

REVELATION 1

INTRODUCTION

- Revelation 1 is the “the things which you have seen” portion described in vs. 19
- It contains a description of the glorified Christ which may be the most grand and majestic in all of Scripture
- It is a vision of Christ in His beauty, majesty, splendor and glory...a description that almost defies human language and surpasses our finite mind’s ability to comprehend it
- Like standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon or on top of a peak in Glacier National Park, this vision of Christ leaves us speechless
- This description of Christ provides a preview of His glory in the Second Coming
- “The first chapter, emphasizing as it does the glory of Christ, is in essence the theme of the entire book moving progressively to the climax, the second coming of Christ in power and glory to the earth.”¹
- “John felt alone when he was exiled on Patmos, but Christ became nearer to him than he had ever experienced before. The more of Christ’s majesty that we too experience, the nearer He will become to us so that we can walk securely in hope at the end of days...What was God’s answer for this aged, weary, distressed, saddened, frightened, and troubled servant? God made him take a long look to discover anew and afresh the most beautiful picture there is in all the Scriptures – Jesus Christ...There is no more beautiful or more clearly painted portrait of Jesus in the whole Bible than the first chapter of Revelation. It is here that we discover Jesus revealing His glorious majesty so that we can see Him as He is...If you are going through disturbing, dangerous, despairing days in your life, *look for Christ*.”²

PROLOGUE (VS. 1-3)

Revelation 1:1-3 ~ The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 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.

Verse 1

- The opening verse of the first chapter tells us immediately the central theme of this book: Jesus Christ in all His glory
- “revelation” is the Greek word *apokalypsis* referring to the content of “revelation, disclosure;” it is related to the verb *apokalypso* referring to the act of “uncovering, revealing”
- It refers to an “unveiling” or “revealing” of something or someone that was once hidden
- In this case, it refers to an “unveiling” of the present and future glory of Jesus Christ which culminates in His final victory and reign upon the earth, an “unveiling” which functions as a reward for Christ’s humiliation and obedience to the Father’s will (cf. Phil 2:9-11)
- It is both a revelation *from* Him and *about* Him!
- These are “the things which must soon take place” (vs. 1)
- The substance of the revelation concerns the future events
- This all will occur “soon” (*en tachei*)...where we get our English word “tachycardia, tachometer”

¹ John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 49.

² John Barnett, *Living Hope for the End of Days*, 61, 69-70 (emphasis original).

- This may speak of both the imminency of Christ’s return as well as the suddenness with which it will occur, not necessarily that it will occur immediately
- The events of the end times could happen at any moment and, once they begin, they will occur in rapid succession
- A “chain of revelation” is described here: God → Christ → Angel → John → “His bond-servants” (vs. 1)
- The Father has chosen to reveal Himself to the Son

John 3:34-35 ~ For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. 35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.

John 5:20 ~ For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.

John 7:16 ~ So Jesus answered them and said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.

John 8:28 ~ So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.”

- Having revealed these realities to Christ, Christ then delivered them to John via an angel (Rev 22:6, 16)
- The name of the angel is not given, but it could very possibly be Gabriel, the “messenger angel,” the same one who brought messages to Daniel (Dan 8:16; 9:21-22), Zechariah (Luke 1:13-19), and Mary (Luke 1:26-31)
- Angels were involved in the giving of the book of Revelation to John just as they were in the giving of the Law to Moses (cf. Acts 7:38, 53)

Verse 3

- This is the only book in the Bible that contains a direct promise of blessing
- Blessings (*makarios* = happy) are pronounced on: 1) The reader (likely referring to the person who read Scriptures aloud in the first century church service for all to hear); 2) The hearer; 3) The obeyers
- The blessing promised here is the first of 7 blessings announced in this book (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14)
- “It seems to anticipate that many would neglect this book or ignore its prophetic revelation. It is singular that the one book in the New Testament which invokes a special blessing on the reader should be often left unread.”³
- The “time is near” indicates nearness from the standpoint of prophecy, not necessarily that the event will immediately occur
- “time” (*kairos*) refers, not to time on a clock (*chronos*), but to a period of time, i.e. epochs, eras, or seasons
- The “time of the end” (Dan 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9) is the next major event on the eschatological timeline, the next major era in redemptive history after the church age

GREETING (VS. 4-8)

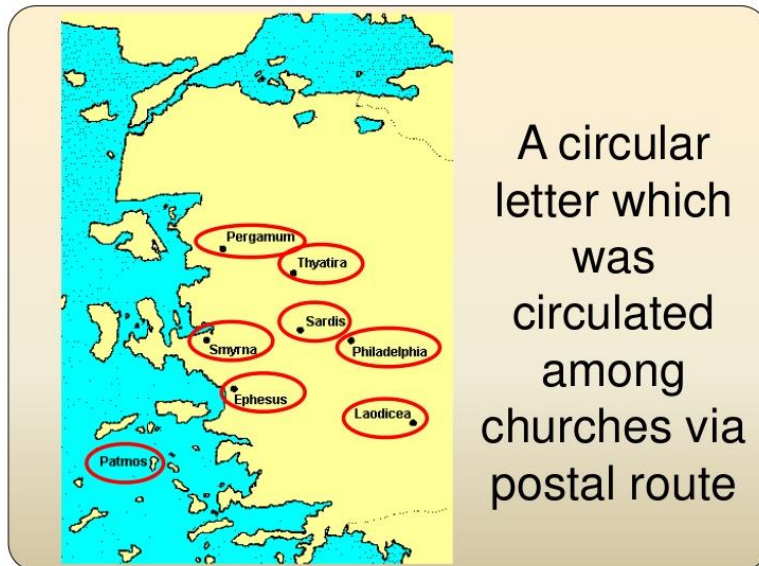
Revelation 1:4-8 ~ John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— 6 and He has

³ Walvoord, 36.

made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 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. So it is to be. Amen. 8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

A Circular Letter

- John addressed his letter to “the seven churches that are in Asia” (vs. 4)
- The whole book of Revelation is a circular letter addressed to those churches, named probably in the order in which they would be visited by a messenger on the postal route starting from Patmos and traveling on a circular route around the province of Asia (1:11)
- “John has employed an apparently original method of writing a circular letter which speaks as specifically as could be desired to each particular church. While most of his work is intended for all the churches indiscriminately, he introduces it with a series of seven specific messages from Christ to the seven churches (chapters 2-3). Each message is specifically relevant to the situation of the church addressed, which John knew well.”⁴



A Trinitarian Benediction

- Verses 4b-5a mention the sender (John), the standard greeting in NT letters (“grace to you and peace), as well as each person of the Trinity:
 - God the Father – “from Him who is and who was and who is to come”
 - God the Holy Spirit – “and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,” the number 7 signifying His fullness (cf. Rev 3:1; 4:5; 5:6)
 - God the Son – “and from Jesus Christ,” probably mentioned last and given a fuller description because of His prominence in the book
- Three titles for Christ here begin to flesh out His supremacy (vs. 5):
 - “the faithful witness” – He always speaks and represents the truth
 - “the firstborn of the dead” – He is the preeminent one of all who have been raised from the dead and the only One raised from the dead never to die again; the first to receive an immortal resurrection body

⁴ Richard Baukham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 13.

- “the ruler of the kings of the earth” – He is absolutely sovereign over the affairs of the world (cf. Rev 19:16; Is 9:6-7; Ps 2:6-8; Ps 72:11; Zech 14:9)
- Three description of what Christ has done for us further describe His supremacy (vs. 5b-6):
 - “He loves us” – present tense means that he continually loves us
 - “He released us from our sins by His blood” – His love for us is most perfectly seen in His perfect sacrifice which secures our redemption
 - “He has made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” – believers form both a priesthood (with access to the Father) and a kingdom (not millennial kingdom but the realm of God’s loving rule entered into at salvation)
- These marvelous descriptions of Christ prompted John’s doxology (vs. 6b)

A Preview of the Second Coming

- We are told to look for His coming: Behold (vs. 7)...a call to pay attention!
- The word “behold” is used 25 times in Revelation
- John quotes from Daniel 7:13, indicating that Christ will come “with the clouds,” namely clouds of Shekinah glory
- Just as Christ was received by a cloud in His ascension (Acts 1:9), so He will come in the clouds of heaven (Matt 24:30; 26:64)
- “every eye will see Him” when He returns
- “There is no indication that the world as a whole will see Christ at the time of the rapture of the church. At His coming to establish His kingdom, however, all will see Him.”⁵
- “even those who pierced Him” will see Him – this cannot obviously be a reference to those who actually killed Christ because they are all dead
- This is a reference to the godly remnant of Israel: Zechariah 12:10 ~ 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 firstborn.
- The believing Jewish remnant at Christ’s return will weep for what they did to their Messiah
- “all the tribes of the earth will mourn” likely refers to all unbelievers of the world who will see Him at His Second Coming
- The salutation closes with a reminder of Christ as the eternal One, the Alpha and the Omega, terms for the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet
- In view in this phrase is the eternity, power, and future glory of Christ
- 9 of the 10 NT uses of the term “Almighty” occur in the book of Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), a clear reference to the sovereign omnipotence of Christ over all things
- “Jesus Christ is the central figure of the opening eight verses of Revelation. As the Source of revelation He is presented in verse 1. As the Channel of the word and testimony of God He is cited in verse 2. His

⁵ Walvoord, 39.

blessings through His revealed word are promised in verse 3. In verse 5 He is the faithful witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. He is revealed to be the source of all grace who loves us and cleanses us from our sins through His shed blood. He is the source of our royal priesthood who has the right to gather in Himself all glory and dominion forever. He is promised to come with clouds, attended with great display of power and glory, and every eye shall see the One who died for men. He is the Almighty One of eternity past and eternity future. If no more had been written than that contained in this introductory portion of chapter 1, it would have constituted a tremendous restatement of the person and work of Christ such as found in no comparable section of Scripture.”⁶

A VISION OF THE GLORIFIED CHRIST (VS. 9-20)

Setting for the Vision

Revelation 1:9-11 ~ 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. 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, 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.”

- John was the last living apostle, likely in his 80’s or 90’s at this point
- He was exiled on the island of Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (vs. 9)
- He had served faithfully as pastor of the church in Ephesus, preaching the Word and proclaiming the Gospel
- Because of this, he was arrested and sent to Patmos as a prisoner
- Patmos was an island – 10 miles long and 6 miles wide – which served as a place where Rome sent its prisoners
- Tradition says that he was forced to labor in the mines, breaking and hauling rock
- He was imprisoned there under the Emperor Domitian and later released and allowed to return to Ephesus

- During his imprisonment, he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” (vs. 10), meaning the Holy Spirit supernaturally enabled him to perceive something beyond the ordinary
- He was somehow transported out of normal reality and allowed to experience something supernatural
- This was not a dream but rather a vision where he was supernaturally lifted out of this world to receive the most extensive revelation of future things shown to any writer of the NT

- He heard the voice of the Jesus Christ which told him to write a book to be sent to the 7 churches (vs. 11)
- He was to record in written form what was being revealed to him
- This is not a future description of Christ but a description of Him now, in His glorified state
- This must have been a tremendous encouragement to this aged apostle who was stuck on a rock in middle of the Mediterranean, forced to do manual labor, and wondering how it all was going to end
- He may have been discouraged, wondering where Christ was in the midst of his trial, questioning how the kingdom of Christ and the church would prevail in the midst of such tribulation
- This vision of the glorified Christ must have brought him great hope, something it does to us today as well

The Glorious Description of the Son of Man

Revelation 1:12-16 ~ Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the

⁶ Ibid., 40.

sound of many waters. 16 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.



- John first saw was “seven golden lampstands” (vs. 12)
- In the tabernacle and in the temple one of the pieces of equipment was a lampstand which was a portable stand holding an oil lamp
- The meaning of those seven lampstands is described in vs. 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
- They represent the 7 churches mentioned in verse 12, churches from which the light of the Gospel was to shine forth
- The lampstands represent the life and the light of those churches
- The number “7” signifies completeness and the gold represents perfection
- John saw One in the middle of the lampstands who looked like “a son of Man” (vs. 13)
- This term is a title for Christ which represents His humanity and the fact that He is the Messiah
- The OT used this title to refer to the Messiah: Daniel 7:13 ~ I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming
- Jesus frequently used this term (more than 80 times) to refer to Himself (Matt 16:27; 19:28; 26:64; Mark 8:31; John 1:51)
- The fact that John saw Christ in the “middle of the lampstands” is important in that it demonstrates that Christ is moving, operating, and working in the midst of His church in a direct relationship
- He is not far off, not distant from the church, not so transcendent that He is not involved in affairs of each church
- The church is His bride; therefore, Christ is empowering, superintending, overseeing, sustaining, and strengthening the church
- The church is “His” church!
- John saw Christ “clothed in a robe reaching to the feet and girded across His chest with a golden sash” (vs. 13)
- This may be a description of Christ’s kingship in that kings wore robes and sashes, a reference to power and authority

- This may also be a reference to His role as priest and judge since such clothing was used by priests in the OT (cf. Aaron in Exodus 39)
- Thus, likely this refers to Christ as our high priest, the One who represents us before God and intercedes for us (cf. Heb 4:14-15)
- Each of the following physical descriptions represents something of Christ's nature

Head Like Wool (vs. 14)

- This is similar to Daniel's description of God the Father in Daniel 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.
- God and Christ are both pictured in the OT and NT as having blazing, glowing, white hair
- What a marvelous parallel that is to indicate again to us that Jesus Christ is in fact God
- This is likely a reference to His holiness and purity
- Christ is so holy and so blameless and so pure and so perfect that His appearance is blazing white

Eyes Like Fire (vs. 14)

- This is similar to Christ's description in Rev 19:12 ~ His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems
- It likely speaks of Christ's divine judgment upon all that is impure
- It indicates His keen, penetrating judgment which searches and exposes all kinds of evil
- Nothing escapes His penetrating vision because His judgments are always just and accurate
- His eyes see everything (cf. Heb 4:13) and expose everything for what it is
- This is the ultimate kind of accountability, making it far superior to any kind of human accountability
- Nothing you do escapes the all-seeing eye of Christ!

Feet Like Bronze (vs. 15)

- In the OT, many of the articles used in the Temple sacrifices were made of bronze or brass which would have been tested and purified/judged with fire
- The fact that Christ's feet are represented as burnished bronze made to glow in the furnace speaks of His divine judgment
- He is the righteous judge who moves through His church to exercise His discipline where necessary
- This shows that Christ is ready to deal out discipline to a sinning Cxn and a sinning church if necessary

Voice Like Waters (vs. 15)

- His voice is like the noise of the surf or a waterfall crashing against the rocks
- This speaks of the power and authority of Christ's voice
- He speaks not with a speech impediment but with conviction and firmness

Hand With Stars (vs. 16)

- The 7 stars in Christ's right hand are explained in vs. 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.

- This doesn't mean that every church has an angel that represents it; rather, they represent the leaders of the churches (elders, pastors, overseers)
- The fact that Christ is holding them in His right hand demonstrates His power and authority over the church
- This shows that church leaders are ultimately under His control and under His authority as head of the church
- Christ mediates His power and control of the church through its leaders
- That's all a spiritual leader is: a tool through which Christ uses to lead His church
- That's why the church is not about us! That's why we are not out to build our own kingdom or build a name for ourselves!

Mouth With Sword (vs. 16)

- A similar description is given of Christ in Revelation 2:16 and 19:15
- Both of those passages indicate that the purpose of the sword in Christ's mouth is to kill, to make war, and to strike down nations
- A sword is meant for killing
- The idea here is that by the very Word of His mouth Christ will slay the wicked
- In fact, the word used for "sword" (*rhomphaia*) refers to a long and heavy sword used for devastating judgment
- In this vision, Christ is no longer the baby in Bethlehem, a child in Jerusalem, or the man of sorrow crowned with thorns
- He is now the Lord of glory who will come and execute His enemies
- Anyone who opposes Christ and His people and His church will be on the receiving end of the sword
- He will deliver the judgment blow with the very Word of His mouth

Face Like Sun (vs. 16)

- Christ's glory is like the sun shining on a day with no clouds: bright, brilliant, illuminating everything!
- This is what Christ is like now in His glorious, exalted state!

The Proper Response to the Son of Man

Revelation 1:17 ~ When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,

- What do you do when you see Christ in His glorified state? → Absolute shock, overwhelmed, motionless, almost lifeless, prostrate on the ground
- John had seen Jesus 60 years before; he had been with him for 3 years
- In fact, one time, on the Mount of Transfiguration, John saw Christ transfigured

Matthew 17:2 ~ And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

Matthew 17:6 ~ When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.

- This time, however, the vision of Christ is even greater; John's experience with the transfigured Christ was when Christ was in his earthly nature; however, this vision of Christ is Him in His glorified state

- There is nothing to temper or mute the fullness of the deity of Christ Christ
- “In contrast to those periods of intimate fellowship which characterized John’s relationship with Christ in His earthly life when frequently John laid his head upon the bosom of the Saviour and had intimate fellowship with Him, John is now in the presence of the glorified Son of God whose power and majesty are no longer veiled and whose righteousness is revealed to be a consuming fire.”⁷
- To see unveiled glory is so devastating and so shocking that it causes one to fall over lifeless
- His response was similar to many others who have come into the presence of Christ

Isaiah 6:5 ~ Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”

Ezekiel 1:28 ~ As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

Ezekiel 3:23 ~ So I got up and went out to the plain; and behold, the glory of the Lord was standing there, like the glory which I saw by the river Chebar, and I fell on my face.

Daniel 10:7-9 ~ Now I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, while the men who were with me did not see the vision; nevertheless, a great dread fell on them, and they ran away to hide themselves. So I was left alone and saw this great vision; yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength. But I heard the sound of his words; and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground.

Job 42:5-6 ~ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.

Acts 9:4 ~ and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

- We need to understand this about Christ because there is little fear of God left today!

The Divine Comfort from the Son of Man

Revelation 1:17-18 ~ When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 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.

- The supremacy of Christ is contrasted with His tenderness (“He placed His right hand on me”)
- Christ comforted John with descriptions of His nature:
 - “I am the first and the last” = He is the eternal One, the same name as Yahweh in the OT (Is 41:4; 44:6; 48:12)
 - “the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore” = He is the resurrected One
 - “I have the keys of death and Hades” = He is the One with authority over death and the place of the dead, deciding who lives and dies

The Conclusion of the Vision

Revelation 1:19-20 ~ Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. 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.

⁷ Walvoord, 46.