

Revelation Ch. 1

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Foreword

Verse 1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

The contents of this book are a unified message (The Revelation, not Revelations) that tells of things that **must shortly take place**, which would mean that the events described by the majority, if not all, of the book would have been completed in the first century.

Which God gave Him to show His servants

Jesus is now revealing additional information about impending events which have been mentioned numerous times in the New Testament, most notably in Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 17:20ff.; and Luke. 21.

Things which must shortly take place

Those who take the Continuous-Historical approach would have “shortly” mean “surely” rather than “quickly” or “soon” (Jackson, pp. 135-139; Deut. 32:35). Given the connection with events leading up to Jerusalem's destruction, parallel passages in the Olivet Discourse, the reiteration of this statement in Rev. 22:6, and the statements in Rev. 1:3 and Rev. 22:10, where John is told not to seal up the words of this book because the time is at hand (cf. Dan. 8:26; seal up, many days), this phrase must mean exactly what it says.

He sent and signified it

The nature of the book is also here described in that it was “signified” or made known by signs. The NASB translates this word “communicated.” Though both differ from the traditional “spoke” (cf. Heb. 1:1-2), the word “signified” is less vague in defining the means of communication.

By His angel

Unlike the rest of the New Testament, the visions of this book were sent by an angel. The Father originated it, Jesus declared it, and the angel delivered it to John. Some postulate that this angel may have been Gabriel, since it was he who played a part in revealing the end of the Jewish nation to Daniel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21), but we simply cannot know for sure.

To His servant John

The author is here identified as simply John. Who else during the first century AD would designate themselves as such without further description other than John the apostle? Please see the introductory notes regarding other indicators of the apostolic authorship.

Verse 2

Who bore witness to the word of God...

This book contains the things to which John bore witness, the things he saw (22:8), described as the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ (cf. 22:20).

Verse 3

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear...and keep those things which are written in it

The last portion of the introductory statement promises a blessing to those who read and understand the prophecy, and those who keep the things therein. The same statement is made in Rev. 22:7. What are the blessings?

- 1) The hearer will gain insight into what things were happening in the various churches, enabling them to recognize and correct problems in his or her own congregation.
- 2) The warnings of the judgment of “Babylon the Great” would cause the faithful to flee this doomed city (Rev. 18:4; Matt. 24:16), as would the warnings of submitting to the desires of the beast cause them to remain steadfast in the faith (Rev. 14:11).
- 3) The hearer will gain confidence that God is in control no matter what the situation may look like (Rev. 11:15).
- 4) The hearer will gain a better appreciation for the true glory of the church and the beauty of heaven.
- 5) Due to its difficulty, and many Old Testament allusions, the reader will build up a deeper knowledge and understanding of the Bible as a whole.

There are other “beatitudes” sprinkled throughout the book as well (14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:14)

Words of this prophecy

Though the book speaks of future events, the word “prophecy” can denote simply a message from God (2 Pet. 1:20,21; Roper, p. 69).

The time is near

The events foretold were on the verge of unfolding, and so the book carries a message of urgency. This language would not have been used if the primary events of the book were to unfold many years in the future (cf. Mk. 1:15; Matt. 26:18; notes on Rev. 1:1).

Greeting

Verse 4

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia. This is a standard greeting. Asia refers to the Roman province of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Some who advocate the earlier date for this book attempt to point to only seven churches being existent in Asia, though this clearly is not the case (Troas, Acts 20:6; Hierapolis, Col. 4:13; Colosse, Col. 1:2). Since seven is a complete number, these most likely are chosen as a complete representation of the spiritual conditions of all the churches at that time, and at present. Additionally, the locations of these cities probably facilitated spreading the message.

Why Asia? Those who advocate the late dating of the book point to fierce Roman persecution in this area, though the messages to these congregations are more indicative of Jewish persecution and internal issues. As already mentioned, these seven churches were probably representative of the spiritual conditions of all churches, and were located central to the Roman Empire, where both Jewish and Roman persecutors were hard at work. It also appears that this region was a stronghold for Christianity during the first century (see Introductory Notes, Audience, also Roper, p. 71).

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come

Customary greeting, followed by a reference to the eternal Father (Heb. 11:6). God's grace and peace were still theirs, though no such things would come from the world around them. This parallels another message to God's people who were suffering affliction (Ex. 3:14).

He delivered His people from a hard-hearted Pharaoh through miraculous signs and wonders, ending in destruction. He will now deliver His people from a hard-hearted nation (Jewish, and eventually Roman), with natural signs and wonders, and also ending in destruction.

And from the seven Spirits who are before His throne

Given the previous description of the Father, and the following depiction of the Son, this is possibly a reference to the Holy Spirit, seven denoting completeness and perfection in His work. There are similarities with Rev. 4:5, which describes the seven Spirits as lamps of fire, with Zech. 4:1-10, which is a vision of seven lamps and two olive trees. The seven lamps are described as representing “the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit...the eyes of the Lord that scan to and fro throughout the whole earth” (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10). Additionally, offering grace and peace from the seven Spirits along with “Him who is and who was and who is to come” seems to be indicative of deity. For a more detailed discussion of this symbol, see “Who are the Seven Spirits?” by Wayne Jackson (http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/read/who_are_the_seven_spirits).

Verse 5

And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness

Jesus was born to bear witness to the truth (Jn. 18:37; cf. Heb. 3:1-6). He has faithfully told and carried out God's solution to the sin problem, and the truth about how to receive that gracious gift. He keeps His word (2 Tim. 2:11-15), and the things that the book of Revelation says were to take place, did take place (Rev. 19:11; 21:5; 22:6).

The firstborn from the dead

Not only is Jesus the preeminent one (Ps. 89:27; Col. 1:18), but also the first to rise from the dead, never to die again (Rom. 6:9; Rev. 1:18). He is the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:23).

And the ruler over the kings of the earth

After he had purged our sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3), King of Kings, and Lord of Lords (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; Rev. 19:16). Whether they know it or not, all earthly rulers fall under the jurisdiction of Jesus Christ (Rev. 11:15).

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood

Though He is ruler of all, he loves each one of us (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 8:37). His death on the cross has saved us (released/freed/washed) from the consequences of our sins (Rom. 5:9). When someone is baptized they are enabling His blood to wash away their sins (Acts 22:16). There is no greater act of love than what Jesus has done for us (Jn. 15:13).

Verse 6

And has made us kings and priests to His God and Father

Another way to phrase this is “kingdom of priests” (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5,9; Ex. 19:5-6). In order for us to be kings or a kingdom, the kingdom must have been present at that time, and therefore is present today (Col. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:12; cf. Mk. 9:1). Notice also that every one who is a king, or member of the kingdom, is also a priest, who needs no mediator but the High Priest, Jesus Christ (Heb. 4:14; Heb.

9:12; Heb. 9:24; Heb. 10:19; 1 Tim. 2:5).

To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever

Similar language is found elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. 1 Pet. 5:11; Jude 1:25).

Announcement and Vision

Verse 7

Behold, He is coming with clouds

Many interpretations would have this refer to the “end of time” though the language parallels passages that would have it refer to a national judgment, i.e., the “time of the end” (Matt. 24:30; Mk. 13:26; Lk. 21:27; cf. Isa. 19:1).

Notice that this verse is nearly identical to Matt. 24:30, when “all the tribes of the earth shall mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” in “this generation” (Matt. 24:34; see also Matt. 10:23; 16:27-28; 26:64). Based on the background of the book and the connection with the passage in Matthew, we can conclude that the coming here mentioned is the coming in judgment on the Jewish nation, carried out in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The idea of coming with the clouds is also a reference to Daniel 7:13-14, where the Messiah is pictured as ascending to heaven and receiving a kingdom. Though the kingdom was inaugurated at Pentecost (Acts 2; cf. Col. 1:13), it reached its fullness after the gospel had been preached in all the world, to both Jew and Gentile alike, and the old covenant system was taken out of the way (Matt. 24:14; Rom. 11:25; Heb. 8:13; 12:26-28).

When Jerusalem was destroyed, those who had rejected Jesus would understand, albeit too late, that Jesus was the Christ, and the kingdom was in fact being taken from them (Matt. 21:43). For Christ and Christians, the clouds meant a day of vindication and exaltation (Matt. 16:27-28; 26:64), but for the wicked, a day of darkness and gloom (Acts 2:20; Psalm 97:2; Isa. 19:1; Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15).

And every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him

Not see him personally, but the effects of His judgment. Though we are all responsible for the death of Jesus (Rom. 3:23; Rom. 5:6ff.), those “who pierced Him” appears to be a reference primarily to the Jews, since it was they who delivered Him up to die, but perhaps also the Romans who actually performed the crucifixion and pierced his side (Psalm 22:16; Jn. 19:6; Jn. 19:34).

And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him

Compare again Matt. 24:30. The Jews were scattered throughout the world and would mourn at the loss of their beloved city and temple (cf. Rev. 18). Even though it will cause much bloodshed, it must be done (Rev. 16:6), and so John says “**Even so, Amen** (so be it).”

Verse 8

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, says the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty

Compare Isa. 44:6. This is a statement of the Deity of Christ (cf. Isa. 44:6; Isa. 9:6). The declaration of being the Alpha and Omega ties in with Rev. 1:11, as does the description “who is and who was and who is to come” tie in with Rev. 1:4. As the beginning, God created all things (Gen. 1; Jn. 1:1-3; Col.

1:16; Heb. 1:10), and as the end, He will destroy them (Heb. 1:11-12). Additionally, God had exalted the nation of Israel, and He also brought them down.

Verse 9

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ

John is a brother in Christ, a fellow Christian, part of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). Additionally, John is a companion in the tribulation, and so is enduring suffering along with his primary audience, the members of the seven churches. He is also a companion in the kingdom (see v. 6), and patience of Jesus Christ, meaning he was waiting patiently for these trying times to come to an end (cf. Matt. 24:13; Heb. 12:1; Jas. 1:3; Isa. 40:31). Burdens are lighter when they are shared (Roper, p. 79).

Was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ

Patmos, part of modern Greece, is a small, rocky island about 24 miles from the coast of Asia Minor, and 70 miles southwest of Ephesus. Exile was a common form of Roman punishment, and John is said to have been exiled during the first century. Some contend he was exiled during the reign of Domitian (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.18), while others place it during the reign of Nero (Copeland, p. 5). The external evidence varies, and so this becomes a question of the late vs. early dating for the book, which we have already discussed. Tertullian (Prescription Against Heretics 36, c. 208 AD) claims that John was first boiled in oil, and upon survival, was banished to Patmos.

The reason he was on Patmos was because of the word, which could mean as punishment or that he purposely went there to receive the vision. It seems most likely that it was the former (cf. Rev. 6:9; 20:4), though it could be both, that he was sent to Patmos because he preached the word, and while there realized that it was God's will to receive the testimony of Jesus regarding the things that would shortly take place (1:1).

Verse 10

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day

This could refer to John being under the influence of the Holy Spirit in seeing these visions (cf. Matt. 22:43), and therefore ready to write them down (he was writing as he was seeing things, Rev. 10:4), or perhaps refers to his disposition, thinking of spiritual things and ready to receive such information.

The phrase "Lord's Day" seems to suggest a special day belonging to the Lord (Roper, p. 80), which would naturally point to the first day of the week, the day of His resurrection (Matt. 28ff.; cf. Psalm 118:24), and the day the kingdom/church was established (cf. Matt. 26:29; Acts 2; 20:7).

And I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet

The voice was loud like a trumpet, and was simply to get John's attention. Trumpets were also used to call an assembly (Num. 10), to celebrate (Ps. 81:3; 98:6), to worship (for the Jews; Ps. 150:3), and as a warning for battle (Jer. 4:19; 1 Cor. 14:8) and of impending doom (Jos. 6; Judges 7; Ezek. 33:3-6; Rev. 8:6).

Verse 11

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last

See 1:8

What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia...

This provides a clarification as to how the message would be “signified” to John (1:1), the signs would be primarily visual.

The initial audience would be the seven churches, however there should be no doubt that the message was spread to all the churches, as were the other NT epistles (cf. Col. 4:16).

Verse 12

Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands

Here the visions begin, and the first is an easy one, especially since we are told exactly what the lampstands symbolize (1:20). A lampstand was chosen to represent the church for obvious reasons, we are to let our light (cf. Ps. 119:105) shine before men (Matt. 5:16; Lk. 8:16). These lampstands were made of gold, signifying how precious the church is to God (cf. 1 Pet. 1:7).

Verse 13

And in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man

The description parallels that of Daniel in 7:9-14 and 10:5-6, and his here applied to show the majesty of Jesus. He is omnipresent, and walks in the midst of His church (2:1). Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man most of the time (Matt. 16:13; Mk. 2:10; Lk. 9:22; Jn. 3:13 to name a few). This was an expression of His humanity, and also a declaration that He was the Messiah, whom Daniel envisioned (Dan. 7:13-14).

Clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band

Perhaps this sheds some light on who Daniel had seen (10:5). The long garment could be symbolic of His royalty (cf. Isa. 6:1). Both robe and golden band are similar to priestly garments (Ex. 28; Lev. 8) so this might carry the idea of a Royal Priest (1:6; 1 Pet. 2:9).

Verse 14

His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow

Compare this with the Ancient of Days seen by Daniel (Dan. 7:9), an obvious reference to God. The white represents honor (cf. Lev. 19:32; Pr. 16:31), purity (cf. Isa. 1:18), and righteousness (Rev. 19:8).

And His eyes like a flame of fire

This most likely refers to His penetrating vision into the heart of man (cf. Heb. 4:12-13; Dan. 7:9; 10:6).

Verse 15

His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace

Fine brass is a symbol of power and strength, refined by His suffering and death (Heb. 5:8-9). The reference to His feet could allude to Him bruising Satan's head (Gen. 3:15). Again, compare Dan. 10:6.

And His voice as the sound of many waters

This could refer to the power of His words, as crashing waves upon the rocks. It also may indicate the wealth of knowledge flowing from Him. He has spoken through many people (Heb. 1:1-2; cf. Rev. 17:15). Compare Dan. 10:6 and Ezek. 1:24.

Verse 16

He had in His right hand seven stars

The seven stars are identified as the angels of the seven churches (1:20). Since each of the letters to the seven churches are addressed to the angels of the churches, this may symbolize the leadership of the congregations, since they must give an account (Heb. 13:17). The fact that they are in His right hand symbolizes both divine protection (Ps. 63:8) and power (Ex. 15:6). He protects and upholds the faithful (Jn. 10:28) and destroys the wicked.

Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword

The Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12; cf. Eph. 6:17). It has the power to bless and curse (Deut. 11:26; cf. Rom. 10:17; Rev. 2:16), to prick (Acts 2:37) and cut the hearts (Acts 7:54) of men. It is His word that will judge men in the last day (John 12:48).

And His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength

This is reminiscent of the transfiguration (Matt. 17:2), and parallels the descriptions of His deity in Heb. 1:3 and John 1:14, 18.

- 1) It is often said that the Son is to the Father as brightness is to the sun. Though we cannot see the sun, we see and experience its rays that attest to its existence and nature.
- 2) God came in the flesh to reveal His glory (Jn. 1:14), the only manner we could have been capable of handling, for no one has seen God (in His true glory) at any time (Jn. 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 Jn. 1:5), let them die (Ex. 33:20). This is the best description we have.
- 3) Compare Paul's (Saul's) encounter with Jesus (Acts 9:8; Acts 26:13)

Verse 17

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead

Others who had seen similar things had similar reactions (Ezek. 1:28; 3:23; Dan. 8:17, 27; 10:8-10; Matt. 17:6; Acts 26:14).

But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last

See 1:8.

Jesus extends His right hand of protection to comfort John, as He did with others (Dan. 10:12; Matt. 17:7). Though His presence can certainly be something fearful (Heb. 10:31), Christians can be comforted that He is our friend and brother (Jn. 15:13; Heb. 2:11).

Verse 18

I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.

Through His resurrection, death no longer has dominion over Him (Rom. 6:9; cf. Rev. 1:5). Rev. 1 is loaded with affirmations of His deity (cf. "he who lives," Jn. 8:58).

And I have the keys of Hades and of Death

The keys are representative of His power of Hades (claims the spirit) and Death (claims the body), in that He has swallowed them up in victory (1 Cor. 15:55), and can deliver us from their power (cf. Heb. 2:14-15; Rev. 20:14). Similarly, Jesus told Peter He would give him the keys to the kingdom, the church, against which the gates of Hades would not prevail (Matt. 16:18-19).

Hades is the unseen realm of the dead (Lk. 16; Acts 2:27, 31), in which departed spirits will dwell in a place of bliss or torment until the resurrection and judgment (Jn. 5:29; Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:13-14).

Verse 19

Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this

The things which John has seen refers to the visions of Jesus, the “things which are” to the conditions of the seven churches to which he is about to write, and the “things which will take place after this” to the rest of the book, the events that must shortly take place (1:1).

Verse 20

The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches

Jesus here makes clear that this is a book of symbols. Perhaps he refers to these symbols as a mystery and here unveils them in order to point out that the rest of the book is also the unveiling of a mystery (Rev. 10:7), that of things foreshadowed in the Old Testament (Rom. 16:25-27).

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