

Ministry of Grace

Revelation Chapter 1

¹The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ²who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

⁴John 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, ⁵and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

⁷Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. 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."

⁹I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹saying, "Write what you see in a book 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."

¹²Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰As for the mystery of the seven stars that 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. [ESB]

Revelation 1:1, 2

¹The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ²who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

“The revelation” (literally “A revelation”) – from the Greek “*apokalupsis*,” from which we get our English word apocalypse. This word is made up of *apo*, meaning “from” or “away from” and *kaluptō*, meaning “to cover.” Hence, *apokalupsis* means “an uncovering,” “an unveiling,” or “a revelation.”

This book is about a revelation (singular) of Jesus – this entire book is the revealing of Jesus in his majesty and glory, both now in heaven and in the future when he comes to earth to judge sin and sinners. In Jesus’ first incarnation He came as a humble servant to offer Himself as the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. In His second coming He will come as the conquering King of Kings to judge and to rule the world.

This revelation, this uncovering of future things about Jesus Christ, was given by God the Father to God the Son (Jesus Christ), who then gave it to his messenger (an angel) to give to John. Now, John in return, is giving it to all mankind. Although this describes messengers between God and us, it is nonetheless a message given from God to us individually.

The revelation was given to Jesus to show (Greek *deiknō* meaning “to present to sight” or “to cause to see”) to His servants (Greek *doulos* meaning “voluntary bond servant”). Jesus only causes his own bond servants (saved Christians) to see the revelation. That is why this book is indecipherable and enigmatic to the unsaved.

For the Law regarding a bond servant – see Exodus 21:2-6

“soon take place” is literally, “which is to come into being in a short space of time.” This can be interpreted as “soon” or as “quickly.” I believe that “soon” is the best interpretation of this word.

Tachos is the Greek word translated “soon.” It is derived from *tachus*, meaning “prompt” or “swift.” In this instance, it is preceded by the preposition *en*, meaning “in.” In this construction the words mean “quickly, shortly, speedily, or soon.”

We must keep in mind that God’s “soon” is different from man’s “soon.” As Peter said in his second epistle, “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (2 Peter 3:8) Since God is omnipresent (everywhere present and at every time present), He is at the beginning and at the end simultaneously. So, what God considers a short time, may to us be a long time and what God considers “soon” is not necessarily what man would consider “soon.”

“John” the author of this letter is generally accepted to be the Apostle John.

The word “angel” is transliterated (brought directly from one language to another) from the Greek word *aggelos* (angelos). It literally means “a messenger.” We will encounter this word a lot in chapters two and three.

Revelation 1:3

³Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

Initially, the letters and writings of the various New Testament books were copied and passed-on to other churches. These were then read to the congregations at local church meetings. At the time, this was the only way believers were exposed to “The Bible.” It was not until the end of the fourth century that all of the writings contained in our Bible were gathered together and proclaimed to be God’s Inspired Word. This is why John says that the one who reads and the ones who hear are blessed.

“**prophecy**” This is the only book in the New Testament that claims to be prophecy. For this reason, it must be read and interpreted differently than the remainder of the New Testament. *See the Introductory Notes in this study series.*

“**keep what is written**” The word “keep” is translated from the Greek word *tēreō*, meaning “to keep an eye on” or “guard” as a soldier watches over a prisoner.

“**time is near**” = Greek *kairos engus*. *Kairos* refers to a period of time or an occasion and “*engus*” means “close at hand.” This verse proclaims that the period of time spoken of in Revelation is close at hand.

Revelation 1:4-6

⁴John 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, ⁵and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

John’s letter was written to the seven churches in Asia (modern day western Turkey). This is the area where John the Apostle ministered. His home church was Ephesus where he was pastor until his exile.

“**Him who is and who was and who is to come**” – God, The Father.

“**the seven Spirits who are before His throne**” – God, The Holy Spirit.

“**Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler over the kings on earth**” – God, The Son.

“**ruler**” = Greek *archon*, which means “first in rank or power.”

“**Amen**” is transliterated from the Hebrew word meaning “it is truth.”

Revelation 1: 7

⁷Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

“**Behold**” – Greek *idou*, which means “look!” or “pay attention!” Whenever we read this word in Revelation we are to pay attention to what is about to be revealed.

“**with the clouds**” – this could also be translated as “in the midst of clouds.” Clouds are a common occurrence with the appearance of God. He led the Israelites out of Egypt as a pillar of fire by day and a pillar of cloud by night. When He appeared to the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai, He appeared in the cloud covering the mountain. When He met with Moses in the wilderness tabernacle He appeared in a cloud. When the glory of God entered and left the Temple, He appeared as a cloud. When Christ ascended to the Father, he ascended in clouds.

John’s statement that he is coming with the clouds is a reference to his second coming at the end of the Tribulation. It is not a description of the rapture. It is significant that after chapter three (the letters to the churches) there is no mention of the church until Revelation 22:16. This is just one of many reasons why I believe that the rapture of the church occurs before the Tribulation.

“**every eye will see Him**” – This includes all people, both living and dead.

“**all tribes of the earth will wail**” – This does not mean that everyone will wail. It means that there will be people from every tribe who will wail. The word translated “tribes” is *phulē*, meaning “a tribe, clan, or lineage.” It is a smaller group than race or nation. The most likely reason for their wailing is the realization that they have been wrong about God and are about to receive the punishment that is due to them for their lack of belief.

Revelation 1:8

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

“**the Alpha and the Omega**” – Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In some Greek text, the words “Alpha” and “Omega” do not appear, just the letters.

The phrase “*the beginning and the end*” is not present in the best Greek texts and has not been included in this translation.

Note that he says “**is**” before “**was**.” Word order is very significant in Greek. When something is expressed first in a series, the writer is calling attention to it. The most significant thing about Jesus Christ is that “He is,” now and forever more

“**Almighty**” = Greek *pantokrator*, meaning “one who rules over all” or “one who has dominion over all.”

Revelation 1:9

⁹I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

“Patmos is a barren, volcanic island in the Aegean Sea, at its extremities about ten miles long and five to six miles wide, located some forty miles offshore from Miletus (a city in Asia Minor about thirty miles south of Ephesus). John was probably sent to Patmos as a criminal (as a Christian, he was a member of an illegal religious sect). If so, the conditions under which he lived would have been harsh. Exhausting labor under the watchful eye (and ready whip) of a Roman overseer, insufficient food and clothing, and having to sleep on the bare ground would have taken their toll on a ninety-year-old man.” [John MacArthur]

John was exiled to Patmos by the Roman Emperor Domitian who reigned from AD 81 to AD 96. Since John claims to have been on Patmos when he wrote this book, it must have been written during that time, probably close to the time that he was released (shortly after Domitian died). Also, since verse 19 refers to “the things which are to come to pass,” it pretty much puts the final nail in the coffin of the preterist view, which culminates in AD 70.

Revelation 1:10, 11

**¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet
¹¹saying, "Write what you see in a book 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."**

“**in the Spirit**” probably signifies that John was in some kind of spiritual trance, perhaps not unlike the state we are in when deeply engrossed in prayer.

“**the Lord’s Day**” This is the only place in the New Testament where this expression is used.

“*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last*” – Though some translations include it here, this phrase does not occur here in the best Greek manuscripts.

"Write what you see in a book 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 instructed to write down everything that he saw and to send it to the seven churches of Asia. (see **Revelation 1:4**). Even though John spent much of the latter years of his life ministering in Ephesus, it is likely that he also had an itinerant (traveling) ministry to the other churches in Asia. He is instructed to write in a “book.” In John’s day that would be a scroll.

Revelation 1:12, 13

¹²Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The seven golden lampstands, as explained in verse twenty, are the seven churches in Asia (modern day Turkey).

“clothed with a long robe” – Kings and prophets were dressed in garments that came down to the feet, but these were typically tied with a sash or a belt about the waist. The High Priest was also arrayed in a robe that came down to the feet. Unlike the king or prophet, however, his was tied with a golden sash across the chest.

“one like a son of man” – The word “like” is *homoios*, meaning “similar to.” The Greek word *hōs* is also sometimes translated “as.” It also does not indicate equality, but similarity. As you read through the book of Revelation (the entire Bible, in fact), notice carefully when you see the words “like” and “as.” It doesn’t mean the thing being described “is” something else, but that it has the form or appearance of something else.

John says that he is “like” a son of man. He does not say that he is “the Son of Man” (a reference to Jesus Christ), but one like a son of man. In other words, John saw a human-like figure standing in the middle of the seven lampstands and he didn’t know who it was. Later, in verse 17, this person will declare himself to be “the First and the Last,” an obvious reference to God himself. And then in verse eighteen he will declare:

... and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.

So, in these later verses John leaves little doubt that this is a representation of Jesus Christ himself. However, at this point John does not know who he is except “one like a son of man.”

Revelation 1:14-16

¹⁴The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

Notice the repeated usage of “like.” This was John’s attempt to describe something that is indescribable.

“hairs of his head were white, like white wool” – The whiteness of His hair is a symbol of the holiness of God. The brightness is a picture of the Shekinah glory.

“His eyes were like a flame of fire” – Fire is an expression of God’s righteous anger against sin and sinfulness.

“sword” – Greek *romphaia*, which is a large broadsword, used to swing a fatal blow. It is different than *machaira*, a short dagger-like weapon used by Roman soldiers for close-in fighting with a

stabbing like motion. The two-edged sword spoken of in **Hebrews 4:12** is translated from the Greek word *machaira*.

“his face was like the sun shining in full strength” – The brightness is a picture of the Shekinah glory.

Revelation 1:17, 18

¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

“Fear not” – Greek *mē phobou*, meaning “do not be frightened!”

“I died” – This is not a completely accurate translation of the Greek. A literal translation of the Greek is “I became dead.” Notice that He does not say, “I was dead;” this would indicate a continuous state. Instead, He says “I became dead,” a reference to His death on the cross.

“I have the keys of Death and Hades” – Jesus has the power over life and death now. Also note that before Jesus’ resurrection, Satan (the devil) possessed power over death:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, (**Hebrews 2:14**) [NASB]

Revelation 1:19

¹⁹Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

This is an outline of the book of Revelation and must be interpreted in the context of the time in which Revelation was written.

“the things that you have seen” refers to the vision of Jesus in the midst of the lampstands (chapter 1).

“those that are” refers to the messages to the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3).

“those that are to take place after this.” refers to the visions of the future which occupy the remaining chapters of the book of Revelation (chapters 4 through 22).
