

## Revelation Lesson 01

### Revelation Chapter 1

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### Introduction to Revelation

We begin a very timely study this week on the End Times which is currently in process.

The book of Revelation was written in about A.D. 96 by the Apostle John after he had been exiled to the Isle of Patmos. The book more accurately is what Jesus Christ directly revealed to John about things to come. The book clearly begins in the church age and looks directly into eternity. It presents greater detail of the Tribulation than any other portion of Scripture. It then gives significant insight into the millennial reign of Christ and of the eternal kingdom to follow. The book looks forward from John's day on into eternity.

The book might be outlined accordingly.

- I. Introduction - chapter 1.
- II. The seven messages to the seven churches of Asia - chapters 2-3.
- III. Things hereafter - chapters 4-22.

The prophetic portion of the book presents a general narrative account of the Tribulation and events following thereafter. Thus, it is generally sequential in nature. The book follows patterns of sevens such as the seven seal judgments, the seven trumpet judgments, the seven personalities, the seven vials, the seven thunders, and others. Interspersed in this generally sequential development of events are several chapters which give information pertaining to the Day of the Lord. These include the Jewish remnant of chapter 7, the account of the two witnesses in chapter 11, the seven personalities of chapter 12, the Lamb on Mount Zion in chapter 14, along with Babylon the Great in chapters 17-18.

These passages seem to summarize or give overview of the greater flow of events. Though the churches are clearly in view through chapter 3, thereafter they vanish from earthly view and are found in heaven in chapter 4 and they return with Christ in chapter 19. A pre-Tribulation Rapture is clearly implied. Accordingly, the earthly focus from chapter 4 through chapter 20 pertains to Israel. From chapter 4 through chapter 22, the book describes the 70th week of Daniel and from there on into the Kingdom. The key personality of the book is Jesus Christ. The general theme is the consummation of the ages in His return. The primary focus from chapter 4 onward is eschatological.

## Revelation Chapter 1

The first chapter of Revelation is essentially an introduction to the book, developing the general theme of the book, “things which must shortly come to pass.” It also presents the occasion of its writing—the revelation of Jesus Christ to John on the Isle of Patmos. In the final portion of Revelation 1, John gives account of instructions he received from Jesus Christ along with a description of His appearance.

### **I. Prologue**

***Rev 1:1 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:***

The essence of the book is summarized in this concise statement, the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servant things which must shortly come to pass. This revelation came ultimately from God the Father to Jesus who in turn gave it to John. The word translated as revelation (apokaluqiv apokalupsis) (from whence the English word apocalypse derives), literally means ‘a revealing,’ or as it is properly translated ‘revelation.’

The words translated as shortly (en tacov en takhos) literally has the sense ‘in swiftness.’ The thought therefore is not so much when the events prophesied will take place as to how. When the Lord returns in the air and the ensuing events following in the Day of Lord come to pass, it will be in swiftness. Thus, this climatic message was “sent and signified by his angel.”

***Rev 1:2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.***

John solemnly noted that he bore record (literally, bore witness) of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ and of all other things which he saw. John in effect became the recorder of the solemn proceedings about to be witnessed.

***Rev 1:3 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.***

The sacred writer concludes his introductory remarks with the invocation of God’s blessing. Specifically, the Holy Spirit through John promised to bless all that (1) readeth, and (2) they that hear the words of this prophecy, (3) and keep those things which are written therein. The final phrase refers to doing, observing, or obeying what

was about to be written. This parallels the principle found throughout the Bible that God blesses obedience.

Though the immediate application is certainly to the Book of Revelation, its greater application broadly applies to the entire Bible. See Revelation 22:7,14.

*Rev 22:7 Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.*

*Rev 22:14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*

God promises blessing for reading His Word, blessing for hearing His Word, and blessing for obeying His Word. The sense of urgency is made apparent: “for the time is at hand.” The thought literally has the sense, ‘the time is near.’ The events about to be unfolded are likely the case. The imminency of those things, about to come to pass, are clearly implied. If that were true then, how much more today.

## **II. Greeting to the Seven Churches**

*Rev 1:4 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;*

The immediate recipients of this revelation are addressed. John to the seven churches which are in Asia. The AsiAsia addresseds the Roman province of that name which encompassed a region along the southwestern coast of Asia Minor. In that region, seven churches had been organized which will be addressed in the following two chapters.

In fashion like many of the other New Testament epistles, the salutation of the book begins with the familiar, Grace be unto you, and peace. Those lofty virtues have been invoked in most of the various epistles of the New Testament. John notes the ultimate Author of the revelatory message: from him which is, and which was, and which is to come. The ultimate author is at once and the same time in the past, present, and future tense. Of course, this One is none other than God. His eternity is clearly in view. He always has been, He is, and He always will be.

Further implied is His imminent return (in Christ). The final phrase, “him . . . which is to come,” literally is ‘Him which is coming.’ The unfolding book is also ascribed as being from the seven Spirits which are before his throne. These seven Spirits are left undefined.

*Rev 1:5 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,*

John makes clear the book is specifically “from Jesus Christ.” He then proceeds to issue one of the most encompassing and beautiful descriptions of our Lord in the New Testament. He is described as (1) “the faithful witness.” Our Lord is defined as a witness who is faithful in every sense, legally, ethically, and accurately. The fact He is a witness to God’s truth is an example for us to this day. Implied is the testifying on that behalf. He also is noted as “the first begotten of the dead.” His resurrection is clearly in view. Moreover, implied is that many others will follow in the pattern of His resurrection. That is us, those redeemed in Him.

Finally, He is described as “the prince of the kings of the earth.” The word translated as prince (arcwn archon), among other things, has the sense of ‘chief’ or ‘ruler.’ The greater thought is that He is Prince over all the kings of the earth, both now and in the ages to come. The book is dedicated unto Jesus Christ. The Apostle provides a majestic threefold description of the One to which this book is consecrated.

He has “loved us.” What a magnificent appellation to Him and blessing for us. He has “washed us from our sins in his own blood.” The cleansing property of the blood of Christ is made clear. The cleansing of sin is by the blood of Christ and that alone, not baptism in any form. See I John 1:7.

*I Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

*Rev 1:6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

He hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father. This third description of Christ’s work is prophetic. Someday in His coming kingdom, His beloved blood-bought saints will rule and reign with Him. To that degree, some in the church in that day will be kings and others will serve in some capacity as priests before Him.

Though there indeed is the priesthood of the believer now, then it will be even more apparent as some of God’s people in that day will occupy such a visible office in His kingdom. Thus to Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, John invoked glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. The final word, amen, simply in this context means ‘so be it.’ Indeed, to our Lord and Savior is due such glory and rule for ever.

*Rev 1:7 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.*

John continues with a further brief prophetic synopsis of our Lord’s impending activity.

The return of Jesus Christ is clearly set forth. That return is in two phases.

- (1) the Rapture of the church.
- (2) His return in power and great glory.

The latter is evidently that which is in view here. When Jesus comes to call up the saints, though it will be in the clouds, apparently not every eye will see Him. However, when He returns in power and great glory, the nations of the earth will see Him as recorded in Revelation 19:11,19.

*(Rev 19:11) And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.*

*(Rev 19:19) And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.*

In Matthew 24:27-30, He is noted as coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The context there clearly is of His second advent, the final phase of His promised return. In that day, all who have survived the Tribulation will see Him. See also Matthew 26:64.

*(Mat 26:64) Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

Moreover, they also which pierced him will see Him. Clearly, implied is that the Jewish nation in that day will not only see Him but also recognize Him. Zechariah 13:6 seems to refer to that reunion. The greater mosaic of biblical eschatology seems to imply that by that time, most if not all, Israel will then be saved. They are thus brought face to face with the deed their forefathers perpetrated against Him at Calvary centuries earlier.

Finally, all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. The thought is how all nations of the earth in that day will mourn as they realize He who they had opposed and rejected has now returned in power. They are on the losing side with all that implies, and they are brought forcibly to that realization. They can only wail before Him. This section of John's salutary introduction is thus concluded. He thus invokes, Even so, Amen. That is, even so, let it be!

*Rev 1:8 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.*

Jesus Himself adds His own direct comment. 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.

The eternality of Christ is again noted as He describes Himself with the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet—(a) alpha and (w) omega. It was idiomatic of being eternal and all inclusive.

Lest one not so understand, Jesus further declared that He was both the “beginning and the ending.” All things in the universe have their beginning and termination in Him. He adds further comment that He is, was, and is to come. That same essential thought was ascribed to God the Father in verse 4. Jesus applied the same identity to Himself. His Deity clearly is in view. Moreover, His impending return is again implied. Finally, He applies to Himself a title reserved for only God—“the Almighty.” In His person, there is infinite power and might.

### **III. *Vision of the Son of Man***

*(Rev 1:9) 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.*

John now presents the immediate occasion of this divine revelation. He first describes himself to his readers as (1) your brother, (2) and “companion in tribulation.” Clearly stated was that John had faced persecution for the testimony of Jesus Christ. As will be shortly noted, he had been exiled to the Isle of Patmos as a result. The fact that his intended readers are described as companions in tribulation indicates they too were facing similar persecution. The Roman government had already begun its infamous opposition of the church. But John wrote that he also along with them were companions “in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.”

Though persecution had become a harsh reality, they nevertheless found solace in the hope of glory ahead and the patience (sustaining perseverance) of Jesus Christ on their behalf. He never gave up on them though they were sorely persecuted. John notes that he had been exiled to the Isle of Patmos “for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Patmos was a sparsely populated island off the southwest coast of Asia Minor in the Aegean Sea, adjacent to the province of Asia. It was about ten miles long and about five miles wide. It was a part of the Sporades group of islands about forty miles southwest of Ephesus. Ignatius says John was banished thereto by Domitian in about A.D. 95 or 96.

Tertullian claims John had been first cast into a vessel of burning oil but suffered no harm. Therefore, Domitian exiled him to Patmos as a prison island. John makes clear his offense. It was for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The writing of his gospel, the epistles, and the distribution thereof may have been the offense which brought his exile to Patmos. Even as an aged man, he was vocal in his testimony of Jesus Christ. See 1:2. John apparently died on this island at some point after the completion of writing Revelation.

*(Rev 1:10) I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,*

The Apostle now describes his encounter with the resurrected Christ on the Isle of Patmos. He describes himself as being “in the Spirit.” Implied is a state of spiritual transcendency. This was similar to that which Paul described in II Corinthians 12:2-4. Paul there portrayed himself being caught up into the third heaven. As the Book of Revelation unfolds, John experiences a similar experience.

God through the Holy Spirit evidently transported him in spirit to heaven where he saw what he thus reveals. (Several Old Testament prophets experienced events not dissimilar to John, for example: Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel.) The time was “the Lord’s day.” Some have attempted to view this as the ‘Day of the Lord’ in an eschatological sense which the grammar might allow. However, the overwhelming historical position is that the day in question was a given “Lord’s day,” that is a ‘first day of the week’—a Sunday.

From the earliest days of Christianity, the early church observed the first day of the week as the day of assembly in commemoration of our Lord’s resurrection. See Acts 20:7 and I Corinthians 16:2.

*Act 20:7 And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.*

This in all likelihood refers to the same. It therefore became a new term which has continued to this day. Though Sunday is a term hearkening back to pagan Rome, the Lord’s Day denotes the special significance which Bible believing Christians attach to the first day of the week. John perhaps was in prayer and meditation on this particular Lord’s day. God in His divine purpose chose to reveal to him on that day what lay ahead.

On that day, John heard behind him “a great voice, as of a trumpet.” Of interest is the phrase “great voice.” The idea is of a powerful, overwhelming voice. John likened it “as of a trumpet.” Of note in Scripture is the association of the voice of God and that of a trumpet. See for example Exodus 19:16, I Thessalonians 4:16, and Revelation 4:1. Implied is a startling, overriding, and perhaps even overpowering sound.

*Exo 19:16 And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.*

*(Rev 1:11) Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.*

That great voice announced, “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.” As noted in verse 8, alpha and omega are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. And as the voice noted, He was the first and last. As the text will unfold, the speaker clearly was Jesus Christ. He sets forth His eternity once again. “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last”. He instructed John, “What thou seest, write in a book.” John soon would be shown events through the course of time, especially into the future. He was told to write “in a book.” The word so translated (biblion biblion) referred to a small book and specifically a scroll type of document.

John was further instructed to send this book “unto the seven churches which are in Asia.” They all were relatively close to the Isle of Patmos whence John was. John evidently sent to each church the message delivered for it. The seven cities containing these seven churches were: (1) Ephesus—the church there had been founded by Paul as noted in Acts 18; (2) Smyrna—a port city on the Aegean Sea about 40 miles north of Ephesus; (3) Pergamos—further still to the north and west of Ephesus; (4) Thyatira—the arc of the cities thus described now turns back to the south and east; (5) Sardis—a city to the south and east of Thyatira; (6) Philadelphia—a city east of Sardis; and (7) Laodicea—a city southeast of Philadelphia.

*(Rev 1:12) And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;*

John turned to see from where the voice was that spoke with him. In turning, he saw “seven golden candlesticks.”. Some have suggested he saw what essentially was a Jewish Menorah, a sevenfold candelabra. However, the word

translated as candlesticks (*lucnia luchnias*) is plural, implying that he saw seven distinct candlesticks. That view is further reinforced in the following verse where he described Jesus in the midst of the candlesticks.

*(Rev 1:13) And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.*

*(Rev 1:14) His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;*

*(Rev 1:15) And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.*

*(Rev 1:16) And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*

In the midst of these golden candlesticks, John saw the “Son of man.” John clearly was allowed to see the resurrected Christ in the fullness of His glory as He is in heaven. Though inspired by the Holy Spirit, he seemed to struggle to find words to describe the grandeur of His glorified Lord and Savior. Recall when Paul, as an unregenerate sinner, was allowed a similar glimpse in Acts 9, he fell to the ground and was blinded for three days.

John had the advantage of having being a regenerated servant of Christ, having served Him his entire adult life. He attempts to describe his Lord in His glory as He saw him there that day. John describes him as being “clothed with a garment down to the foot.” The royal majesty of our Lord is expressed in His modesty. Across his chest was a “golden girdle.” It was an accessory garment used to snug the robe beneath it. John further described Jesus’ head and hair as being white not only like wool, but actually “white as snow.”

There is no white which is whiter than freshly fallen snow. It bespeaks the utmost of purity. The thought likely is not of a bleached out appearance, but rather of infinite purity, dazzling in its brilliance. “His eyes were as a flame of fire.” Implied is a piercing focus in his eyes bespeaking His holy wrath. It is significant to note the word as here. John did not say His eyes were a flame of fire. Rather, they were as a flame of fire. He clearly spoke by way of analogy.

John went on to describe His feet as “like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.” The figure described is evidently likened unto the brilliance of molten brass. Altogether, John presents a description of Jesus Christ in His glorified body which bespeaks brilliant purity and blazing holiness, implying judgment.

He further described His voice as “the sound of many waters.” This metaphor was used in Ezekiel 43:2 and again in Revelation 14:2 and 19:6. Whether John had ever heard the roar of a major waterfall is not known. He certainly had heard the roar of the sea as wind drove the surf on the shore. Indeed, such a sound is awesome. It can be heard from a considerable distance. Implied is that the voice of our Lord in His glorified body is powerful, loud, and overwhelming. John continued to describe his vision of Jesus. He saw “in his right hand seven stars” which will be defined in verse 20. From His mouth he saw “a sharp two-edged sword.”

Though Jesus undoubtedly portrayed Himself for John’s benefit, the metaphor is evident. His Word is otherwise described as a sword and a two-edged one at that. See Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12.

*(Heb 4:12) For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

The source of such quite obviously is His mouth. Further implied is the power thereof, for His voice was described as like unto many waters. No force in nature is more powerful than that of energized water. Likewise, no force is more powerful spiritually than the Word of God. As implied, it is sharp and as Hebrews 4:12 notes, it pierces to the depth of the human heart.



All in all, John described his vision of the countenance of the revealed, glorified Christ as “the sun shineth in his strength.” The word translated as countenance (oqiv opsis) has the general sense of ‘appearance.’ So John perceived the appearance of Jesus (as God the Father had highly glorified Him) as the brilliance of the noonday sun at the summer solstice at a tropical latitude. It was overwhelming in its brilliance.

*(Rev 1:17) And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:*

Accordingly, as John saw the One highly glorified by God after His ascension back to heaven, he “fell at his feet as dead.” The fear-inspiring revelation of Jesus Christ in His glorified form so terrified John, he collapsed as dead before Him. The awesome spectacle of His holiness is clearly at hand. His tender mercy and compassionate love is also made clear. He therefore tenderly “laid his right hand upon” John and said to him, “Fear not.”

Praise God for the mercy of our Lord. Though terrifying in holiness, yet He is tender and kind to His servants. Jesus said to John, “I am the first and the last.” For the third time in this chapter, the eternity of Christ is set forth. It clearly bespeaks to His Deity.

*(Rev 1:18) I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*

Jesus continued, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen.” Several potent thoughts are at hand. Jesus clearly alludes to His death and resurrection and His substitutional sacrifice for our salvation. He also again clearly alludes to His eternal preexistence and eternity into the ages, again implying His Deity.

The verb tenses are instructive. With the exception of His comment that He was dead, the verb tenses are present implying ongoing existence. It was such before His passion and will continue thereafter, literally ‘unto the ages of the ages,’ (i.e., forever.) He further notes His divine authority, and have the keys of hell and of death.

The word translated as hell literally is (‘Adhv) hades. Of significance was the Jewish axiom that the keys of death and the grave were in the hand of God.

John no doubt was aware of that as were his readers. Clearly implied again is the Deity of Christ, for He Himself holds those keys.

*(Rev 1:19) Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;*

Jesus ordered John to write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter. A threefold division of the book is tacitly set forth.

(1) There were those things John had already seen thus far (past tense).

(2) There were the things he was to thus address which were then (present tense). These likely were the letters concerning the seven churches sent from Jesus through John to those seven churches.

(3) John was ordered to write that which he would see concerning things hereafter.

Jesus simply divides the book in the first chapter—the things which John had seen; chapters 2 and 3—the things were then present; and chapters 4 through 22—the things which would be thereafter.

*(Rev 1:20) The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the*

*seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.*

As is the case in much of the Book of Revelation, the symbolism is defined, leaving little room for subjective speculative interpretation. Jesus defined to John “the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawst in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks.” The seven stars were “the seven angels of the seven churches.” The word translated as angels (aggelov angelos) has the literal sense of a ‘messenger.’ The seven respective messengers of these seven churches are a likely reference to their pastors.

Of note is that those so chosen by Christ to effect His work as pastors are in the center of His right hand. That should come as comfort to any who so occupies that sacred and exalted office. Though the load of the work is often great and the attacks of the devil very real, that one called by God to be an under-shepherd of His sheep is in the center of His right hand. Jesus then also defines who the seven candlesticks were. They were the seven churches thus named. Of interest is that the local church of the New Testament is likened by our Lord as being a light fixture. Some have translated the word as ‘lampstand.’

The fact they are described as golden reveals their value to God. Moreover, a major function implied for the local church is to be thus a light to a darkened world. The analogy of a lighthouse is also comparable thereto. Indeed, Jesus instructed His disciples early in His ministry that they were to be light in the world. Clearly implied is that after Jesus, the ultimate light of the world, would depart; the church, His appointed successor, would be given that responsibility. See Matthew 5:14.

*Mat 5:14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*

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*Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

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