

RECEIVING REVELATION FROM THE BOOK OF REVELATION

by John Pester

The book of Revelation is, perhaps, the most impenetrable book of the New Testament. In the history of its interpretation there are distinct theological schools of thought as to the timing of the events it describes,¹ and there are popular imaginative applications related to unfolding world events.² None of these interpretive methods or applications, however, hold forth a hope of penetrating the depths of this book. This is because the book, titled “the revelation of Jesus Christ” and given by God Himself (1:1), actually requires spiritual revelation in order to understand and receive the intrinsic significance of its content. Understanding different schools of thought requires nothing more than learning doctrines, and seeing a seeming correspondence between the text and world events requires nothing more than a fantastical imagination that draws obtuse connections that are in need of constant revision when the imagined connections fail to materialize. Doctrines and fantasies are not revelation; they do not come from God, and they do not convey the spirit of the prophecy, that is, the reality, substance, disposition, and characteristic of the book of Revelation.

Revelation is a book that can be easily read, but it is also a book of spiritual words, words of prophecy spoken by the Spirit, and in order to receive revelation from the book of Revelation, one must both read the words and hear the speaking of the Spirit in these words (vv. 3, 11; cf. 2:7). Only then is it possible to keep the things that are written in these words. Receiving spiritual things is related to hearing, and genuine receiving always involves revelation from God. The book of Revelation reveals that the essence of its consummate revelation is received from the Triune God by believers who are separated unto God, exercised in their human spirit, and gathered, however imperfectly, in local churches.

The Essence of the Revelation in the Book of Revelation

Most Christians regard the book of Revelation as an account of future events leading up to the final struggle between God with His raptured saints and the devil with his surrogates. There certainly are grounds for such an assumption, because the bulk of the book, 4:1 through 22:5, are clearly presented within a framework defined as “the things that must take place after these things” (4:1).³ These things, however, are not presented for the sake of merely detailing “apocalyptic” events, especially the disastrous conditions that come upon the earth at the time of the Lord’s second coming. The popular understanding and use of the term *apocalypse* to refer to massive destruction and death at the end of days underscore the fact that there is a near-total absence of revelation regarding the intention of the Triune God in the giving of His revelation to John and, by extension, to us (1:1). The Greek word for *revelation* in the first verse of Revelation is ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalypsis*), and it refers simply to an unveiling. In its usage in this book, it refers to an unveiling of Jesus Christ in His universal administration to consummate God’s eternal purpose and plan through the growth, maturity, and manifestation of overcoming saints

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in local churches as the testimony of Jesus. *Revelation* in 1:1 does not refer to an unveiling of future events and calamities. Nonetheless, a narrative of future events is presented in Revelation through signs and symbols, because the move of God to accomplish His eternal economy is a move of God in the history of humanity. The Word becoming flesh in John 1:14 is just one indication of the move of God in human history. As such, God's administrative move is an undercurrent within unfolding human events. However, if we regard Revelation only as an account of future events without seeing its underlying revelation of God's move, we will miss the essence of the revelation in this book. The essence of the revelation in the book of Revelation is the administering Christ who is producing overcomers in local churches for the enlargement of the testimony of Jesus. Witness Lee comments on the first aspect of this revelation—Jesus Christ:

As the conclusion, completion, and consummation of the Bible, the book of Revelation especially is "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1). Although this book also reveals many other things, the focus of its revelation is Christ. Several aspects of Christ, such as the vision of Him as the High Priest in the midst of the churches, caring for them in love yet with a judging attitude (1:13-16), the vision of Him as the Lion-Lamb in the midst of God's throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the twenty-four elders of the universe, opening the seven seals of God's universal administration (5:1—6:1), and the vision of Him as Another Mighty Angel coming down from heaven to take possession of the earth (10:1-8; 18:1) have never been unveiled as they are in the book of Revelation. (*Life-study of Revelation* 8)

The consummation of the divine economy in Revelation is predicated upon a consummate unveiling of Christ, who is focused on building the churches as the testimony of Jesus. When John first meets Christ in this book, Christ is so unfamiliar to him that he falls at His feet as dead (1:17). In the Gospels, John met the Christ who said, "I will build My church," the Christ whose love for the church was evidenced in His intimate relationship with John, allowing him to recline on His breast and eventually dying on the cross for John's and our sins (Matt. 16:18; John 13:25; Eph. 5:25). In Revelation 1, however, John meets the Christ who is building the church by serving the local churches in His capacity as the High Priest. In His service He is girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle—in contrast to the priests in the Old Testament, who were girded about at the loins (v. 13; Exo. 28:4)—assuring the fearful John that all His work on behalf of the churches is being conducted out of love and in the realm of the divine love. His head and hair are as white as white wool (Rev. 1:14), signifying great age, even an eternal standing, and testifying that His service to the local churches is related to His commitment to carry out the eternal will of God (Heb. 10:7, 9). He is judging the deficiencies of the churches with eyes that are like flames of fire, being keenly aware of every shortage and impurity that impinges on the churches being the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 1:14; 2:5, 14-15, 20; 3:1, 4, 15-17; cf. Luke 22:61) and bringing to light the hidden things of darkness and the perverted counsels of our heart (1 Cor. 4:5). He is walking among the lampstands with feet that are like shining bronze (Rev. 1:15), indicating that Christ's work among the churches involves judgment, because love, as signified by the girdle around His breasts, is always a precursor and basis for discipline and judgment (Heb. 12:6). He is speaking to the churches with a voice that is like the sound of many waters (Rev. 1:15), indicating that the Lord's speaking is not rare among the churches (1 Sam. 3:1).⁴ The words that Christ is speaking in Revelation are also like a two-edged sword, indicating that His speaking divides the soulish elements in our being that hinder the manifestation of Christ in the churches from the spiritual elements in our being that testify of Jesus in the golden lampstands (1:16; Heb. 4:12). Finally, Christ is holding seven stars, the messengers of the seven churches, in His right hand (Rev. 1:16, 20), indicating that His strengthening love, His undeterred will, His exposing oversight, His ever-present judgment, and His plenteous and discerning word should be applied through the labor and administration of messengers who bear these same high priestly functions. It is a fearful thing to fall into and to be held in the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31), and John's fearful posture surely exemplifies his realization

of his status as a messenger writing to the churches. In the midst of seeing this fearful vision, however, John heard comforting words: “Do not fear; I am the First and the Last and the living One; and I became dead, and behold, I am living forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades” (Rev. 1:17-18). In our experience of Christ as the One walking among the local churches, we should be equally comforted, knowing that the application of His high-priestly attributes cannot be limited by the power of death and Hades, but instead is energized by the divine life that will bring God’s predestinated will in eternity past to its ultimate fruition in time in this age.

In order to carry out His focused work of building the church by attending to the seven golden lampstands, Christ is also revealed as the Lion-Lamb who is opening the seven seals of God’s universal administration in the midst of God’s throne (5:5-6). The Lord’s work as the High Priest walking among the seven golden lampstands is the hidden work of God in human history, but this hidden work occurs within the visible, unfolding framework of human history, a history that is under His control. For this work, Christ is revealed as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the One who has the authority and standing to open the seven seals of God’s universal administration, because He is also the resurrected Lamb. As the Lion-Lamb, only He is worthy to open the scroll that initiates the events in time that will advance the accomplishment of God’s desire to obtain an enlarged testimony of His Son in the local churches (vv. 7-9). Even in His identification with the familiar signs of a lion and a lamb, however, there are unfamiliar elements, notably that of the Lamb having seven horns and seven eyes, indicating that as the Lord who is walking amidst the seven golden lampstands, the seven Spirits, the intensified Spirit of God, are being sent forth into all the earth to not only strengthen those whose heart is perfect toward Him but also to exercise God’s judgment to advance His eternal economy (2 Chron. 16:9; Rev. 5:6).

As God’s judgments unfold with the opening of the seven seals in time, Christ is again uniquely manifested in Revelation as another strong Angel coming down out of heaven to take possession of the earth (10:1-8). This revelation of Christ is inserted in a vision between the sixth and seventh trumpets of the seventh seal, indicating that Christ in this manifestation is on His way to earth even though He is secretly clothed in a cloud (v. 1). The precipitating event that spurs Him to begin to come as a strong Angel is the completion of the mystery of God (v. 7), especially the mystery of Christ and the church. When overcomers are produced in churches under the high-priestly ministry of Christ in a world under the divine administration of the Lion-Lamb, the Lord will initiate His secret coming as another strong Angel in order to shortly thereafter take visible possession of the earth.

The unique revelations of Christ as the High Priest walking among the seven golden lampstands, as the Lion-Lamb on the throne, and as another strong Angel on earth are related to the producing and unveiling of the churches as the testimony of Jesus. This is the second aspect of the essence of the revelation in this book. Witness Lee comments,

On one hand, this book gives us “the revelation of Christ,” and on the other hand, it shows us “the testimony of Jesus,” which is particular and consummate (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4). The testimony of Jesus is the church. Revelation presents the revealed Christ and the testifying church. In this book we have a particular and consummate record of the church. In no other book are the churches revealed as they are in the book of Revelation. The lampstands in chapter one, the great multitude of the redeemed in chapter seven, the bright woman with her man-child in chapter twelve, the harvest with its firstfruits in chapter fourteen, the overcomers on the sea of glass in chapter fifteen, the Bride ready for marriage and the fighting army of Christ in chapter nineteen, and the New Jerusalem in chapters twenty-one and twenty-two are all the testimony of Jesus...Christ is the Witness (1:5), the testimony, the expression of God, and the church is the testimony, the expression of Christ. (*Life-study of Revelation* 9)

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The ultimate manifestation of the churches as the testimony of Jesus is the integral focus of the work of Christ in Revelation, and the producing of overcomers in the local churches is the underlying focus of all the events spoken of in Revelation, including “the things which you have seen and the things which are and the things which are about to take place” (1:19). In general, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of the prophecy in all the revelation contained in the Scriptures (19:10; cf. Luke 24:27), because all the prophecy related to Christ individually ultimately points to Christ in His ultimate manifestation in the church as the enlarged testimony of Jesus. Consequently, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of the prophecy in the book of Revelation (19:10). The prophetic pronouncements in Revelation, which detail the historical development of the church (2:1—3:22), the historical judgments that will occur with the opening of the seven seals affixed to the scroll of God’s economy (4:1—19:21), and the historical inauguration of the millennial kingdom and manifestation of the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth (20:1—22:5) all relate to the manifestation of the church as the testimony of Jesus. The realization of this manifestation, however, is contingent upon producing overcomers in the churches, and thus all the various aspects of the testimony of Jesus mentioned above are associated with producing overcomers who serve as harbingers of the full manifestation of the testimony of Jesus.

The testimony of Jesus is seen in the local churches as the seven golden lampstands in 1:11-12 and in chapters 2 and 3. These seven golden lampstands present a complete picture of the historical developments in the church—from the initiation of the church age to the coming of the Lord at the end of the church age. While there is a full description of the condition of each church as a whole, the purpose of the letters is to supply the word of God that, when received, will produce overcomers. Thus, in each of the letters to the seven churches, there is a call for overcomers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). Even in the two churches—Smyrna and Philadelphia—that are blameless in the eyes of Lord, there is a call for overcomers.

The testimony of Jesus is seen in the great multitude of the redeemed in chapter 7. Those who make up the great multitude are overcomers because they have “come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (v. 14). “The great tribulation here refers to the tribulations, sufferings, persecutions, and afflictions experienced by God’s redeemed people throughout the ages” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 14, note 1). Having passed through these tribulations in triumph, this great multitude is raptured to stand before the throne (v. 9) as a proof of their overcoming.

The testimony of Jesus is seen in the bright woman with her man-child in chapter 12. In this chapter the role of the raptured overcomers in initiating war in heaven as the emergent man-child (v. 5), resulting in Satan and his angels being cast down to earth (v. 9), is detailed. The rapture of the man-child, who represents the stronger part of the totality of God’s people, including the New Testament believers as signified by the sun, the people of God in the Old Testament as signified by the moon, and the patriarchs as signified by the stars, sets in place the final three-and-a-half-year timetable of events that lead to the coming of the Lord. This speaks of the critical importance of the overcomers in the full unveiling of Christ.

The testimony of Jesus is seen in the harvest with its firstfruits in chapter 14. The firstfruits have the name of the Lamb and His Father written on their foreheads as their testimony, and they stand on Mount Zion in heaven and sing a new song before the throne (vv. 1, 3). These one hundred and forty-four thousand, a minority of Christians living at the end of this age, are firstfruits and overcomers because they have ripened and matured in the divine life before the majority of Christians who are living through the sobering and intensified circumstances of the great tribulation. They have ripened by not being defiled with women, by following the Lamb wherever He goes, by having

no lie found in their mouth, and by having no blemish (vv. 4-5). Maturity in the divine life is both a prerequisite for rapture and an indication of overcoming. Hence, the angel's imploring for the Son of Man to "send forth Your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come because the harvest of the earth is ripe" is an indication that those raptured in the harvest at the end of the great tribulation are overcomers in principle (v. 15), having been ripened with the help of the sufferings brought about by the great tribulation.

The testimony of Jesus is seen in those who are standing on the glassy sea mingled with fire in chapter 15. These are the late overcomers, who in passing through the great tribulation "will be martyred under the persecution of Antichrist and then resurrected to reign with Christ in the millennium (20:4)" (Lee, Recovery Version, 15:2, note 2). They are overcomers because they are "victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name" (v. 2). Since the beast with his image and number will be manifested only during the three and a half years of the great tribulation, these overcomers will be produced as they testify of Jesus during this time. They will praise His great and wonderful works and His righteous and true ways in heaven because they have acknowledged these things in their testifying stand on earth during the great tribulation.

The testimony of Jesus is seen in the wife of the Lamb who has made herself ready for the marriage dinner of the Lamb and who returns with Christ as His fighting army in chapter 19. Some, but not all, believers will be called to the marriage dinner of the Lamb (v. 9). In order to receive the blessing of being so called, one must be an overcomer. Such an overcomer is clothed in fine linen, bright and clean, signifying the righteousnesses of the saints (v. 8). The proof of the wife's overcoming is also seen in her participation in the defeat of Antichrist, the false prophet, and the rebellious armies of the earth (vv. 19-21). Just as the wife is clothed in fine linen as her bridal garment, the wife who accompanies the King of kings and Lord of lords is dressed in fine linen as her fighting garment (vv. 14, 16). It is significant that just after the marriage dinner of the Lamb in verse 9 and just prior to the Lord's open coming in triumph in verse 11, the testimony of Jesus is referenced and associated with the spirit of the prophecy in verse 10. This is because the testimony of Jesus, which has been hidden in human history while the wife is making herself ready, becomes fully visible in human history with the return of Christ with His overcoming bridal army to defeat Antichrist and his followers at the battle of Armageddon.

The testimony of Jesus is ultimately seen in the New Jerusalem as the consummate and eternal expression of the overcoming church. All the constituents of the New Jerusalem embody the intrinsic element necessary for overcoming—the divine life. In 5:5 one of the elders in heaven declares that the freshly crucified Christ, who is standing in resurrection through the power of the divine life, has "overcome so that He may open the scroll and its seven seals." This overcoming Lamb, who embodies the resurrection life, is on the throne of God in the New Jerusalem, making it a city of life, with a river of water of life flowing out from the throne and the tree of life growing on this side and on that side of the river (22:1-2). In this city of life, the Triune God and the enlivened, redeemed, and regenerated believers are the incorporated testimony of Jesus, the living and enlarged corporate Christ. The New Jerusalem is not a physical city but the spiritual instantiation of the divine life of the Triune God that has been mingled with and incorporated into redeemed and regenerated humanity. It is the spiritual realization and ultimate fulfillment of the Lord's prayer in John 17:23: "I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me." In the new heaven and new earth, the New Jerusalem will testify of Jesus, displaying the multifarious wisdom of God that has been progressively made known throughout human history and that will be made known in eternity future through the church, according to the eternal purpose that was made in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11).



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The future events in Revelation are included only because they are needed to contextualize the progressive presentation and development of the testimony of Jesus. The letters to the churches in chapters 2 and 3 speak of the Spirit's continuing call for overcomers throughout the church age. The great multitude of the redeemed in chapter 7 represent the overcomers who have been produced through tribulation that is endemic in the human history of God's people. The overcoming man-child will be manifested in human events that will occur immediately prior to and during the forty-two months of the great tribulation. Hence, there is a need to speak of these coming events. The overcomers as the firstfruits and the harvest in chapter 14 and the late overcomers standing on the glassy sea in chapter 15 are also manifested in the great tribulation. Hence, there is a need to speak of these coming events. The overcomers as the bridal wife and fighting army in chapter 19 are manifested in the final days of the great tribulation. Hence, there is a need to speak of these consummating events. And ultimately, the overcomers will be the New Jerusalem in chapters 21 and 22. Hence, there is a need to speak of the eternal details of this living city. In order to see the serving, administrating, and coming Christ, who is building the church and producing overcomers in the local churches, there is a need for revelation that can come only from the Triune God. Such a revelation is not needed for the sake of understanding future events but for the sake of entering into the essence of the revelation.

The Source of Revelation in the Book of Revelation

Revelation comes from the Triune God; it does not come from teachings, no matter how clearly they are explicated, understood, or repeated. Revelation is not a matter of doctrinal knowledge but a matter of a divine unveiling, an inward realization of the reality of divine and spiritual things made possible through God's gracious shining of Himself as light into the hidden and inward parts of a redeemed and regenerated believer. Apart from God's unveiling, all humans, both unbelievers and believers alike, would remain in darkness. In the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord clearly spoke of God as the source of revelation. When the Lord reproached the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, "the cities in which most of His works of power took place, because they did not repent" (11:20), He offered an extolling prayer to the Father, saying, "You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for thus it has been well-pleasing in Your sight" (vv. 25-26; cf. Luke 10:21). Following these words to the Father, the Lord seemingly turned to the disciples who were with Him and reinforced the fact that revelation is given according to the will of God and that the true content of revelation is a full knowledge of God Himself, saying, "No one fully knows the Son except the Father; neither does anyone fully know the Father except the Son and him to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27; cf. Luke 10:22). Later, at Caesarea Philippi, the Lord asked the disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is" (Matt. 16:13), gauging the human appraisals, the human revelations, of His person. The "revelations" of who He is varied: from John the Baptist to Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (v. 14), but no one was clear, other than Simon Peter, who said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). In response, the Lord said, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in the heavens" (v. 17).

Revelation from the Father is also revelation from the Son and the Spirit because there is always an implicit reference to the Son and the Spirit whenever the Father is spoken of in the New Testament. Thus, according to 1 Corinthians 2:10, the Spirit is involved in revealing the things of Christ: "To us God has revealed them through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God," and according to Galatians 1:12, the content of Paul's stewardship of the grace of God was made known to him by the Son: "Neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation by Jesus Christ." The role of the Triune God as the source and the content of revelation can be seen most clearly in Paul's prayer "that the

God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him” (Eph. 1:17). Here the Father is the source of revelation concerning the Son, a revelation that is received in our regenerated human spirit that is mingled with the Spirit. Revelation concerning the Son can come only from the Father through the Spirit, and prayer is the most effectual means to motivate God to do what is well-pleasing in His eyes—to reveal His Son so that He is fully known to us (Gal. 1:16; cf. Matt. 11:27).

In Revelation the role of the Triune God, as the unique source of revelation, is clearly demonstrated. Verse 1 of chapter 1 begins with references both to revelation and to God: “The *revelation* of Jesus Christ which *God* gave to Him to show to His slaves the things that must quickly take place” (emphasis added). This revelation concerns Christ, and it comes from God who is uniquely presented as the Triune God in verses 4 and 5: “Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth.” Each of the descriptions of the Father, Son, and Spirit are economically significant to the unfolding revelation of Christ as the word of God and the church as the testimony of Jesus (v. 9; 19:10; 20:4). The revealing Father is revealed as “Him who is and who was and who is coming”; this speaks of the present actions of Him who is to fulfill the undeterred and eternal will of the same Him who was to achieve the glorious goal of being manifested to all by the same Him who is coming. The revealing Spirit is revealed as “the seven Spirits who are before His throne”; this speaks of the Spirit’s intensified function and operation in the unfolding realization of God’s economical manifestation in the churches through the Spirit’s speaking to and searching of the churches with His seven eyes. The importance of the Spirit is seen both in the term *seven*, which signifies completeness and intensification, and in the Spirit’s being listed as the second of the divine persons in the Trinity. The revealing Son is revealed as “the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth”; this speaks of His faithfulness to witness, testify, and express God in His divine-human status to produce the church as the Firstborn of the dead, which will be manifested through His administration of the events and affairs of humanity in His status as the Ruler of the kings of the earth. The Triune God is the source of the revelation in Revelation, and the ultimate issue of the Triune God’s revelation is the manifestation, the revelation, of Himself, first to His properly situated slaves and then to the universe.

The Recipients of Revelation in the Book of Revelation

Although the Triune God and His economical operation to consummate His eternal purpose are revealed in the words of the prophecy in the book of Revelation, this revelation can remain hidden to us, and many things can also be added and taken away from it so that its essence is perverted and practically annulled (22:18-19). Although the Spirit is speaking to the churches, not all are listening; thus, there is still a need for an ear to hear what the Spirit is speaking. To hear the Spirit’s speaking is to receive revelation, but such revelation can be fully received only in the regenerated human spirit of separated believers in local churches. A regenerated and exercised human spirit, a condition of separation in holiness, and the genuine standing of a local church are three essential prerequisites for fully receiving divine revelation. As believers, we all have a regenerated human spirit, and thus, like the apostles and prophets, we can receive revelation in spirit (Eph. 3:5). It is not without a basis to say that every believer has received some revelation, knowing deeply through the light of life, for example, that Jesus is God and that the Bible is the word of God. However, like the holy apostles and prophets, receiving fuller revelation is contingent upon a holy condition of separation. The more we are separated from the profane elements of the world and the fallen elements of the old creation, the more the revelatory skies above us will be clear, enabling us to see visions of God (Ezek. 1:1, 22). The fullest experience of receiving revelation, however, is contingent

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upon our standing in relation to the local churches, because the revelation in the book of Revelation was written to local churches and then sent to local churches in order to be read and kept experientially by those in local churches (Rev. 1:11; cf. Col. 4:16).⁵

Revelation Being Received by Separated Believers

It is significant that John speaks of his exile and, perhaps, imprisonment, on the island of Patmos, indicating a position of separation: “I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 1:9). Even though he was in a separated situation, John was not isolated from Christ or even the churches. In fact, he considered himself to be a fellow partaker with the saints in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus. In his identification as a fellow partaker, he identified himself with those who constitute the local churches. As such, he was perfectly situated to receive the revelation of the coming tribulations that would inaugurate the kingdom in its millennial and eternal manifestation.

The apostle John was fully separated unto God on the island of Patmos (1:9). He was also brought to the open door of heaven (4:1) and to a great and high mountain (21:10), and thus saw God’s revelation and realized God’s manifestation. Today, many Christians who are talking about the church do not see the local churches, mainly because they are not separated unto God. (Lee, *Life-study of Revelation* 86-87)

John’s separated status should be emulated in our experience, even as it was in the experience of Paul, who described himself as both a prisoner of Christ Jesus and a prisoner in the Lord (Eph. 3:1; 4:1). In Paul’s status as a prisoner of the Lord, the revelation of the mystery was made known to him, and the content of this revelation, subsequently, became the grace that he imparted through his stewardship (3:2-3). In his status as a prisoner in the Lord, he was a pattern, a testimony, of a walk worthy of our calling to manifest the oneness of the Spirit in the one Body, which testifies of the reality of Jesus that is learned in Christ (4:3-4, 21).

As we advance in our experience from being a prisoner of the Lord to being a prisoner in Lord, being progressively separated from the world as sojourners (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11), the more our eyes will be anointed to see and our ears will be anointed to hear. Every situation of “exile” and “imprisonment” is an opportunity to receive revelation from the Triune God. We should not despair but rather, be encouraged, knowing that revelation is being given because the time is near and because we have an opportunity to learn the reality of the corporate Christ as fellow partakers in the local churches (Rev. 1:3, 9). John’s physical separation signifies the need for an inward spiritual separation—as a matter of our heart; it should not be interpreted as a call for an outward ascetic separation—as a matter of our body (Rom. 2:29; Col. 2:23).

Revelation Being Received in the Regenerated Human Spirit

In order to receive revelation, the most critical part of our being is our regenerated human spirit, not our body or our soul. John received revelation from the Triune God in spirit, that is, in his regenerated human spirit, a spirit mingled as one with the Holy Spirit (1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 4:12; John 3:6; Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17). Most of the commentaries on the words *in spirit* (Gk. ἐν πνεύματι) in Revelation 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; and 21:10 regard the word *spirit* as a reference to the divine Spirit. Such considerations, however, are based on a deficient understanding of the tripartite nature of humanity. Without a proper understanding of the truth of the tripartite nature of humanity, the revelation that John received through the simple exercise of his regenerated human spirit is supplanted with a view of revelation as being a matter of rapturous and ecstatic experiences, even to the point of outward, physical transportation. This premise causes

Christians to regard the receiving of revelation as an extraordinary and unattainable supernatural experience. Such a premise, however, is not contained in the words of Revelation, words that must be kept by all (1:3). Nothing can be kept if it is not received, and to stress overly mystical interpretations in regard to receiving revelation deprives the believers of an entrance into the realities contained in the revelations.

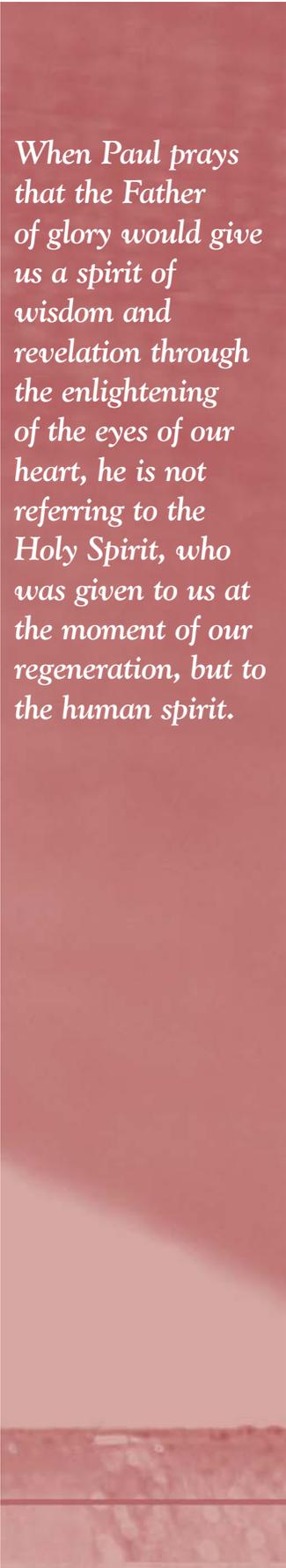
In four crucial verses in Revelation, John associates the regenerated human spirit with receiving revelation. After receiving the revelation of the seven churches as seven golden lampstands and the vision of Christ walking in their midst, John writes, “I was in spirit on the Lord’s Day and heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet” (1:10). After being shown the “things that must take place after these things,” the things of Christ and the golden lampstands, beholding a door opened in heaven, and hearing a voice saying, “Come up here” in 4:1, John writes, “Immediately I was in spirit; and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne there was One sitting” (v. 2). After receiving a revelation of the great harlot, Babylon, and her destruction, John writes, “He carried me away in spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns” (17:3). Finally, after receiving the consummate revelation in the Scriptures of the bride and wife of Christ as a city, the New Jerusalem in contrast to the vision of the great harlot as a city, John writes, “He carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (21:10).

The book of Revelation not only stresses the Spirit of God as the sevenfold intensified Spirit for God’s intensified move, but also our human spirit as the organ for us to realize and respond to God’s move. Only (our) spirit can respond to (God’s) Spirit. The book of Revelation is composed of four major visions: the vision of the churches (ch. 1—3); the vision of the destiny of the world (ch. 4—16); the vision of the great Babylon (ch. 17—20); and the vision of the New Jerusalem (ch. 21—22). To see these four visions, John was in his spirit (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10)...We also need to be in our spirit to see the visions of this book. It is not merely a matter of mental understanding, but of spiritual realization. (Lee, *Life-study of Revelation* 87)

Receiving revelation is a matter that originates in our regenerated spirit. When Paul prays that the Father of glory would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation through the enlightening of the eyes of our heart (Eph. 1:17-18), he is not referring to the Holy Spirit, who was given to us at the moment of our regeneration, but to the human spirit, which is linked to the human heart through the ongoing function of the conscience.⁶ Even though the human spirit is the focus of Paul’s prayer, the Holy Spirit is still involved, because our human spirit is able to receive revelation only because it has been enlivened and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

In order to have revelation, we need a spirit of wisdom and revelation. The spirit in verse 17 must be our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. Such a spirit is given to us by God that we may have wisdom and revelation to know Him and His economy. Actually, the spirit in this verse is the mingled spirit, the regenerated human spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit. However, the emphasis is upon our regenerated spirit, not on the Holy Spirit. (Lee, *Life-study of Ephesians* 123)

It is regrettable that many commentators fail to see the truth of the tripartite nature of man and, thus, regard the references to the human spirit in Revelation 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; and 21:10 as references to the divine Spirit.⁷ For example, in *The Book of Revelation: Worship for Life in the Spirit of Prophecy* John Paul Heil explicates Revelation 4:2, writing, “John previously reported that ‘I was in Spirit’ on the Lord’s day of worship when his initial vision of the exalted Jesus in heaven began (1:10). And now he relates again that ‘immediately I was in Spirit’ (4:2)” (71). In regard to 17:3, he writes, “Now an angel carried John ‘in Spirit’ into a wilderness on the earth to be shown the divine judgment



When Paul prays that the Father of glory would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation through the enlightening of the eyes of our heart, he is not referring to the Holy Spirit, who was given to us at the moment of our regeneration, but to the human spirit.

A misplaced reliance on the use of the term Spirit in 1:10 opens a door to an erroneous focus on rapturous and ecstatic experiences, including even physical transportation, as an intrinsic component of revelation.

of the great prostitute (17:1)” (238). And in regard to 21:10, he writes, “The angel carried John in Spirit to a mountain ‘great and high’ (21:10a), which associates it with the heavenly realm” (309). Whereas Heil writes with certainty that the divine Spirit is being referenced in these verses, Peter S. Williamson, in *Revelation*, at least acknowledges that some are willing to render the term as *spirit*; Williamson says, “Although the NABRE rendering ‘in spirit’ is possible, it seems better to interpret this and the other three uses of this phrase in Rev (4:2; 17:3; 21:10) as referring to the role of the Holy Spirit in prophecy” (49). Even in his acknowledgment, however, Williamson is quick to reaffirm the prevailing view that the Greek term is a reference to the Holy Spirit.

Ambiguous considerations in regard to the referent of the Greek word πνεύματι in the explication of these four crucial verses often bring in confusion related to the distinction between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. For example, in *Unveiling Revelation* John Allen conflates the two terms without providing any scriptural rationale, saying, “John records, ‘I was in spirit (or Spirit), and behold, a Throne was standing in heaven’” (9). In *Revelation* Paige Patterson uses the phrase *by means of the Spirit* and then shortly thereafter suggests that the phrase may mean “in the spirit,” saying, “John, by means of the Spirit, is carried to a mountain great and high; and he sees the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. The phrase *en pneumati* may mean either ‘in the spirit’ or ‘by means of the spirit’” (369). Again, no explanation for the different use of the terms is given. In *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: An Exposition on the Book of Revelation* Louis T. Talbot comments on 4:2, saying, “John hears a voice; he sees an open door in heaven; and, being ‘in the spirit,’ he is caught up into the very presence of God Himself” (67), but later, when commenting on 21:10, he says, “To view this fair city, John was led by the Spirit ‘to a great and high mountain’” (245), again without any explanation for the shift. When there is a misplaced reliance on the use of the term *Spirit* or an ambiguous treatment of the term, the result is that, on the one hand, a door is closed to the truth of the regeneration of our deadened human spirit through faith (Eph. 2:1, 5), which, once enlivened, serves as the focal point for our receiving of revelation. On the other hand, a door is opened to an erroneous focus on rapturous and ecstatic experiences, including even physical transportation, as an intrinsic component of revelation.

In *The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future* Edward Hindson combines a sense of the rapturous with John’s vision of the scene in heaven in chapters 4 and 5: “‘Come up here’ (4:1). John is about to be temporarily ‘raptured’ to heaven ‘in the Spirit’” (57). In *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* G. K. Beale associates John’s experience with that of Ezekiel, employing the term *rapture* for each: “The introductory section of 4:1-2a concludes with a reflection of the prophet Ezekiel’s repeated rapture in the Spirit” (319). Rapture imagery is used also when Beale comments on the vision of John in 17:3: “The angel ‘carried’ John ‘into the desert in the Spirit’ in order to transport him to another dimension where he could view the vision” (850), and he employs this same language in his comment on 21:10: “The angel ‘carried’ John ‘in the Spirit’ to convey him to another dimension where he could see perceive yet another vision” (1065). For most Christians the term *rapture* has a deeply rooted significance related to the end times and, as such, does not represent a common experience. This can be seen in the sparing use of the terms *caught away* and *caught up* in the New Testament, which bear the denotation of rapture. In Acts 8:39 the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away. In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 Paul was caught away to the third heaven and into Paradise. In Revelation 12:5 the man-child is caught up to God and to His throne, and in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 the believers who are alive and remain at the end of the great tribulation, immediately prior to the Lord’s return, will be caught up together with the dead in Christ to meet the Lord in the air. All four of these examples are extraordinary in the mind of every believer, and to use terms such as *rapture*, *raptured*, *transport*, and *convey* in the context of receiving revelation elevates such an experience to a realm that is beyond the expectations of nearly every Christian. After all, who is like Philip and Paul, and who has the assurance that his growth and maturity is enough to qualify him to be

part of the man-child? If receiving revelation is a matter akin to being raptured, a matter that few have experienced, why would there be admonitions for all to hear what the Spirit is speaking to the churches, and for that matter, why would there even be a book containing the content of Revelation? The book of Revelation has been given in order to reveal its content to the churches, and as such, all those who are in the churches have the capacity to read, hear, and keep its content once it is revealed to them.

Receiving revelation also does not require ecstatic, trancelike experiences, but this implication is contained in many commentaries. For example, in *Revelation: A Commentary* Brian K. Blount writes in regard to Revelation 1:10, which records John's initial experience of being in spirit, saying, "John could well, then, have intended the Spirit of God. More likely, he refers to an inspired prophetic trance whose contours were well enough known that he could speak about it in an idiomatic way" (40). In *Govett on Revelation* Robert Govett writes, "God is able to transfer the man into another state, that of ecstasy or trance, in which the present world disappears, and the things unseen by the eye of nature are unveiled" (32). And in *The Apocalypse: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* Joseph A. Seiss writes that John "was called by a mighty voice to come up into heaven, and straightway 'became in the Spirit'—in some mysterious, miraculous, ecstatic state, wrought by the power of God" (99). It is doubtful that many Christians have a grounded understanding of revelation if they regard revelation as an "ecstatic" experience, given the common denotation of *ecstatic* as a sudden, intensely powerful emotional state, full of joy. Such a consideration can easily lead to the pursuit of emotional releases, which would most likely be products of an overactive imagination. According to Paul and John, revelation is more critically related to the function of the mind rather than the function of the emotion: Revelation is given so that we might know in order to experience (Eph. 1:18), and revelation is given so that what is revealed can be made known and kept (Rev. 1:1, 3).

By avoiding the function of the mind in receiving revelation, commentaries commonly associate John's visions with physical transportation, possibly even out-of-body experiences. This makes receiving revelation such an extraordinary event that most Christians would not even entertain the possibility of receiving revelation. In *Revelation* Louis A. Brighton, writing about John's vision in 17:3, says, "In the Spirit' (ἐν πνεύματι) suggests that John was empowered by the Spirit of God in some kind of mystical experience so that he not only saw the woman in a desert but was actually 'carried' to the place" (439). Concerning the vision in 21:10, he says that by the Holy Spirit of God, "John was transported to the mountain. This is an event in the Spirit (whether in the body or outside the body; cf. 2 Cor 12:2-4) by which John saw the bride of Christ visually, and possibly also experientially or empirically" (609). Earlier in his commentary Brighton draws a distinction between the common experience of all Christians and the experience of John related to being in the Spirit, saying,

Here in [Revelation] 4:2 ἐν πνεύματι bears a sense of some kind of a mystical sensation by which the person experiences something above and beyond the ordinary capability and understanding of human reality. Possibly John experienced what Paul testifies to in 2 Cor 12:1-4...It certainly is different from the way in which all Christians are ἐν πνεύματι ("in the Spirit") by virtue of their Baptism and the indwelling of the Spirit (Acts 2:38; Rom 8:9, 11; 1 Cor 12:3). Perhaps like Paul, John could not tell whether he was in the body or out of it. Nevertheless, by the Spirit and in the Spirit, he was lifted up so that he could receive the visions of God which he was to share with the church (cf. Rev 21:10). (113-114)

According to Brighton, being in the Spirit for the believers is an experience related to baptism and the indwelling of the Spirit, experiences essential to the daily living of a believer, but being in the Spirit for John involved a "mystical sensation...beyond the ordinary capability and understanding of human reality," a sensation that is "different from the way" experienced by all Christians. This distinction elevates the receiving of

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revelation to almost unattainable heights, especially given the reference to Paul's experience in 1 Corinthians 12:3.

By translating ἐν πνεύματι as "in the Spirit" and then employing language that points to rapturous and intensely emotional experiences, even to physical transportation, to describe John's receiving of revelation in his regenerated human spirit, the believers' expectation of receiving revelation is diminished by elevating John's revelation to a rarified and mystical realm. Nevertheless, every believer has a regenerated human spirit with the capacity for it to be a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Paul's prayer for all the believers in Ephesians 1:17 would be vain if this were not the case. Receiving revelation is not a matter of mystical experiences but of the simple exercise of the regenerated human spirit that is mingled with the divine and revealing Spirit. In our regenerated human spirit it is possible to know the things of man and the things of God (1 Cor. 2:11), including the things in the book of Revelation, which were given by God (1:1). Without an awareness of the truth of our regenerated human spirit, however, it is difficult to see the visions in Revelation as God intends. We truly need the Father in His mercy to give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation, but we also need to realize further that this giving is related to being properly positioned in the local churches.

Revelation Being Received in the Local Churches

After John's salutary speaking in Revelation 1:1-3, he identifies the recipients of the revelation that he has received from God as being seven churches: "John to the seven churches" (v. 4). He then speaks of the churches to whom God had charged him to write and send his revelation as seven locally identified churches: "What you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea" (v. 11). The seven churches that John addresses in verse 4 are further identified as seven local churches in verse 11, utilizing designations according to locality, designations that originate from the revealing Triune God, not from man.⁸ The book of Revelation begins with John's acknowledgment that his revelation is for seven local churches, and it ends with the Lord Jesus' similar acknowledgment that the things that have been testified are for these same churches: "I Jesus have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches" (22:16).

The local churches, as revealed in Revelation, are not a human construct, an ecclesiastical arrangement based on shared doctrine, culture, race, nationality, or mission. Rather, they are God's ordained way for His called-out ones to be gathered in order to locally manifest the testimony of Jesus. Local churches are at the forefront of John's first vision in 1:10 and his last vision in 21:10, indicating that local churches are significant to both the initiation and the consummation of the Lord's enlarged testimony. The local churches also provide the subtext for John's two intervening visions in 4:2 and 17:3. John's first vision in 1:10, a vision of the Son of Man as the High Priest walking amidst seven golden lampstands, explicitly points to the seven churches: "Write therefore the things which you have seen... The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (vv. 19-20). As the testimony of Jesus, these seven golden lampstands bear the golden divine nature of the Father; the form, the embodiment, of the Son; and the expression the Spirit. John's last vision in 21:10, a vision of the New Jerusalem, also explicitly points to an enlarged locally identified church: "I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem" (v. 2). As the testimony of Jesus, the New Jerusalem is an enlarged lampstand that bears the golden divine nature of the Father (vv. 18, 21), the embodiment of the Son (v. 23), and the expression of the Spirit (22:17). John's two intervening visions, the vision of the Lion-Lamb's divine administration in 4:2 and the vision of the great harlot in 17:3, speak of the manner in which God will administratively deal with the obstacles—the Satan-corrupted world and its relationship with the apostate church—that stand in the way of consummating His eternal desire for an enlarged expression of Himself in churches that are locally identified.

It is theologically shortsighted to ignore the fact that Revelation was written and sent to local churches; it is scripturally dismissive to ignore the practice of one church in each city as the way to express God's testimony, and it is spiritually debilitating to ignore the revelatory speaking of the Spirit that is directed to local churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), the things that are testified for the churches (22:16). Given the emphasis on the local churches in Revelation, it is reasonable to assert that receiving revelation is contingent upon being rightly positioned in a local church. Witness Lee candidly asserts,

Without the local churches, the universal church has no practicality or actuality. The universal church is realized in the local churches. Knowing the church in its universal aspect must be consummated in knowing the church in its local aspect. It is a great advance for us to know and practice the local churches. Concerning the church, the book of Revelation is in the advanced stage. To know this book, we must advance from the understanding of the universal church to the realization and practice of the local churches, because this book is written to the local churches. Only those who are in the local churches are positioned rightly, with the right angle and the proper perspective, to see the visions in this book. (Recovery Version, 1:4, note 2)

Even a limited sampling of commentary related to the phrase *the seven churches which are in Asia* demonstrates the degree to which there is a lack of revelation concerning the significance of the local church in God's economy. In *Revelation: An Expository Commentary* Donald Grey Barnhouse reinforces the common thought that national and denominational affiliations constitute legitimate grounds for an organized religious construct to bear the designation of *church* as unveiled in the New Testament: "Churches differ from country to country and from denomination to denomination. They also differ within any given denomination and within any given city" (19). National and denominational "churches," however, are not the testimony of Jesus; they are a testimony of division. The church as the Body of Christ in both its universal and local expressions is not divided (1 Cor. 1:13). In *The Apocalypse: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* Joseph A. Seiss declares that divisions based on nationality or denominational affiliation are acceptable:

We also speak of the Church of a particular country or denomination; and not improperly when we wish to designate clusters of Churches of particular and distinctive type, or regime, or geographical contiguity. But the Scriptures express themselves differently. They do not contemplate the Christians of so many countries or confessions, as so many Churches; but find a Church in every individual congregation, having its own minister, elders and deacons, without regard to any corporation other than itself. (26)

What is striking in Seiss's declaration is not just his saying that such divisions bear a degree of propriety but his willingness to acknowledge that these "particular and distinctive" types of "Churches" do not match the standard of the Scriptures, which "do not contemplate the Christians of so many countries or confessions, as so many Churches." Seiss's statements demonstrate a willful undermining of the revelation of what was in the beginning in regard to God's desire for one testimony of the church in each locality. For those promoting a position that is in direct contradistinction to the revelation in the Scriptures, how much light is needed to break through the veils of religion and human traditions? If there is inadequate revelation concerning the recipients of revelation in the book of Revelation, how can there be adequate revelation related to the things that have been sent to the local churches and that are for the local churches?

Receiving Revelation in a Holy Spirit as a Fellow Partaker in a Local Church

In order to enter into the reality of the revelation contained in the book of Revelation, there truly is a need for revelation. Nevertheless, the unveiling of the essence of the book of Revelation—the Lord Jesus as the word of God and the local churches as the

If there is inadequate revelation concerning the recipients of revelation in the book of Revelation, how can there be adequate revelation related to the things that have been sent to the local churches and that are for the local churches?

Organizational divisions among Christians, no matter how well-intentioned in order to maintain “doctrinal integrity,” to accommodate cultural, economic, or ethnic differences, or to avoid dispositional conflicts, undermine the testimony of Jesus.

testimony of Jesus—does not depend on a comprehension of doctrinal teachings or an assiduous correlation of world events with imaginary interpretations of the “signs” in Revelation. It depends on the light of the Triune God shining into the regenerated human spirit of believers who are separated unto Him and who are both positionally, and dispositionally situated as fellow partakers in a local church. Only in the light of the Triune God do we see light (Psa. 36:9), and His light comes when what has been written to the churches is read in a holy spirit (2 Cor. 6:6). 

Notes

¹See *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, edited by C. Marvin Pate and Stanley N. Gundry and published by Zondervan in 1998, which presents the preterist, idealist, progressive dispensationalist, and classical dispensationalist interpretive approaches to the content of the book of Revelation.

²See Edward Bishop Elliott’s *Horae Apocalypticae*, published in 1844, for a representative account of an interpretation that was applied to events unfolding in the nineteenth century. For a more recent representative account of a popular application of the contents of Revelation to world events, see Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth*, published by Zondervan in 1970 and *There’s a New World Coming: An In-depth Analysis of the Book of Revelation*, published by Harvest House in 1984.

³In *The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future* Edward Hindson states that the prophetic unveiling of future events is the central focus of the book of Revelation, saying,

The Apocalypse calls itself a “prophecy” of future events (cf. Rev. 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19). While it combines apocalyptic visions with epistolary instructions, the Revelation is essentially a book of New Testament prophecy. It is an inspired book of prophetic visions of the future. These focus on scenes both in heaven and on earth, both of Israel and the Church, and cover a span of time including the Tribulation period, the Millennial Kingdom, and the eternal state. (1-2)

⁴If the Lord’s speaking is rare to us in our personal and corporate experience, we need to humbly consider whether we are properly situated to receive His speaking.

⁵The standing of a genuine local church is based on its receiving of all the believers within the geographical boundary of a city. This is God’s ordination to practically manifest the oneness of the Body of Christ so that the world, which cannot see spiritual realities, can, nevertheless, believe that Christ has been sent in love (John 17:21-23). Organizational and practical divisions among Christians, no matter how well-intentioned in order to maintain “doctrinal integrity,” to accommodate cultural, economic, or ethnic differences, or to avoid dispositional conflicts, undermine the testimony of Jesus, which can be seen only in a genuine local church. Appropriating the name of a locality as the name of a church alone, however, does not make a gathering of believers a genuine local church. Any declaration of oneness must be matched with an inward spiritual realization and outward manifestation of the oneness of the Triune God.

⁶See chapters 5 and 6 of *The Economy of God* by Witness Lee for a detailed explanation of the three parts of humanity—spirit and soul and body—and their relationship to the human heart. This book is available online at www.ministrybooks.org.

⁷Most of the commentaries listed in the works cited below capitalize the word πνεύματι as *Spirit*. These include John Allen’s *Unveiling Revelation* (9, 86); G. K. Beale’s *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (850, 1065); Brian K. Blount’s *Revelation: A Commentary* (40); Louis A. Brighton’s *Revelation* (47, 113-114, 439, 609); E. W. Bullinger’s *Commentary on Revelation, or, the Apocalypse* (216); Charles Lee Feinberg’s *A Commentary on Revelation: The Grand Finale* (157); Robert Govett’s *Govett on Revelation* (32); John Paul Heil’s *The Book of Revelation: Worship for Life in the Spirit of Prophecy* (27, 71, 238, 309); Edward Hindson’s *The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future* (57); Henry M. Morris’s *The Revelation Record* (328); Paige Patterson’s *Revelation* (150); Joseph A Seiss’s *The Apocalypse: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (18, 99); Louis T. Talbot’s *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: An Exposition on the Book of Revelation* (245); and Peter S. Williamson’s *Revelation* (49, 99).

Other than Witness Lee, there are no examples of commentators using a lowercase *s* in translations of ἐν πνεύματι in which the lowercase word *spirit* is clearly regarded as a reference to the regenerated human spirit. However, among the books listed in the works cited below, the lowercase term *spirit* is at least utilized. These include Donald Grey Barnhouse's *Revelation: An Expository Commentary* (319); Brian K. Blount's *Revelation: A Commentary* (42); E. W. Bullinger's *Commentary on Revelation, or, the Apocalypse* (498, 658); Robert Govett's *Govett on Revelation* (32); R. C. H. Lenski's *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (57, 169, 627); Henry M. Morris's *The Revelation Record* (446); Louis T. Talbot's *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: An Exposition on the Book of Revelation* (67); and Peter S. Williamson's *Revelation* (273, 348). It is interesting to note that some commentators use *spirit* and *Spirit* interchangeably, notably Blount, Bullinger, Govett, Morris, Talbot, and Williamson.

R. C. H. Lenski uses the lowercase word *spirit* throughout *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, stating, for example, "John relates the facts in a clear and simple way. On a Sunday during his exile on Patmos he was ἐν πνεύματι, "in spirit" (57), and "In the power of his command, 'Come up,' John was there 'in spirit'" (169). In regard to the words *in spirit* in 1:10, Lenski even refers to "man's spirit," saying,

Our natural senses, mind, and spirit are ordinarily operative and responsive in regard to the natural world about us. But God is able to inhibit this common response and to bring man's spirit into direct contact with the invisible, spiritual world and with the things that are in God's own mind and yet do this in ways that accommodate themselves to finite human perception for God's own specific and gracious purposes...This is due to the fact that the spirit is taken out of the ordinary range of contact and for the time being is placed into one that is wholly new and superior. (58)

Lenski's use of the lowercase *spirit*, however, is not an acknowledgment that the human spirit is a distinct part of God's created human vessel, different from the soul and the body. In his commentary on Revelation, as well as in his other commentaries on the books of the New Testament, he explicitly holds to a dichotomous view of the parts of humanity. In his teaching, the spirit and the soul are the same part, with the only difference being the use of the terms based on their respective inclinations. Thus, the same immaterial part of humanity is termed *soul* when it is inclined toward the things of the man and *spirit* when it is inclined toward the things of God. In his commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Lenski says,

Man's material part can be separated from his immaterial part, but the immaterial part cannot be divided; it is not a duality of spirit and soul. Where, as here, spirit and soul are distinguished, the spirit designates our immaterial part as it is related to God, as being capable of receiving the operations of the Spirit of God and of his Word; while soul (ψυχή) designates this *same* immaterial part in its function of animating the body and also as receiving impressions from the body it animates. (*The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles* 366-367, emphasis added)

Within his dichotomous understanding of the nature of humanity, Lenski uses the lowercase word *spirit* because in his mind all of John's revelations are focused on higher spiritual realities. However, his view that the spirit and the soul are the same part, differing only in the direction of its inclinations, does not help us, as believers, to enter into the practical exercise of our regenerated human spirit that is essential to receiving revelation (1 Tim. 4:7). It is possible to incline our soul toward God by thinking about Him with our mind, loving Him with our emotion, and even choosing Him with our will without actually contacting Him with our spirit. John 5:39-40 speaks of those who have an active and searching mind and a focused will but who, nevertheless, miss the reality of contacting Christ: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that testify concerning Me. Yet you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." In utilizing only the faculties of their soul to find eternal life, the searching Jews missed both the revelation and the reality of eternal life. Our soul can contact matters related to only the psychological realm, and only our regenerated human spirit can contact God, who is Spirit.

⁸In other books of the New Testament, just as in the book of Revelation, God divinely designates every practical expression of the universal church with the name of a city: the church in

Lenski's view that the spirit and the soul are the same part, differing only in the direction of its inclinations, does not help us to enter into the practical exercise of our regenerated human spirit that is essential to receiving revelation.

In other books of the New Testament, just as in the book of Revelation, God divinely designates every practical expression of the universal church with the name of a city, and the plural word churches is always associated with a region.

Jerusalem (Acts 8:1; 11:22), in Antioch (13:1), in Ephesus (20:17), in Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1), in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1), in Laodicea (Col. 4:16), and in Thessalonica (1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1). When the plural word *churches* is used, it is always associated with the name of a region: the churches in Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41), in Galatia (1 Cor. 16:1; Gal. 1:2), in Asia (1 Cor. 16:19), in Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1), and in Judea (Gal. 1:22; 1 Thes. 2:14). The one exception, Acts 9:31, uses the singular word *church* in a regional context: "So then the church throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied." Concerning this seeming exception, Witness Lee writes, "Since at that time [the nascent days of the early church] the church had spread only to the regions of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and since the word *whole* covers all the places where the church existed, *church* in singular is used here in the universal sense" (Recovery Version, v. 31, note 1). Although this exception pertains to the singular use of the word *church* in a regional context, there is no exception in the New Testament involving the plural use of the word *churches* in the context of one locality.

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