

LESSON 1

Introduction & Revelation 1

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE REVELATION

The first lesson should provide a brief introduction to Revelation as well as a study of Chapter One. The following short articles originally appeared in *Christianity Magazine* (1984) and explain what I believe to be the correct approach to the book. A teacher may also want to read other introductions to the book (e. g. the commentaries of Caird, Hailey, Harkrider, Hendriksen, Lenski and Summers; a different point of view in Wallace, Ogden and Gentry; various introductions to the New Testament). Those who have time may want to tackle the massive work of G. K. Beale as well. It is encyclopedic, and will be often profitably consulted by those who have access to it, though it may tell the average Bible class teacher more than he has time to deal with.

Interpreting the Book of Revelation

Three insights have seemed to blow away much of my quarter century old confusion over the book of Revelation. The first involves basic approach—how to read the book, and in particular, the relation of Revelation to history.

Many people begin with history. This or that, they say, has not been fulfilled. We must look for it in the future. Others pick up scraps of history which seem to fit Revelation and read these back into the book, interpreting Revelation by history. Scripture is sometimes bent to fit history.

That approach is fundamentally unsound. Scripture is not to be interpreted in the light of history or the newspapers. Rather, history must be understood in the light of scripture. We must learn to see history as God sees it. I therefore suggest that instead of standing as twentieth century persons looking back on Revelation through two thousand years of history, we ought rather to forget everything we know about history and take our stand with John in the first century before

the predicted events, reading Revelation as though that were all we had and none of the events since then had occurred. We must see the future through John's eyes. We must understand what he expected to happen. We must then see history in the light of scripture.

Our first responsibility as Bible students and teachers of the Word is to understand and then repeat what scripture says. What scripture says, it says regardless of history. Only after we have understood what scripture says should we turn to history, which then can be viewed in the light of scripture.

I do not believe scripture will be inconsistent with history. But our first and primary business as students of scripture is to understand what God has said in scripture; as believers, to accept whatever God has said, without reservation and regardless of history; and as teachers, to repeat in the twentieth century what God first said in the first century. It is not our business to make scripture fit history.

Matthew 24 is an excellent illustration of this point. Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and said: "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished" (v. 34). When one starts with history and contends that some of "these things" remain unfulfilled, the effect is to make a false prophet of Jesus who said they would all be accomplished before that generation had passed. That is the approach of an unbeliever. As one who has put his trust in Jesus, I start with scripture and conclude that whether I understand the application of all Jesus' language to history or not, I know it has already been fulfilled, for Jesus said it would take place in that generation, and I believe Jesus. Our first responsibility is to understand, to believe and to repeat what the scriptures say, and only then to do whatever we can with regard to history. A believer can take no other view.

The book of Revelation must be approached in the same way. We must first forget everything we know about history and read Revelation to see what John has said. Then we can turn to history if we still think it is of any importance. But I expect to show below that Revelation contains several references to time that specifically define the place in history where one must look for the predicted events. The scope and span of time to which the prophecies of Revelation apply is just as definitely and conclusively fixed by the book itself as Matthew 24:34 fixes the time span of that prophecy.

The Time Element in Revelation

According to Revelation 1:1, the subject of the Revelation is “the things which must shortly come to pass.” “... for the time is at hand” (1:3). “Behold, he comes with the clouds; ...” (v. 7).

The closing section contains the same references to time. The message of Revelation is again said to be “the things which must shortly come to pass. And behold, I come quickly” (22:6–7). Daniel had been told, “... but shut thou up the vision; for it belongs to many days to come” (Dan. 8:26; cf. 10:14; 12:4, 9). But John is forbidden to seal up the Revelation, for it does not deal with the distant future—“the time is at hand” (Rev. 22:10).

That statement is immediately followed by another indicating that the time is near at hand when character will be finally settled and it will be too late to change (v. 11). The next verse has the Lord saying, “Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is” (v. 12). Then for the third time: “He who testifies these things says, Yea: I come quickly” (v. 20).

The conclusion is inescapable that the Revelation deals primarily with events that were soon to occur at the time the book was written. If someone reminds us that a thousand years is as one day with the Lord (2 Pet. 3:8), we must reply that the Revelation was not written to the Lord but to men and in terms understandable to them (cf. Rev. 1:1–3; 22:6–9). Nor can “I come quickly” refer to a coming which may have been millennia away but executed speedily once the time came. The time was so near the book was not even to be sealed.

On the other hand, the reference cannot be to the coming of Christ at the end of the world. One might say that is obvious from history, but more importantly, the book of Revelation itself makes it obvious that the end of the world was not at hand, for one of John’s visions puts it at least a thousand years in the future (Rev. 20).

What, then, is meant by “the things which must shortly come to pass”? What coming of Christ was near? The answer to these questions must be determined by the evidence of the book of Revelation itself. That evidence is found in four passages: (1) The martyrs who had already been slain were told “that they should rest yet for a little time” and their blood would be avenged (6:9–11). (2) From the time of Satan’s

defeat by means of the cross, symbolically portrayed in Revelation 12:7–12, he has “great wrath” against the church (explaining the persecutions), “knowing that he has but a short time” (v. 12)—only “a short time” and he would be bound (20:1–3). (3) The chief instrument of Satan’s wrath was the beast, a persecuting monster, who was not far in the future at the time of Revelation (17:7–11), and (4) when he came he would continue for only forty two months (13:5). After that “short time” Babylon would fall (chs. 17–18), the beast and the false prophet would be defeated (ch. 19), and Satan would be bound for a thousand years (20:1–3). Thus “the things which must shortly come to pass,” which were “at hand,” are identified with the conflict between the church and the persecuting monster (which was not far off), ending with the defeat of the persecutor and the binding of Satan after only a short time. However the “millennium” may be explained, the book of Revelation certainly leaves no doubt where it begins—namely, not long after Revelation was written. I will not try to play historian, but will insist that this is what John has said in the book he wrote.

Content and Structure

Added to the decision regarding the right way to read Revelation and due attention to the time element in the book, a third insight which opens some doors to this book relates to its structure.

The time references in Revelation prove that almost the whole of the action of the book—right up to the binding of Satan (20:1–3)—takes place within a relatively short period that was not far in the future when John wrote. I do not insist on taking the numbers literally. Perhaps they are intended for comparative purposes—“a little time” (6:11), forty two months (11:2; 13:5), twelve hundred and sixty days (11:3; 12:6), three and a half years (12:14), “a short time” (12:12) as opposed to a thousand years (20:1–6). The persecutions would last for three and a half years. Then the enemies of the church would fall and the martyrs would reign for a thousand years.

The literary structure of Revelation reinforces this impression with regard to the time span of Revelation initially created by the time references of the book. In other words, the structure of Revelation also suggests that the book deals with events falling into a relatively brief time span rather than action spread over a long period.

The book begins with a vision of the glorified Christ commissioning John to write to the seven churches of Asia (1:9–20). This commission is followed by messages to each of the seven churches, warning and preparing them for the coming crisis (chs. 2–3). Then come the visions of God on the throne (ch. 4) and of the crucified Christ taking a book from the hand of God in order to bring its contents to pass (ch. 5).

This book contains God's purpose relating to the complete establishment of the kingdom of God and the putting down of the enemies that have arisen against the divine government—an explanation established by what happens when the book is opened (chs. 6–11) and especially the goal toward which the action is directed (10:7 & 11:15–19). The book was sealed with seven seals. As the seals are broken, things begin to happen. The first four reveal forces operating in the world under the control of Christ (6:1–8); the fifth, the cry of the martyrs for judgment on their enemies (6:9–11); the sixth, an anticipation of that judgment (6:12–17). Two consolatory visions provide reassurance for the servants of God in view of the terrible forces to be turned loose on the world (ch. 7).

The fifth and sixth seals have made us look for a vindication of the blood of the martyrs (6:9–11) and judgment on their enemies (6:12–17). But when the seventh seal is loosed and the book stands fully opened, judgment becomes a long drawn out affair with a series of trumpets signaling various plagues affecting those dwelling on the earth, but from which God's servants are exempt (chs. 8–9). John is given a new commission to proclaim the consummation of God's purpose at the seventh trumpet (ch. 10). The experience of Christ must be repeated in his witnesses (11:1–13), but when the seventh trumpet sounds the cry of the martyrs is answered and judgment comes upon their enemies (11:14–19).

This sketch ought to show that the trumpets are included in the sealed book (ch. 5) and the trumpets begin to sound when the book is fully opened. The rest of the action of Revelation up to Chapter 20 does not advance beyond the seventh trumpet, but only amplifies what is already summarized in 11:15–19. But before this elaboration, the progress of the action of Revelation is suspended in Chapters 12–14 in order to provide some information necessary to understanding the struggle between the church and its enemies.

This struggle is the earthly expression of the spiritual conflict between Christ and the devil. The devil is defeated at the cross (12:1–12)—So verse 10 explains the “war in heaven”!—and is cast down to the earth where he rages against the church (vv. 13–13:1a), “having great wrath, knowing that he has but a short time” (v. 12). That explains the persecutions.

The chief agents through which this wrath is manifested are a beast (= king, 17:11) that comes up out of the sea (13:1–10) and another beast out of the earth that enforces the worship of the first beast (13:11–18).

Over against these enemies stand the Lamb and his faithful followers (14:1–5). The approach of judgment is announced by three angels (14:6–13) and two visions of judgment are seen (14:14–20).

When the seven bowls of wrath are poured out (chs. 15–16), the wrath of God is finished (15:1). These seven bowls, therefore, are the final judgment against the persecutors. The seven bowls are not something entirely new. They are an elaboration of the judgment of the last trumpet (11:15–19). This judgment was not described in Chapter 11 except for the brief summary at verse 19. The proof that the bowls are an elaboration of the last trumpet lies in a comparison of 15:5 and 16:17–21 with 11:19. Every element of the judgment of the seventh trumpet reappears in the bowls—temple, ark of covenant, lightnings, voices, thunders, earthquake, hail.

Chapters 17–20:3 are a still further elaboration of certain details of this judgment—the fall of Babylon (chs. 17–18), the defeat of the beast and the false prophet (ch. 19) and the binding of Satan (20:1–3).

Are you beginning to grasp the structure of Revelation? It is like a great painting that covers a whole wall. You have to stand at the opposite wall to see it all. Then you walk up to it and get a closer look at details. Then you take out a magnifying glass and study certain aspects even closer.

So with Revelation. We are first shown the whole big picture—at least the main outlines. Then we are given a close look at details. Later some details will be magnified even more. Here and there visions are inserted to provide information needed for understanding the struggle the church faces.

Revelation is, therefore, not a continuous account of the history of the church through the ages. After 11:15–19, succeeding sections do

not advance the action beyond the point reached there (until ch. 20),¹ but focus in on details. The book provides an intensive treatment of a limited period of the church's history. It depicts the conflict between the church and its enemies, ending in the defeat of every enemy and with the martyrs, who only seemed to have met defeat, reigning on thrones for a thousand years (20:4–6). Then Satan is loosed only to be finally destroyed (20:7–10). Then comes the final judgment (20:11–15). The closing vision depicts the final realization of the purpose of the Creator (21:1–22:5). The Creator is on the throne (ch. 4). And he will not permit his purpose to be frustrated (See page 65 for a diagram of the structure).

The “Waterloo” of Modern Speculation on Revelation

My first proposal was that we should first read Revelation to see what John expected to happen in the future rather than looking back on it through two thousand years of history; then look at history in the light of Revelation rather than interpreting Revelation in the light of history. The application of this principle leads us to the more or less definite time frame within which John expected his prophecies to be fulfilled. The evidence of Revelation is that everything up to the thousand year reign (ch. 20) was expected to occur not long after Revelation was written.

This attention to time element in Revelation fixes some limits within which details must be understood. We may not find explanations for some of them, but we know where to locate them in history.

¹ I am beginning to question the exception I made in my original study guide, which is implied in “until ch. 20.” I continue to hold that “the things which must shortly come to pass” must refer to the conflict between the church and its persecutors, and the downfall of enemies faced in the first century, rather than to the final consummation at the end of time. But I see no reason why the description of what happens when the seventh trumpet sounds should not anticipate and encompass the entirety of the judgment on those enemies, including the final consummation (chs. 20–22). Revelation 11:15–19 would then be a summary view of the whole of the judgment, but the more detailed picture found in the remainder of the book will reveal that this judgment is more complex than one might conclude from the initial summary view.

This one point stops fanatics and speculators dead in their tracks. Consider some examples: (1) Though some questions about the thousand year reign (20:1–6) may remain unanswered, we do know where to put it in history, for the binding of Satan was not far future when John wrote (6:9–11; 12:12 with 20:1–3; 13:5 with 17:7–11). (2) If the persecuting monster expected by John was not far future when Revelation was written (17:7–11) and would continue for only a short time when he arrived (13:5), then we must not look for this beast in the twentieth century or at the end of time. (3) Whatever the explanation of “Armageddon” (16:12–16), we know its place in history. (4) The United Nations came ages too late to be found in Revelation (Jehovah’s Witness view of 17:12). (5) Revelation 11:3 cannot be evidence in support of the expectation of prophets in the twentieth century (as one man argued). Even if we cannot identify or explain the two witnesses, when proper heed is given to the time element contained in Revelation itself, we will certainly know better than to look for them at a time so remote from the first century.

In short, learn the references to time in Revelation and you will be able to shut the mouths of fanatics, speculators and futurists. The importance of this point in its bearing on dispensationalism alone can hardly be overstated. Revelation 20 is the only reference to a “millennium” in the Bible. Take that away from the dispensationalists and they will have to reconsider every Biblical passage and revise every chart they have ever used. While they are busy with their task the silence on the air waves will be golden.

The Beast of Revelation

The chief agent of the devil in his persecution of the church was a wild beast that came up out of the sea (Rev. 13:1–10). The beast represented a king (17:9–11). The evidence of Revelation is that the beast was not far future (17:7–11) and would have only a short career (13:5). With the time frame in which we should look for historical applications established (cf. page 13), may I point out some interesting coincidences between Revelation and first century A. D. history without seeming too dogmatic?

Roman Caesars of the First Century

Augustus	27 BC–14 AD	Otho	69 AD
Tiberius	14–37 AD	Vitellius	69 AD
Caligula	37–41 AD	Vespasian	69–79 AD
Claudius	41–54 AD	Titus	79–81 AD
Nero	54–68 AD	Domitian	81–96 AD
Galba	68–69 AD		

Death-stroke of the Beast

The beast had seven heads (13:1)—one “as though it had been smitten unto death,” but the “death-stroke was healed” and the world was amazed (13:3). In all likelihood this description is an allusion to the events of 69 AD—the “Year of the Four Emperors.” The mismanagement of Nero’s last years had bred revolt and Nero’s suicide in 68 AD was followed by civil war. Four different emperors claimed the throne in 69 AD. The empire was shaken to its foundations. Order was, however, reestablished under Vespasian. The death-stroke was healed and the world marveled.

The Nero Legend

“The beast,” John was told, “was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss ... and he was, and is not, and shall come” (17:8). The seven heads are seven kings—“the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come.” The beast is himself an eighth king and “of the seven” (vv. 10–11). I have considerable confidence that this description is somehow related to the so-called “Nero” legend.

Certain tyrants in history have been so bad that, when they died, the world could hardly believe that they were really dead. After Hitler’s suicide, for example, the rumor was circulated that he was alive, perhaps hiding somewhere in South America, planning another effort. So it was after Nero’s death. Some would not believe he was dead. He was in hiding, soon to return and reclaim the throne. Pretenders arose, claiming to be Nero, and gathered a following. This “Nero” legend is documented by first century Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius.

I shall begin my work with the year (i. e., 69 AD) in which Servius Galba and Titus Vinius were consuls, ...

The story upon which I embark is one rich in disaster, ... Four emperors perished violently. There were three civil wars, ... and thanks to the activities of a charlatan masquerading as Nero, even Parthia was on the brink of declaring war.²

About this time Achaia and Asia were upset by a false alarm. It was rumoured that Nero was on his way to them. There had been conflicting stories about his death, and so numbers of people imagined—and believed—that he was alive. ... On this occasion the man concerned was a slave from Pontus, or, according to other accounts, a freedman from Italy. The circumstance that he was a harpist and singer by profession, when added to a facial resemblance, made the imposture all the more plausible. ...³

Nero died at the age of thirty-two, on the anniversary of Octavia's murder. In the widespread general rejoicing, citizens ran through the streets wearing caps of liberty, as though they were freed slaves. But a few faithful friends used to lay spring and summer flowers on his grave for some years, and had statues made of him, wearing his fringed gown, which they put up on the Rostra; they even continued to circulate his edicts, pretending he was still alive and would soon return to confound his enemies. ... Twenty years later, when I was a young man, a mysterious individual came forward claiming to be Nero; and so magical was the sound of his name in the Parthians' ears that they supported him to the best of their ability, and were most reluctant to concede Roman demands for his extradition.⁴

John did not, of course, believe such a fable. But he does seem to make use of it, for it contained an element of truth. A persecuting monster like Nero was on the horizon. Not Nero himself, but a second

² Tacitus, *Histories*, i. 2 (Penguin paperback, 21f).

³ Tacitus, *Histories*, ii. 8f (Penguin paperback, 85f).

⁴ Suetonius, *Nero*, 57, in *The Twelve Caesars* (Penguin paperback, 240f).

Nero would appear—another king in whom the spirit and character of Nero would be revived. He would be an eighth king, but “of the seven,” a second Nero—likely Domitian.

Number of the Beast

“Revelation 13:17f., 15:2 refer to numerology which was quite familiar to the people of ancient times; according to it, since each Greek letter has a numerical value, a name could be replaced by a number representing the total of the numerical values of the letters making up the name” (Arndt & Gingrich, *Lexicon*, 106). One love-smitten fellow scribbled on a wall in ancient Pompeii a Greek sentence which translates, “I love her whose number is 545” (Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 277).

In the light of the evident allusion to the Nero legend discussed above, perhaps we should consider the solution to this riddle given in Grimm-Thayer, *Lexicon*, 669. The number 666 is called “a mystical number the meaning of which is clear when it is written in Hebrew letters ... ‘Nero Caesar.’”

Date of Revelation

Debate over the date of Revelation will continue. But does not the book itself demand a date between the persecutors, one past and one future, rather than during the reign of either? And should not this internal evidence take precedence over any external testimony?

OUTLINE, NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE TEXT OF REVELATION

Introduction Revelation 1:1–8

Subject of the Book (1–3)

1. What does the Revelation deal with, according to verse 1a?⁵
2. What four stages were involved in the giving of the Revelation? (1–2).
3. What was John’s role? (2).
4. What is the time element of the Revelation? (1a, 3b).
- 5a. According to verse 3, what was this book expected to do for its readers? Is its purpose speculative or practical?
- 5b. Judging from verse 3, did John expect the Revelation to be understandable to his readers? Explain.
- 5c. After all, what is the meaning of “Revelation”?⁶

Address to the Churches (4–8)

1. To whom was the Revelation addressed? (4a).
2. From what three persons were grace and peace wished by John for his readers? (4b–5a).
- 2a. With regard to the first, see on verse 8 below.
- 2b. With regard to the second, compare the relation to Christ indicated in 3:1b, the symbolism of 4:5b (with footnote) & 5:6, and the symbolism for the church in 1:20b.

⁵ Some notice a resemblance between 1a and Daniel 2:28–30, 45–47. As you study through Revelation, watch for relationships between this book and the visions of Daniel. Compare and contrast the time element.

⁶ Greek *apokalupsis*, an uncovering or unveiling.

- 2c. The descriptive titles of Jesus Christ given in verse 5 are each important to the content of the book. List the three titles, with brief explanations of their significance.⁷
- 3a. What has Jesus done, for which he is praised in verses 5b–6?
- 3b. What would be the significance of this description of the church in light of the comparison with Exodus 19:5–6?
- 4a. What yet lies ahead? (7).
- 4b. Consider whether verse 7 may provide the initial indication of what was referred to as “the things which must shortly come to pass” (1a), which were “at hand” (3b).
- 4c. When parallel passages such as Matthew 24:30 with verse 34; 26:64; Revelation 2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11; 22:7, 12, 20 are compared, would this coming seem to be limited to Jesus’ final coming?
- 5a. The Lord God, the Almighty—evidently (after 4b–5a) the Father rather than Jesus—speaks in verse 8. How does he describe himself?
- 5b. How is this language explained in later passages? (21:6 & 22:13).
- 5c. What is the significance of this description in relation to history?

Introductory Vision of the Glorified Christ, and John’s Commission to Write Revelation 1:9-20

This vision of the glorified Christ is comparable to the experiences of ancient prophets such as Moses (Ex. 3–4), Isaiah (Is. 6), Jeremiah (Jer. 1) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 1–3), who received visions of deity, commissioning them for their task. Thus John writes with prophetic authority.

Self-description and Commission to Write (9–11)

- 1a. How does John describe himself? (9).
- 1b. What is indicated about the conditions when John wrote?

⁷ Consult also Psalm 89:27 and Colossians 1:18 for the significance of the terminology.

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- 1c. What is indicated about the state of the “kingdom” when this word is coupled with “tribulation” and “patience”?
- 1d. Why was John on the island called Patmos?
- 2a. What is meant by “in the Spirit” (10 with 4:2)?
- 2b. What did John hear under the influence of the Spirit?
- 2c. What was John ordered to do? (11)

Vision of the Glorified Christ (12–16)

Read carefully the description of the Christ (12–16). Picture it in your mind. Point out details:

1. Standing amidst seven golden lampstands.⁸
2. “One like unto a son of man”: Consult Daniel 7:13–14. Perhaps the most important reference for the understanding of this portrait.
3. “A robe reaching to the feet” (AG, 680, on *poderes*).
4. Golden girdle.
5. Head and hair.
6. Eyes “as a flame of fire”: Cf. 2:18; 19:12.
7. Feet “like unto burnished brass”: Cf. 2:18. “He treadeth the winepress of the wrath of God” (19:15; cf. 14:19f).
8. His voice.
9. Seven stars in his right hand. Cf. 2:1.
10. “Out of his mouth ... a sharp two-edged sword”: Cf. 2:12, 16; 19:15.
11. His countenance.

John’s Reaction and the Reassuring Words (17–18)

1. Describe the impression made upon John by this vision of the glorified Messiah.

⁸ Grk *luchnia* is not a candlestick, but a “lampstand upon which lamps were placed or hung” (AG, 483).

2. The reassuring words from the Christ are a self-description. What is to be made of the fact that the description is identical with that of the Lord God, the Almighty? See 4, 8; 4:8; and compare 21:6f (Father) with 22:13 (Jesus).
3. Point out the importance of the description of Christ in verses 17–18 for churches facing severe persecution, perhaps even martyrdom (cf. 9).
4. Again, compare Daniel’s vision of “one like unto a son of man” (Dan. 7:13–14). What is the relation of John’s vision to that of Daniel?

Commission Renewed (19–20)

1. Observe the connection with the preceding verses. John’s commission is renewed (from 10f) after the vision of the glorified Messiah (12–16) and Jesus’ explanation (17–18). What effect would the vision and the explanation have on this order?
2. Name the categories of things John was to write, and give thought to the reference of each.
3. A “mystery” is explained, involving two aspects of the vision. What is the explanation of the seven stars?⁹

⁹ The explanation of the angels of the churches is doubtful. But any identification of these angels with a human figure, whether the messengers carrying the book to the churches or some human official in the churches, would seem to be ruled out by the consistent usage of the book of Revelation, in which angels seem always to refer to superhuman messengers or servants of God—in other words, angels in the usual sense. Observe, further, that each church has an angel (2:1, 8, 12, etc.), and the angel of the church seems somehow to be identified with the church itself. The letters (chs. 2 & 3) are addressed to the angel of the church and yet to the church itself: “I know your works ... your tribulation ..., where you dwell ...,” etc. J. B. Lightfoot has distinguished stars and lampstands thus: “The star is the suprasensual counterpart, the heavenly

Note continued on next page

- 4a. What about the seven candlesticks, or better, lampstands?
- 4b. The Greek is better translated “lampstands” than “candlesticks.” Comment on the significance of the imagery, taking also into consideration the reference to “seven lamps of fire” (in 4:5b).
5. Discuss the relationship of Jesus to the stars and the lampstands (20 with 12–13 & 16a).

representative; the lamp, the earthly realisation, the outward embodiment” (St Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians, 200).

The closest Biblical parallel would seem to be the angels or princes of nations in Daniel 10:10–13, 20–21; cf. 12:1. The conflicts between nations are paralleled by unseen struggles between the angelic princes of these nations. The latter perhaps represent the spiritual conflict that is going on behind the scenes, unseen by human eye, when nations are at war. Might not the angels of the churches be explained in similar light? The angels representing the churches exercise a sort of guardianship, as spiritual forces working behind the scenes, and therefore identified with the fortunes of the churches they represent.

See further Appendix A on The Angels of the Seven Churches (p. 115).