
3. What is a number one priority to understanding Revelation?
4. When was the Revelation written, by whom?
5. Whom does this book bless?
6. Why is the church called a “kingdom,” and why are Christians priests?
7. What might the “clouds of heaven” be in this picture?
8. Why will “all the tribes of the earth” mourn?
9. What does the name “Alpha and Omega” mean?
10. Why was John on Patmos?
11. What is the “Lord’s Day,” and why is it called that?
12. How was John “in the Spirit”?

## From Beneath the Altar

---

13. What does the number 7 imply?
14. Who are the 7 churches, literally and figuratively?
15. Where is a similar description to verses 13-16? Who is it?
16. What would be implied by a two-edged sword?
17. What does “having the keys” mean?
18. Who or what are the 7 spirits?
19. What are the 7 lampstands? The 7 stars?
20. Name 8 ways that Jesus is described in this chapter.
21. What message do you see in the picture of this glorified Being walking among the lampstands holding the stars of the churches in His hand?