

The Revelation to John

Chapter One

John's Introduction to the Book
Orders to Send Letters to Churches
A Vision of the Lord Jesus as Judge

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Rev 1:1 “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,

Rev 1:2 who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

Rev 1:3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.”

The first word of this book is the Greek word “apocalypsis” that is translated as “revelation”. The word means an unveiling of something previously hidden that we could not unveil ourselves. That this unveiling is of Jesus Christ means that it belongs to Him although it is disclosed to John by an angel. The information is not some great theological or philosophical treatise from some great man but is an unveiling of future events sent to John by Jesus. People have made much of the word “shortly” but we must be careful with that word as it is used in Scripture. It could mean that when it occurs it will happen suddenly and it does not mean that all that is reported in this book will occur at the same time. It is also important to remember that God's time is certainly not our time as He is outside of time and has His own timetable for events that He has ordained to occur.

2Peter 3:8 “But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

John says that he saw the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. It is appropriate for him to say that he saw the unveiling since so much of it is visionary. He leaves no doubt that all that he reports is what was revealed to Him by the angel and directly from Jesus. As I said in the introduction, this is the only book in the Bible with a specific blessing associated with the reading of it. The third verse is one of seven beatitudes in the book. He says that the unveiling is prophesied and so he intends it to be a part of the Holy Scripture. Prophecy is not necessarily foretelling but mainly points to a divine origin and information that is to be given the weight of “thus says the Lord”. Note carefully that the blessing is for those who read it, hear it, and heed it. Therefore he is telling us that the blessing is for the people who put the words to work in their lives. Scripture is not just for doctrine but it is a means of action for God's people.

Rev 1:4 “John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne;

Rev 1:5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood,

Rev 1:6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The letter is meant directly for seven real churches that existed at the time of the writing although it is also meant for a wider audience also as seen from the third verse, which is addressed to anyone who reads it. There were many more than seven churches in this area of Asia and we do not know why he addressed it directly to just these seven churches. It is probably not without significance that seven is the perfect number and if one draws a line among all of the seven churches one inscribe a rough circle, which is a symbol of completeness.

He asks for grace and peace to these people from the Father, the Holy Spirit, and from the Son. The words “Him who is and who was and who is to come” undoubtedly is a title for God the Father, although it is a bit unusual. His reference to “the seven spirits who are before His throne” is certainly his way of saying the Holy Spirit. John never uses the term “Holy Spirit” although he does use the word “Spirit” and certainly when he uses this reference he is referring to the Holy Spirit. He may be taking this manner of speaking of the Holy Spirit from the perfect meaning of the number seven and from:

Isaiah 11:2 “And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Isaiah here refers to the seven-fold nature of the Holy Spirit: of the Lord, of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of strength, of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord. The third reference is not veiled at all in that grace and peace is also asked for the people in the name of Jesus Christ. John refers to Jesus as the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of all the kings of the earth. These titles probably are a chronological reference to the works of Jesus. The faithful witness refers to His carrying out the plan of the Father during His earthly ministry. The first-born of the dead refers to His resurrection and the ruler of all kings of the earth refers to His lordship over all authority on earth. Although we do not see His rule over all authority in its fullness now, nevertheless it is a fact and one that we will clearly see later as noted later in this book:

Rev 12:10 “And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night.”

Even though we do not always see the rule of Jesus over our existing authority, the Bible is clear that all authority is established by God:

Rom 13:1 "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."

Sometimes He gives us the authority that we deserve and that concept especially frightens me now.

Verse six tells us that He has made us a kingdom of priests to the Father. The kingdom of heaven was a main topic of the teaching of Jesus. His kingdom is unlike most kingdoms in that it has no earthly boundaries but consists of all the people that have been forgiven their sins by the works of Jesus. The kingdom exists now and one day it will be clearly seen by all the people of the world. I was wearing a cross on my collar at an airport one day and a person dressed in a white robe and passing out pamphlets for their cult asked if I were a priest. I replied that I was but not as she might think. We Christians are all priests before God the Father because of the works of Jesus and not of any works of our own. A priest talks to God on behalf of the people, he speaks to the people from God, and he makes sacrifices before God. We do all three of these tasks. We are to pray to God for the needs of the people and we are to witness to people of the works of God from His Word. You might wonder about the sacrifices! Our sacrifices are ourselves:

Rom 12:1 "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

Rev 1:7 "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen.

Rev 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

This first verse is a revealing of the advent of the promise given on the day of the ascension of Jesus:

Acts 1:11 and they also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

John may also have been thinking of the Old Testament promises:

Dan 7:13 "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him."

Zech 12:10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they

have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.”

The theme of this book is the return of Jesus Christ and John relates it to the promises of the Old Testament. This event will somehow be witnessed by everyone, even those who pierced Him referring to His crucifixion. There will be considerable mourning by those who know now that He really is the Son of God and their rejection of Him will spell out eternal doom for them. John is just stating a fact that will occur and he asserts his agreement that this must be so by his last statement in the verse.

The title, The Lord God, here refers to the Father and the use of the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet tell us that He has been before the existence of all things and will exist forever. John states that God says that He is, was, and is to come. God is the creator of all things and the ruler over all things.

John 1:10 “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.”

Col 1:17 “And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

By stating that God is the Almighty, John is saying that His power is over all things and cannot be resisted by anyone or anything.

Rev 1:9 “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”

John now tells us something of his background and his condition when he had his first vision. He does not claim to be anyone special but rather he is a fellow Christian and a fellow participant in the tribulation, the kingdom, and the perseverance that are all in Jesus. We also are participants in all three of these because we are also children of God. We are all promised tribulation and the degree of tribulation has not been constant among all Christians but has varied throughout the centuries since His ministry among all of His people. We are called into the suffering for the gospel:

2Tim 1:8 “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,”

We are also members of the kingdom and we are promised perseverance because He keeps us near Him:

Rom 15:5 “Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus;”

He then states that he was on an island, which may mean that when he wrote this book he no longer was on the island. Patmos is a small island (about 8 by 4 miles) off the coast of Asia Minor and, since he was there because of the word of God and the testimony of

Jesus, he was probably there doing hard time in a labor camp. This clarification of the reason of his being on the island tells us that he was a minister of the truth and perhaps the Apostle John.

The First Vision

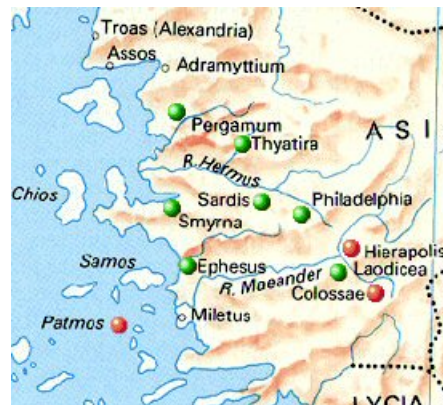
Rev 1:10 “I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,

Rev 1:11 saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

Rev 1:12 And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;

Rev 1:13 and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle.”

Being in the Spirit implies that he was in a mental state of receptiveness to a vision. He was meditating on God and giving himself totally to Him. The statement of the Lord's Day could be a reference to the first day of the week in a commemorative state for the resurrection of Jesus. Although this is the only use of this word for this particular day, we are told in Scripture of our changing the worship of God from the Sabbath to the first day of the week as tribute to the start of the New Covenant of Grace (John 20:19, Acts 20:7, 1 Cor 16:2). His statement that the loud voice was like the sound of a trumpet usually has the meaning of a proclamation of last things. John was told to write the events that would be given him and to send the book to the stated seven churches. The order given for the churches is probably the order that one would visit them starting with the island Patmos.



Just as when Paul wrote to a specific church, he is not being told that the book is only for those churches. We all benefit today from those letters as they have been read for many churches.

John then reports that he turned (probably very slowly!) to see the person speaking to him. He explains the meaning of the lampstands in verse 20 so I will wait to comment on them. I will here note that these are seven separate lampstands and not one stand with seven candle holders such as was used in the tabernacle outside the veil. These were

seven separate holders of lamps and the speaker stood in the middle of them. Although Jesus was fond of describing Himself as the Son of Man, the words here are not quite the same and probably are a reference to a verse in Daniel:

Dan 7:13 "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him."

John then describes the clothes. He states that the robe reaches to His feet, which describes a person of great distinction. Although priests wore a girdle higher than normal, their girdle was woven and not golden so John is not saying that He was just a priest. Gold is an indication that He is presented as a King and a Judge so John is seeing Jesus as the ruler and judge of these seven churches and, indeed, of all of His churches.

Rev 1:14 "And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire;

Rev 1:15 and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

Rev 1:16 And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength."

Now John gives us more detail about his vision of Jesus and it is indeed frightening! White hair is a symbol of wisdom and age. When wool is white it is very white as indicated by him adding "like snow". We see the same type of comparison in:

Dan 7:9 "I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow, And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire."

John saying that his eyes were like a flame of fire indicates energy and spiritness and ablaze with righteousness. These piercing eyes can see through any attempt at a cover up. His statement about his feet uses a word for which we have no interpretation: chalkolibanon. The portion "chalko" indicates an alloy of copper but we cannot be sure which alloy. The reference to a furnace further indicates that he is referring to a metal of some sort. Probably the interpretation like bronze that has been tempered in a furnace is good for it gives us an image of solidity in the feet which will tromp over all those conquered. That His voice was like the sound of many waters brings to mind the roaring noise of the water falls at Niagara and other places. Such sounds drown out all other sounds and so all the gibberish of the world would be smothered by this sound. Being on an island he would have constantly heard the waters of the sea breaking against the shore and he would have had this comparison.

Since the stars are explained in verse 20, I will again wait until then to talk more about them. His holding the stars in His hand indicates that He is protecting them. The sword is a weapon of offence and its shape is similar to that of a short Roman sword that was shaped like a tongue. Since the imagery of the stars held in His hand indicates protection

perhaps the imagery of the sword out of His mouth indicates that He will defend His church against all adversaries.

2Thess 2:8 "And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming;"

Heb 4:12 "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

When John completes this description by saying that His face was like the sun shining in its strength he is telling us that the face could not be looked upon. We cannot look at the sun without damaging our eyes and a similar fate would await someone who tried to look at the face of Jesus. Actually I cannot imagine even trying to look at that face.

Rev 1:17 "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,

Rev 1:18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Rev 1:19 "Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things.

Rev 1:20 "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."

John's reaction is the same as would be that of anyone coming so close to the Lord Jesus Christ in His righteous judge appearance. It is quite a different appearance than that had by John the Apostle when he rested on the shoulder of His Lord! Now he drops down like a dead man! But the reaction to seeing Jesus is the same as it will be for us when we see Him in this form for the first time. He will also tell those who believe in Him to not be afraid. But those who are not His will not receive that reassurance. Rather they will have to face judgment from the One Who sees all and knows all.

He identified Himself similarly as to the Alpha and the Omega and that He is the living One. "I was dead" literally translates as "I became dead", which I find very interesting. He has always existed but there was a time when He was given a human body and lived among the people. He then let Himself be crucified even though He could have stopped that process. He then states that He is alive forever. He lived a perfect life as He obeyed all the Law. He was crucified for perfect payment of the sins of those chosen to receive that payment. He was then resurrected as proof of His claims and He now lives forever as the perfect Judge of all people and ruler of all nations.

John is also told that He has dominion over death and the afterlife as the keys are symbolic of such authority. He is the absolute judge and holds supreme rule over death and the afterlife. He then tells John to write of the things that he sees, the things that are, and the things that will be.

He then explains to John about some of the vision he has seen concerning Himself. The stars are the angels of the seven churches. We are not sure the exact nature of these angels for the word means messenger. They could be protective angels or they could be the elders assigned for each of the churches. The latter meaning is the preferred and since they are held in His hand we see a protective nature involved by Jesus. The seven lampstands are the churches and so the picture is of Jesus standing in the middle of all seven churches with the assigned elders of each being protected by Him. The image then of Jesus is of the protector and judge of the churches. The letters that follow are then His letters to these churches.