CHAPTER ONE

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

This very first verse provides us with the source of the revelation, the agent through whom it came and the person to whom it was revealed: God the Creator, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and John the evangelist. We also learn that the purpose of this revelation was to show His servants what would shortly begin. It is interesting to note that the phrase "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" is only found three times in the Bible. Other than in this verse, Peter uses the phrase twice in his first letter (1 Peter 1:7 & 13). It means "the revelation that Jesus makes," and is used that way in all three instances. However, by reading the remainder of this first verse of Revelation we clearly see that God the Father is the absolute source of the revelation. Jesus is revealing it to the evangelist John for the purpose of distributing it to Christians so that they may know what is about to begin.

We know the word "revelation" stems from the Greek word "Apokalupsis", a New Testament word meaning "to reveal, or to remove the cover from, or make naked." When used in the New Testament, it is almost universally accepted to mean the "unveiling of divine mysteries," but not mysteries in the ordinary sense of the word. Rather, it refers to the revealing of something that has been insinuated, but up until that point hidden or "veiled" in such a fashion that it was not yet fully understood. In Ephesians 3, Paul tells us "by revelation he made known to me the mystery". The mystery he speaks of is the breaking down of that "wall of partition" that had stood between the Jew and Gentile (because of the Law of Moses) before being revealed to him. We can't know with any degree of certainty just how or when Paul received that revelation, but most think it was on the road to Damascus when the Lord told Ananias that Paul was to preach to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). That same "mystery" was also revealed to Peter in his vision on the housetop in Acts 10. However, the plan to unite Jew and Gentile revealed to Peter and Paul wasn't a new one. The Old Testament prophecies contained

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hints and promises of the uniting of all people but the reader at that time was not ready to understand it.

Consider the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. Even though it was multi-faceted, you will recognize the last part as the hint of what was to come: "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." The phrase "all the families of the earth" encompasses everyone, implying Jew and Gentile, even though that promise was made long before those terms were used.

Here in this first verse of Revelation, we are told by Jesus that He is the revealer of a message from God to be written and delivered to His servants. Actually, He is both the revealer of the mysteries and a vital part of them since He is at the center of this entire book. Using signs, scenes and symbols, Jesus will reveal in detail what is to shortly take place. Even though this point is arguable, my opinion is that prior to this book, most if not all of the unveiling done in scripture was to an individual. This revelation, however, is for everyone who reads the book and understands the symbolism.

In the phrase "To show unto His servants" the term "servant" is used by Jesus to specifically identify those to whom these mysteries will be revealed. Often overlooked in this text is the restrictive overtone. By indicating those who will be shown the meaning of the message, Jesus is also indicating that some will be excluded from understanding it. Restrictive statements in the Bible should never be taken for granted. A simple example is evident in God's command to Noah before the flood. We are told that because Noah found grace in the sight of God, he was told to build an ark of "gopher wood" so that he and his family might be saved from the flood. When God said, "build the ark of gopher wood," Noah understood that God meant gopher wood exclusively. He was not to use oak, pine, maple, teak, or any other kind of wood, because he recognized the restriction contained in God's statement. Gopher wood may have been a particular tree at that time, or it may have been a certain type of "layering" of the wood, similar to plywood. We can't be certain, but whatever gopher wood was, Noah built the ark with it.

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That same type of restriction applies here in Revelation 1:1. When Jesus said the purpose of the revelation was to show "His servants" the message, we should realize that those who were <u>not</u> "His servants" were not supposed to understand the message contained in it. Therefore, the message was framed (veiled) in such a way that the intended recipients were the only ones able to see through the symbolism and uncover the substance of the message contained in the book.

The message in question is "things which must shortly come to pass." This statement should be accepted in its simplicity but sometimes is not, depending on the "views" (mentioned in the introduction to this study) taken in regard to how Revelation should be interpreted. I maintain the proper understanding of this phrase is simply what it appears to be: a message that will show us everything God has planned to quickly begin to happen.

John also records Jesus telling him that the revealing of these mysteries was to be "signified by His angel." The word "angel" means "messenger," and certainly Jesus is a messenger of God. As Jesus pointed out during His personal ministry, He was doing and teaching that which came from His Father. In this instance then, He is the messenger revealing to John that which was sent from his Father. So He is certainly an angel, but as the "things" are being revealed, He will also present Himself as the King of all the righteous. The Greek word translated "signified" is "semaino," defined by Thayer as "to indicate," or "to give a sign." From this definition we should understand that the revelation was to come to John through signs, symbols, and figures. Some writers even use the term "sign-ified" to impress that meaning upon us. The import of the term "signified," then, is that the message was not simply told to John in plain language. Instead, it was revealed to him through signs, symbols and scenes, in keeping with that restrictive element mentioned above. Knowing the meaning of these signs and symbols is the key to understanding this book.

At the time the book of Revelation was written, which I believe was very near the end of the first century (circa 96 AD), the ones to whom it was directed recognized and understood the signs used, so the message for them was understood. Those for whom these signs and symbols were **not** a part of their heritage could only view this book as mysterious and difficult

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to understand. So, unless we are to fall into that second category, we must ascertain what the signs truly meant to those early Christians in order to glean the treasure found in this book.

VERSE 2 - "Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw." This sentence is simply John's affirmation that he fulfilled his mission. He faithfully and unerringly recorded what he saw and heard. The words "bearing record" or "testifying" are weighty words that assure us that John's descriptions are accurate.

VERSE 3 - "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." Adam Clarke described the word "blessed" in this verse as the idea of "happiness or being fortunate" because there is encouragement and assurance to be gained from reading or hearing the message. Both the reader of the prophecy and the hearer of the prophecy are mentioned. It is my supposition that a few diligently prepared copies of this book were passed between the congregations of Christians at that time. I agree with Spence when he says it was likely "they were read aloud in the assemblies" and then passed on to another church. The idea presented is that all those exposed to this message were potentially blessed by it if they understood it and then proceeded to live their lives based on it.

The blessing is granted to those who "keep" this prophecy. Therein lays the condition of God's promise: keeping the word equals obeying it. The Greek word translated "prophecy" in this passage is actually "prophēteia" and according to Thayer is defined as "a discourse ... from divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of God, whether by reproving and admonishing the wicked, or comforting the afflicted or revealing things hidden; especially by foretelling future events."

The word "prophecy" does not have to imply a prediction of future events, but in this particular case, since the carrying out of the message is soon to begin, there are definitely predictive issues involved. The last part of verse 3 states, "...and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." Let's think about that phrase "the time is at hand."

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If someone in your family were expecting a baby, you would be anxiously awaiting its arrival for many months. But once you were told "the time is at hand", would you not recognize that that day was imminent? Those words would serve as your signal to "spring into action" to make sure everything was done in preparation for what was to come.

With that in mind, we must recognize that the reader here was being informed that the time was quickly approaching. The question is, time for what? The answer is, for "things" to begin to occur. The time frame for these "things" is anywhere from the end of the first century (when the message was written) to the end of the world. So, we must accept that a portion of these things have, in our time in the 21st century, already occurred. And, by extension, since the world has not yet ended, we must conclude that others are still <u>yet to occur</u>.

VERSE 4 - "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;" It is generally accepted that this verse marks the beginning of John's message, but we should also recognize that without the authority granted in the previous three verses, it would not carry the weight necessary to accomplish its purpose.

John only vaguely identifies himself here and in fact, in all of his writings. It has been said that the apostle John was well known, respected, and recognized by those to whom he wrote. Contrary to the apostle Paul, who frequently felt the need to affirm himself as an apostle of Christ, it appears that John never felt that need. Neither of John's three letters nor the gospel which bears his name have a formal statement as to the writer's identity. It appears as though the long period of time John spent working in and among the very early churches led him to believe that they would be familiar enough with him to recognize his work. Some of the early historical writers, however, have suggested that John's letters came in a special wrapping with his name on a seal, and perhaps that is true.

Most of those early scholars and historians agree that all of the writings credited to the apostle John were written very close to the same time – late in the first century. It is also possible all of his writings were collected and distributed together, as a group, shortly after that

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exile. If that is true, and if there had been some sort of identification attached to the outer wrapping, then they would certainly have been much more easily accepted as the work of John. But since we can't be sure whether those things happened, we must rely on internal evidence when it exists, and trust the scholars when it doesn't.

The "seven churches of Asia" were briefly discussed earlier as an example of the symbolic number seven, but perhaps a more formal introduction might be in order. Since John only mentions seven churches in the book of Revelation, some have reached the conclusion that there were only seven churches in Asia. That, of course, cannot be true since the book of Acts coupled with Paul's writings list more than seven. In those writings we find churches at Colossae, Miletus and Troas, all located in Asia, and when added to the seven listed in chapters 2-3 of Revelation, we know there were at least ten actual churches in Asia, and probably more. Even if we consider the possibility that some had been disbanded from the threat of persecution, we still should not presume that there were only seven churches in Asia.

As outlined in the introduction, numbers are an important part of the "veiling" used throughout this apocryphal book and the symbolic number seven represents "perfect, in the sense of completeness," so the "completeness" of the number seven is being used with the "seven" churches mentioned in the upcoming chapters. Taken collectively, the qualities and characteristics of the seven churches outlined in the next two chapters could describe any church, then or even now. These churches represent characteristics or traits found in all churches. So it appears that Jesus is using the "completeness" suggested by the use of the number seven to emphasize that all congregations need to eliminate any non-conforming practice so that the church – all congregations – wholly abide by the scriptures. The church that Christ established is pure. If we are a part of that church, then we must adhere to ALL traits that Jesus laid out and not just pick the ones we like.

We also find in this verse that John has been instructed to tell those listeners that "grace and peace" will be the result of hearing and applying the words of this prophecy to their lives. The word translated "grace" in this passage is the Greek word "charis" from which we get our English word "charity." Thayer says "charis" means "...that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness, good will, loving kindness, favor."

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The word translated "peace" in this verse is the Greek word "eirene" and means a "state of ...tranquility, exemption from the rage and havoc of war; peace between individuals, harmony, concord, security, safety, prosperity." You may find it interesting to know that the Greek word "eirene" corresponds to the Hebrew word "Shalom" which, of course, means "peace." Christians can have that kind of peace in their lives because Christians first love God, then each other. There should be no discord, hard feelings, backbiting, or harshness between Christians. Christians are given grace, which is the loving favor of God. We are promised salvation and a home in heaven if we are able to live righteously in His sight. There should be no worry about outside persecution, because even if we are killed for our stance, that is just the last step leading into heaven!

This verse further identifies the source of that "grace and peace" which comes to Christians: It is stated here as being "from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come." Who is being spoken of here? Every time I asked that question in a Bible class, the most frequent answer is "Jesus." Well, the truth is the grace and peace being spoken of comes from all of the Godhead – not just a part of it. In this verse and the next, we are being shown the symbolism of the number "three." Remember, the number three represents "whole or completeness, in the sense of enough." The Godhead is the Holy Trinity, but verse 4 mentions only the first two of the Godhead entities, God the Father, being talked about here as the One "which is, and which was, and which is to come." Next is the Holy Spirit who is described as "the seven Spirits which are before His throne;" another symbol – the number seven – representing "perfect and complete." In verse 5 we see the third and final entity of the Godhead explicitly named: "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead..." But that's not all! There is more to consider about this particular usage of the symbol "three:" Here in verse 4 pay attention to the phrase which identifies God, the Father. That phrase also consists of three statements: He is. He was. And He is to come. Another symbolic three which describes the eternal nature of God:

- 1. He is, present tense, indicating that God is presently alive and in Heaven.
- 2. He was, past tense, indicates He has always been.
- 3. He is to come, future tense, indicating He will always be.

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God is alive without beginning or end, He is eternal. In Exodus 3, while Moses stood before the burning bush, God told him to go into Egypt. Moses asked, "What shall I tell them when I am asked who sent me?" God's response was to tell them, "I AM has sent me to you." The phrase, "I AM" is another eternal phrase – without beginning or end.

Then, still in verse 4, there is another entity of the Godhead mentioned, The Holy Spirit! We must not overlook the conjunction "and" in the statement "and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne." This adds the Holy Spirit as part of the source of grace and peace. Rather than looking at this as seven individual and separate spirits, the "seven" used here represents the perfection, the completeness, and the universality of the Holy Spirit, working alongside God. Furthermore, we see the "grace and peace" being supplied to the seven churches, the "completeness," or the "whole" of the Church, represented by the reference to the "seven" churches in Asia. There remains one more entity to complete the "Enough" that Deity demands for the Trinity.

VERSES 5 & 6 - "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

"And from Jesus Christ:" This completes the "Trinity" concept of the Godhead. Grace and peace are being supplied by all three of the entities that make up the Godhead. But we are still not through with the symbol "three" in this verse. It was used earlier to confirm and tie The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit together as the Godhead, and now we see it used in the description of Jesus. He is described by three phrases:

1. "The first begotten of the dead" - Jesus was held in a tomb for a long enough period of time to prove His death. How long? Three days! But the Hebrew writer says Jesus, "brought to naught him that had the power over death, that is, the devil." (Heb. 2:1) This phrase reinforces the promise that Jesus is the "first fruits"

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of them that sleep." (1 Cor. 15:20) The fact that Jesus has already returned from the dead insures the home in Heaven for the righteous.

- 2. "The prince of the kings of the earth" From His victory over death, Jesus has ascended to God's right hand, where He now sits as the ruler above all of the kings of earth. It does not matter what earthly rulers are saying or doing, Jesus is above them. And because of that, Jesus has the power to save us from our sins and give us that eternal home in Heaven, as He has promised. Through the shedding of His blood, Jesus releases us from our sins by His blood. We have forgiveness of sin. We are no longer servants of sin. Jesus has set us free! He paid the price with His life; therefore through the washing away of our sins we are no longer alienated from God, but are redeemed. Regardless of our situation on earth we only have to remain faithful, resting assured that we will one day be with God around His throne, because Jesus is victorious and the faithful will be with Him!
- 3. "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father" Here, in the first part of verse 6, we see the third element – Jesus Christ made us "kings and priests unto God." The phrase "made us kings" as it is stated here is not found elsewhere in the Bible. Both the Apostle Peter (2 Peter 1:11) and the Apostle Paul (Eph. 5:5) state that Christians are called to be in the "Kingdom of Christ." In 1 Peter 2:5, Peter wrote "... you are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ." There, Peter refers to Christians as a "priesthood," and just a few verses later (1 Peter 2:9), a "royal priesthood." I conclude, then, that the reference here in verse 6 is symbolic, perhaps with the meaning that we are collectively a "kingdom of priests." If so, then each member of the Church shares in the eternal priesthood unto God, His Father. The sentence in verses 5-6 makes a fresh start. In addition to His "washing us" from our sins, He makes us a part of His kingdom and is deserving of our admiration and praise, hence the phrase "to Him be the glory and dominion:" Glory is described by Thayer as "Splendor or brightness and its brilliance as bright as the stars." Referring back to the beginning of the sentence (verse 5) we see the

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one to whom we owe this glory: "Unto Him that loved us and washed..."

Obviously it is Jesus the Christ.

The word "dominion" in the phrase "...unto him be glory and dominion for ever and ever" refers to the strength, power and might of Jesus in His rule and His sovereignty. How long will Christ be deserving of our admiration? How long is He to have dominion? The phrase appearing in most translations is "for ever and ever." To our mortal minds the term "forever" takes the meaning "until we die." We cannot promise beyond that. Sometimes, we add that extra "ever," ("forever and ever") for emphasis. The Greek word used in the original text, and translated "ever" in this instance is "aeon," from which we get the word "eon." We typically use that word to describe an age, such as "The Patriarchal Age" or the "Mosaic Age", but always finite periods of time during which certain things happened. But in the book of Revelation, this phrase always appears in the original Greek in what is referred to as a double plural. The Greek word used ("aeon") is a plural word in itself, actually meaning "ages" – more than one. That is why the English translations often render the phrase "for ever and ever." But the actual Greek expression that John wrote was "eis aiōn aiōn." In the original Greek manuscripts John wrote the Greek word "aion" twice even though the Greek word "aiōn" already means "ages" plural. Therefore, in English, the statement would be "unto ages ages" forming the double plural which is unique, and indicates an unending duration. We will find this same phrase used in eleven other places in the book of Revelation and we will talk about each one as we come to them, but keep in mind that the idea is to convey eternal, or unending. Jesus has established His kingdom, the Church, and its existence is unending! Yes, the church exists here on earth, in our "time orientated" world, but in truth, His kingdom will last beyond time - unto the ages of the ages - stretching into eternity.

John then closes the verse with the word, "Amen" or "so be it," indicating the certainty of what has just been said and his agreement with it.

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

The word "behold" is used to focus the reader's attention on what is about to be said. It is similar to "Pay attention!" The subject of the reader's attention in this text is the Lord's return! John wrote, "He cometh with clouds and every eye shall see Him." We the readers are expected to glean a two-fold meaning:

- 1. Jesus will assuredly return, and...
- 2. When He does, "He will come with clouds."

Notice John did not say Jesus was going to "come with the clouds," but rather he said Jesus was going to "come with clouds." While it is not a common phrase in the Old Testament, it does appear multiple times there, and each time it carries the meaning of coming to execute judgment. It is used in that context in several places, such as Isaiah 19:1; Ezekiel 30:3; 32:7; and 34:12. It is used in the same way in the New Testament in Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:24; and here in Revelation 1:7. The typical 1st century Roman would not be knowledgeable enough in the Jewish scriptures to understand that this text is assuring Christians of the judgment that will be executed upon those who stand against righteousness. Unfortunately, the tendency when this verse is discussed is to concentrate on the "every eye shall see Him" rather than the much more important concept of judgment, and that causes many to completely miss what is truly being said. There is no doubt that every eye will see His return. But the ultimate purpose of His return is to execute judgment.

In regard to the "seeing" of Jesus' return; "blepo" is the Greek word commonly rendered "see," but not in this verse. Instead, John used the word "optomahee" in this passage, which carries a much stronger meaning than "blepo." The word "optomahee" suggests standing with eyes wide open and mouths gaping in amazement. We are in awe and can't stop looking! We are standing in astonishment and expectation. Something special is happening. Those who are alive on the earth at the time of the second coming of our Savior will unquestioningly be seeing in the sense of the word "optomahee" as they gaze into the heavens.

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In I Thessalonians 4 & 5 and again in II Thessalonians, the apostle Paul gives a good description of the second coming of Christ. One point made in these passages is this: even though we don't know when Christ will return, we do know it will not happen quietly! There will be shouts. There will be the sounding of trumpets. All who are alive at the time, believers and non-believers alike will know of it instantly. A full understanding of what is occurring will quickly follow – because the Lord Jesus has returned to separate the sheep from the goats and pronounce His judgment!

VERSE 8 - "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."

We have already discussed the symbolism in regard to the eternal nature of the Godhead. The terms used here apply to Jesus, as He is the one giving the revelation. Some have difficulty applying these terms to Him, believing they refer only to God, the Father. But, if we take into account the reading of Revelation 2:8; 22:13-16, we will see that it is indeed Jesus the Christ being referenced in this instance. Furthermore, in verse 1 we saw that the revealer of the mysteries was Jesus Christ even though God was the originator of the revelation.

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

In this verse John introduces himself for the third time since the book began eight verses earlier, which in itself is unusual for him. In this instance, the purpose is to claim a kinship to those to whom he is writing. He calls himself their brother, their companion in tribulation, and also their companion in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. I hope you recognized the symbolic number "three" in this statement. (Having already established the importance of numbers, I encourage you to read carefully as all such referenes won't be as obvious.) These three things are enough for them to accept the writer as the John they know. Those to whom this book is written know that John is their brother and companion, an elder and evangelist, even an apostle by office. Yet he puts himself on a level with the ordinary members of these

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churches as one who shared with them all that they are experiencing. Yes, he even shares in

their tribulation. At the time of these visions, he was a prisoner in the isle of Patmos. This image is from Google Earth and shows the Aegean Sea. To help you picture where this is, Greece is in the left upper corner and Turkey in the upper right corner. That little red speck in center-right is the small island called Patmos. It is interesting that John gives the exact description of where he was. Perhaps he



thought they might recognize it as a place of exile. His wording of the reference is also of interest. In the KJV it is correctly rendered that John "was in the isle that is called Patmos." Some bible versions have it rendered as being "on" the isle rather than "in" the isle. The Greek word describing why he was in Patmos is "eyevounv," and the best translation would be that John "came to be" in Patmos, indicating Patmos was not his ordinary place to be, nor was it his choice to be there. Instead, it was through a series of circumstances that he "came to be" in Patmos. This is also the same Greek word used in verse ten where John says he was "in the Spirit" which, of course, would indicate that this was not his ordinary condition. But John does give us a clue as to why he was there in Patmos: He says he was there "for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ," indicating that he was put there for (because of) the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Eusebius, an ancient historian, wrote that John's "exile to Patmos" was the result of the intense persecution caused by Domitian. Eusebius' use of the word "exile" caused many commentators to accept and repeat that term when speaking of John's time in Patmos. Actually, it is doubtful that John was exiled, in the sense of being all alone on the isle of Patmos, but rather it was more likely he had been "banished" to the isle. Banishment, or deportation, was a common practice in the first century AD, and the group of islands in the Sporades, was most often the place of banishment according to early writers. Irenaeus, another historian who wrote about John in the early part of the 2nd century AD said: "For that was seen not very long since,

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but almost in our own day, toward the end of Domitian's reign." Secular history places

Domitian's reign ending in 96 AD, so if Irenaeus is correct this would be cause to believe the
"Late View" to be correct. The position most historians take is that John refused to bow to the
Roman Emperors and refused to quit proclaiming Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and for
this he was banished to Patmos for an undetermined period of time. Some go so far as to say
John was on Patmos for several years, and maybe that is true.

This concludes this lesson. Lesson Three will take up with the first vision...