

The Revelation to John: Part I

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

³ Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near.

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,

⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings

1. of Jesus Christ: by, about, or belonging to

Chain of communication: God→Jesus Christ→Angel→John→Churches

Must: not by fate, but by sure fulfillment of God's purpose

Soon: in your lifetime/generation

Note the free use of the Name of Jesus in this opening paragraph, and its comparative absence later in the book. It has been suggested that when this address was copied, obscure references to Jesus were replaced with his Name for the sake of other Churches. This is not an entirely consistent suggestion because of the Name's occasional use throughout the rest of the book

2. bore witness: legalistic term, meaning he assures the hearer he is telling the truth in the best way he can.

3. In an illiterate society, only one copy of a letter was affordable by a church, and it was intended to be read aloud in the course of worship. The message of the whole book, not just the letters to the churches, is prophecy, on a par with OT writings, so God's blessing rests on all who read and hear it, just as it did for those who read the prophecies aloud in the Synagogue.

4. Seven is a symbolic number of perfection or completion throughout the book. Creation was completed in seven days. "Seven" can be read "all of" without loss of meaning—here and throughout the whole book. These churches are representative of the whole Church.

Note the linear construction of time.

Note that Grace always precedes peace, as in Paul, with whom there must be some familiarity, and denotes a cause/effect pattern.

5. Note the way the Trinity is referred to in 4 and 5. It indicates an intermediate Trinitarian theology which helps us to date it. The pneumatology identifies the Spirit with the spiritual gifts of God mentioned in Isaiah 11:2.

In a time when Christians were being killed regularly, this verse has a reminder that Jesus

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on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood

⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one 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.

⁹ I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account 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

Christ is the most faithful witness (greek=martyrion) and that all should follow his example. Note the present tense.

Textual variant: freed (gk=lusanti) is sometimes read washed (gk lousanti)

6. See **1 Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

7. This expresses certainty in Jesus' promise that he will return to judge the world. It also identifies all people in the world as sinners for whom Christ was killed, and as those who will have to accept Christ's majesty in the end, no matter how upsetting or painful the experience is.

8. The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, signifying that God came before everything in creation and will also outlast everything, also that He alone is the Creator, and that He alone will draw His creation to a close. See Isaiah 44:6
This marks the end of the address and the beginning of the preliminary vision.

9. This is the only identification that John gives. Its proximity to Ephesus, and our knowledge of the tolerant political climate there suggest that he may have been Ephesian, which aligns with the tradition that John the Apostle became Bishop of Ephesus and died there. The grammar and theology suggest different authorship, however. There is no satisfactory explanation. The final statement suggests that he was banished rather than martyred, perhaps to avoid rebellion. This suggests that he was a man of some influence, and perhaps that the Christian Churches under his care were comparatively large.

10. This denotes an ecstatic kind of meditative prayer, frequently practiced in the New Testament churches. The mention of the Lord's day refers to the specialness of Sunday for prayer and devotion.

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me a loud voice like a trumpet
¹¹ saying, "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."
¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,
¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast;
¹⁴ his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire,
¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters;
¹⁶ in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a

The trumpet is perhaps symbolic of loudness, clarity, musicality
11. Whether he was able to write what he saw on Patmos, or was later released from exile (perhaps after the death of Domitian) and wrote it then is unclear. There are arguments both ways.
The order of the churches listed is the order in which a messenger would have delivered them traveling from North to South, traveling in a semicircle. They are each about 25-50 miles apart, and are spaced so that the book could be distributed to smaller churches in the countryside.
12. Here begins the vision proper: seven again is completion, and the allusion is to the churches just mentioned. Each light represents a church, and so here he sees all of the church on earth bearing the light of Christ to the world around it. ("candlesticks" in some English Bibles is a bad translation)
13. the "son of man" is from Daniel as is much of the imagery in this vision. In this case it is a title that Jesus applied to himself during his earthly ministry.
Standing in the midst of the lampstands, or churches, indicates that Christ is not an absentee landlord: he is present in his churches. The garments are those of a king, and this is an image of Christ as King of his churches.
14. The description of his head and hair are from Daniel 7:9 where Daniel sees God as "Ancient of Days" This does not mean that Jesus has grown old, but rather that he is equal in dignity and substance with the Father.
Many visions describe Jesus eyes, the imagery here is that they burn away impurities and see us as we really are. Jesus is a God who knows us perfectly and loves us perfectly.
15. Contrast the bronze feet to those in Dan. 2:33. the "feet of clay" this represents immovability and stability.
Many waters comes from Ezekiel 43:2, and is a description of the voice of God. Again, here we have the likening of Jesus to the OT image of the Father.
16. The stars, we are told in a few verses are the angels of the churches: their guardians and guides, as well as the means by which God communicates. Jesus has complete control over them.

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sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last,

¹⁸ and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

¹⁹ Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter.

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.

The sword is a symbol of judgment (see Heb. 4:12), it comes from his mouth because he speaks words of judgment. The context in Hebrews is that Jesus, having been one of us, knows our weaknesses, and therefore his judgments are always just and fair.

The sun is a popular image for God, shedding light, giving growth and life to the world. The Humanity of Jesus and the personal encounter with him, represented by seeing his face, is the true light of the world.

17. John is petrified at seeing this, but the point of the vision is not to terrify John, but to give him confidence by showing Jesus with divine attributes. He is healed of his fear by Jesus' touch.

18. By dying, Jesus gained complete control over Death. Therefore the time and manner of the death of each person are in his control. This is a message of assurance to those who are threatened by death, that it cannot separate them from his love.

19. The command to write comes from Jesus himself, and it encompasses everything that is happening now, and everything in the future. One of the chief problems in the interpretation of this book is the need to distinguish between what is now, and what will come.

20. In order to make sure that the reader is on the same page: John includes an explanation of some of the symbolism. He is essentially saying: "look beyond the words, into the images and their associations, then you'll get it."

Imagine a love letter that goes something like: "Your eyes are limpid pools of water, your cheeks are rose petals, your neck is graceful like a swan's" Charming, right? Might make you swoon. But draw a literalistic picture of it and suddenly it's not so flattering.