The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday PM Bible Study

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**Chapter 1**

* **1:1-3– Superscription**
* **Verse 1**– Jesus is the one who unveils/reveals (Revelation) the message to John. Here, Jesus acts as a mediator between God and John (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5-6). This will be further detailed shortly. The point is to stress that God is the source of all revelation (cf. Gen. 40:8; Dan. 2:22, 28-29, 45, 47; Amos 3:7).
* That Jesus acts according to the will of His father is a Johannine theme that is prevalent in the fourth gospel and the Revelation (Jn. 1:18; 5:19-23; 12:49; 14:10; 17:6-8). This shows a direct line of relationship between God and Jesus and thus that they are one and the same in terms of deity.
* The message is to be imparted to the *“bondservants”* of God. The term *“bondservant”* is used twice in this verse and refers to the saints, Christians or simply the disciples of God. In this particular case, the word references the saints of the seven churches (1:4) It is a term that is used of Jesus (Phil. 2:7) and thus indicates these are those who are modeling their lives after Jesus. The term also refers to being a *“slave”* (Rom. 6:16-22).
* The message of Jesus pertains to events *“which must soon take place.”* What is meant by the use of this phrase? Rev. 1 is filled with allusions to Daniel (especially chapters 2 and 7). To understand what is being meant by this phrase, we must tie in the message from Daniel.
* Daniel 2:29-45 speaks of four kingdoms, three of which will be future, and the fourth no doubt pertains to the time period of the Revelation. There is however, another Kingdom which is greater than all four and it pertains to the days of the fourth kingdom but it will be established forever. It is understood that this is the Kingdom of God (Jn. 18:36).
* Daniel is clearly told by God these events are yet future (Dan. 2:29, 45). There is no doubt that John and the rest of the Jews waited for this day to arrive and he came to understand that the time had come.
* That the Messiah (Jesus) accomplished the prophecies of the OT and fulfilled God’s plan of redemption prompted the *“end”* or *“the last days.”* This is understood in light of Christ setting up the Kingdom which sets up His second advent (Rom. 16:20; Phil. 4:5; Heb. 10:25; Jam. 5:8-9; 1 Pet. 4:7; 2 Pet. 3:9-11; 1 Jn. 2:18).
* Obviously the message imparted to the bondservants pertains to something that has already begun and will continue to increase shortly (persecution) but the phrase also bears reference to something greater. The prophecies from Daniel 2 and 7 has come to past and will continue to develop in this book.
* Mounce adds, *“The most satisfying solution is to take the expression [“must soon take place”] in a straightforward sense, remembering that in the prophetic outlook the end is always imminent”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*).
* The phrase must not be read in light of Christ’s second coming and the consummation of all history but rather as the inaugural fulfillment and ongoing nature of the Kingdom. Beale says, *“John’s book is a prophetic work which concerns the imminent and inaugural fulfillment of OT prophecies about the Kingdom in Jesus Christ”* (G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation).*
* Thus, the phrase signifies an already but not yet connotation which permeates throughout the entirety of the book. In one sense persecution has begun and will continue to increase and on the other hand, the cosmic forces of evil and their defeat (consummation of history) is yet to take place.
* The chain of communication seems to be as follows: God to Jesus, Jesus to angel, angel to John. Whether this angel is a figure separate and apart from Jesus is not certain. The bible speaks of the angel of the LORD who at times may be identified with Jesus (cf. Gen. 22:11; Num. 22:22-35; Judg. 6:11-22; Isa. 37:36).
* While it may be uncertain according to the Greek, Rev. 22:6-9, 16 seem to indicate that Jesus communicated to John the message via an angelic figure. The point is that John got the message and in turn was to communicate it to the saints.
* **Verse 2**– This verse emphasizes that what John saw was the real deal and the truth in its entirety. He saw the message Jesus Himself bore witness to (Jn. 1:18) and John furthermore serves as a witness to the message of Christ.
* That there were false prophets prevalent at the time makes this statement even more impactful. There is room left for doubt concerning the origin of the Revelation and the reliability of its content. This again seems to be a theme in the Johannine writings (Jn. 1:32; 19:35; Jn. 21:24; 1 Jn. 1:1; 5:9-11).
* **Verse 3**– This verse indicates a common occurrence during this time. Usually there was a proficient reader who would get up and read God’s word (public reading; Lk. 4:16; Acts 13:15; 1 Thess. 5:27; 1 Tim. 4:13). As such there was a heavy responsibility placed on the reader (Rev. 22:18-19) but Jesus notes that the hearers have are just as responsible.
* The one who read was not so distinguished as the one who would listen since both are required to heed the words of the prophecy. This mirrors what Jesus Himself said Lk. 11:28 and John 13:17. This implies there was moral significance to the message and all who would hear it must act on it obediently or face the consequences. Thus, this acts both as an encouragement and a warning.
* The phrase *“the time is near”,* Mounce suggests, denotes *“a time of crisis or a decisive moment”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*). The message John would convey required a sense of urgency since it was pertinent to their respective situations. For more information see comments on *“which must soon take place”* in v. 1.
* **1:4-8– Salutation to the Seven Churches**
* **Verse 4**– The salutation commences with John (for more info. on John see authorship) addressing the seven churches in Asia. This area is also referred to as Asia Minor and it is what is today called Turkey.
* Mounce adds, *“In the NT, Asia normally refers to the Roman province that occupied the entire western portion of Asia Minor stretching inland to the Anatolian plateau. It is the area represented by the ancient kingdom of Pergamum, which in 133 B.C. fell to the Romans”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*).
* There were other churches in this geographical area including Troas (Acts 20:5) and Colossae (Col. 1:2). As a result, why were these seven churches chosen? The general consensus is that they were chosen because of their relation to emperor worship or the imperial cult which the book seems to address.
* Other suggestions include a symbolic argument that these churches (7) represent a complete number and thus while they are all specific churches, what is said to them is applicable to all churches throughout the ages of the kingdom.
* The salutation begins with the customary greeting formula: *“Grace to you and peace.”* This phrase is prevalent in the Pauline letters (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:2 etc.). The salutation is extended from three different sources beginning with Yahweh Himself, The Almighty.
* He is described as the one *“who is, and who was and who is to come.”* This is a commonly repeated phrase in the book (Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 21:6; 22:13) that ties together the OT form of God’s name while also stressing the nature of His existence. He is eternal and thus controls the past, present and future (Psa. 90:2). This is especially comforting to the saints under the shadow of an impending crises.
* The second source extending the salutation are the seven spirits who are before the throne of God (Rev. 4:5; 5:6). It is difficult to know with certainty who are the seven spirits. It could be a perfect way of referring to the Holy Spirit thus completing the triune nature: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
* It may also be referring to a complete number of heavenly hosts (angels or otherwise). Whatever the case be, the reader is no doubt encouraged to learn that a number of heavenly hosts (or Holy Spirit) take consideration vis-à-vis their situations.
* **Verse 5**– The third source of the salutation is Jesus Christ. There is a three-fold description applied to Jesus within this verse beginning with that of *“the faithful witness.”* This description of Jesus is prevalent throughout the book and also Johannine literature (Rev. 3:14; 19:11).
* Jesus’ entire purpose, His life and His ministry was to reveal God and His nature (Jn. 1:18; 3:32-33; 18:37; 1 Tim. 6:13). Jesus bore witness to the truth that YHWH alone is God, that He loves and cares for everyone and through Him we can live forever!
* The word for witness (martus) is where we get the word martyr from. It carries with it the idea of staying faithful to a cause even in the face of death. Jesus is presented as the model witness since He did exactly that and the Christians who are going to suffer persecution ought to look to Him and do the same.
* The second description applied to Jesus is *“the firstborn from the dead.”* This phrase occurs here and is also found in Col. 1:18. The point of the text is that the resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 28:1-7; Jn. 20:1-18) holds pre-eminence above all others. Many people were raised from the dead before Jesus, but they undoubtedly died again! Jesus rose from the dead never to experience death again (Rev. 1:18)!
* This description also emphasizes that only through Jesus’ resurrection can all men live forever even though they die on the earth (Jn. 11:25-26). To the Christians at the time, this was both reassuring and enlightening.
* The third description concerns His sovereignty in saying that He is *“the ruler of the kings of the earth.”* This is a phrase that is dominant in the OT (1 Sam. 2:10; Psa. 2:6, 10-11; 89:27). That is to say, Jesus is the Sovereign ruler (perhaps most repeated description of Jesus in the book). Jesus has authority and power that no man can even begin to imagine let alone wield (Matt. 28:18).
* The devil wanted Jesus to worship him in exchange for the kingdoms of the world and their glory (Matt. 4:8-10). Jesus refused him but still achieved the supreme authority and magnificent exaltation over all the kingdoms of earth through His death and resurrection (Phil. 2:8-11; Rev. 11:15).
* Just as Christ was tempted to give in to the devil, even so the Christians in Revelation were tempted to give in. The security and comfort that could come from denying Jesus and God and Lord was indeed hard to turn down. But because Jesus sits on the throne of God they could take heart and refuse temptation since He has granted them victory through His death and resurrection (Rom. 8:18).
* The latter part of v. 5 continuing into v. 6 now constructs a doxology to Jesus. Jesus’s love for His people is directly linked to His death on the cross (Eph. 2:4; 5:2, 25-27; Rev. 5:9). Notice that they were *“loosed”* from something. That something is sin and its terrifying consequences.
* This could only be possible through the shedding of the innocent blood of the Son of God (Acts 20:28; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; 1 Jn. 1:7). There is a clear illusion here to the Passover lamb of Ex. 12 and how that played a role in delivering Israel from bondage in Egypt. Jesus is our Passover lamb who delivered us from the bondage of sin (1 Cor. 5:7).
* **Verse 6**– Through His death and His bloodshed, He made us (saints) to be a kingdom and a priesthood (Rev. 5:10). Those who identify with Christ’s death, resurrection and His rule don’t just know of it but they are a part of it.
* The disciples exhibit the same characteristics as their Savior which is only made possible through His death (1 Pet. 2:9). This again draws allusion from Ex. 19:5-6 where Israel is made a kingdom and priests after deliverance from Egypt if they will identify with God. In this sense then, the church is the true Israel (Rom. 9:24-28).
* The verse concludes the doxology by ascribing glory and universal reign to Jesus. He is equated with YHWH in this sense and thus magnified and exalted as above all else. He alone is worthy of such praise (cf. Rev. 4-5) not only now but throughout all eternity.
* **Verse 7**– The salutation continues as it moves to an end in vv. 7-8. Two OT passages make up the bulk of v. 7 and thus its significance. Dan. 7:13-14 and Zech. 12:10-12 are the passages John has in mind.
* The verse may fall under the umbrella of the *“already and not yet”* aspect that we have previously discussed in v. 1. Jesus coming in the clouds is no doubt associated with judgment and His second advent (Isa. 19:1; Matt. 24:30; 1 Thess. 4:16-17).
* The aspect of the clouds is more so related to the presence of God (Ex. 13:21; 16:10; Psa. 104:3; Jer. 4:13; Ezek. 3-3-4; Joel 2:1-2). Thus, the idea is that Jesus is coming to bring judgement judgment upon the enemies of the saints. His coming is a blessing to the believers but a cause for mourning to the unbelievers.
* *“Those who pierced Him”* may have reference to the Romans who crucified Jesus but it probably refers to those who reject Jesus. When one rejects God, he/she pierces Jesus since He willingly died for us.
* Like the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus’ presence is imminent upon the enemies of this book and He will execute judgment against them all. Thus, the verse finds fulfillment primarily during the crises of the book. But the fuller significance of the verse is the second advent of Christ (Matt. 25:31-46). Therefore, the *“already and not yet”* aspect is seen here.
* **Verse 8**– The salutation now comes to a close with a powerful reminder or the nature and power of God. The salutation is closed in the same way it began. The Almighty is emphasized as the Alpha and the Omega (Jn. 1:1-3; col. 1:16-17; Rev. 1:8, 17; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13).
* The purpose of this phrase (Alpha and Omega) is to further emphasize that He is the Sovereign ruler of all creation since He Himself was before all things and through Him everything exists. He is alive now and He will be there even at the end.
* The words used *“Alpha”* and *“Omega”* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet respectively. Like the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet (Aleph and Tav), to emphasize the *“Alpha”* and *“Omega”* is to stress everything in between and not just the first and last letters (merism).
* The point of this phrase (used repeatedly in the book) is not to stress God’s eternal nature per se, but rather it is *“stressing his timeless sovereignty for the encouragement of Asian Christians who are facing persecution for their faith”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*). He is the beginning of all things, but He also controls their end. God is active in His creation and He has asserted His sovereign role throughout the course of human history.
* This concluding remark in the salutation also serves as a stamp of approval on what is said in between (vv. 5-7) about Jesus and His faithful testimony, ministry, death, resurrection and sovereignty. This prepares us for the vision to follow.
* **1:9-20– John’s Commission and Inaugural Vision**
* **Verse 9**– This section of chapter 1, is reminiscent of prophetic calling of both Isaiah and Ezekiel (Isa. 6; Ezek. 1). In this light, John may be considered as a prophet of God. John identifies himself not as an apostle, or one who knew Jesus personally or any description which places himself above his brethren.
* John places himself in the same predicament which the brethren of Asia Minor find themselves in. He is their brother and fellow partaker because he finds himself exiled in Patmos for the cause of Christ.
* John lists three things he is a partaker of along with the brethren: tribulation, kingdom and perseverance. The tribulation or suffering is listed first since it is no doubt at the forefront of the minds of the audience. John can relate with what they are going through since he himself has tasted suffering (cf. John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12). Suffering is listed first not only because it’s readily relatable but also because one cannot enter the kingdom and be in the kingdom without some form of suffering (Acts 14:22; Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 1:8, 12; 1 Pet. 2:19-21; 4:1-19). Suffering achieves the blessings of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5:10-12).
* With that in mind then, John finishes the trifecta illustration by saying they must persevere. They are persevering at the time but they must continue to do so in order that their joy be made complete (2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Jn. 1:4). This perseverance must ultimately be modeled with respect to Christ (Heb. 12:1-2).
* Mounce says of Patmos, *“Patmos, a small, rocky island (approximately ten miles long and five miles wide) in the Aegean Sea some forty miles west-southwest of Miletus”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*). This may have been a place the Romans utilized as a penal settlement for those convicted of crimes against the government.
* John identifies the “crime” he has been punished for and that is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. John was a prominent figure among many of the 1st century churches and thus he would have garnered a lot of attention from the Christians. His preaching may have seemed seditious to the Romans and thus exile was only appropriate.
* **Verse 10**– John now begins to tell of what he witnessed in the inaugural vision. As to what is meant by John “being in the Spirit,” the idea is probably that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Some think it to be hypnosis or some form of a trance (cf. Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17; 2 Cor. 12:2-4). The Greek word used for trance in these scriptures is not the same used in v. 10.
* John’s experience here parallels that of Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:3; 3:12;, 14, 24; 11:1; 43:5) where Ezekiel is filled with the Holy Spirit. As such John’s experience may be that of being filled with the Holy Spirit. This occurred on the Lord’s day which is a reference to the first day of the week or Sunday (Lk. 24:1-2; Acts 20:7).
* John hears a voice behind him which he describes as the sound of that of a trumpet (Rev. 4:1). The point is that what he hears is loud and clear and it calls for his undivided and unwavering attention.
* **Verse 11**– The voice commissions John to write all that he sees. The importance of what will be told to John and what he will see is of a high order and thus his attention to the vision is crucial. The contents are to be sent to the seven churches (1:4) which the book has previously addressed. For more information on why the letters are to be sent to these churches, see 1:4.
* **Verse 12**– John now turns around to see who is the one speaking to him. When he turns, he witnesses seven golden lampstands (v. 20). The lampstands no doubt bring to mind the instructions of God to Moses concerning the tabernacle (Ex. 25:31-40). Zechariah also speaks of something similar (Zech. 4:2). In conjunction with v. 20, the purpose of the churches being called lampstands signifies to repsonsilbities of shining their lights in a dark world (Matt. 5:14-16; 1 Tim. 3:15).
* **Verse 13**– As John continues to describe what he sees, he now points us to the Son of Man who walks among the lampstands. The phrase *“Son of Man”* is derived from the Danielic vision of the four beasts and the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7. The *“Son of Man”* is presented before the Ancient of Days (God Almighty) and it is clear from Dan. 7:14 the Son of Man is Jesus Christ.
* Jesus further clarifies this phrase by using the phrase to refer to Himself time and time again in the gospels (Matt. 8:20; 9:6). The Hebrew writer removes doubt by adding the phrase speaks of Jesus’ humanity and deity (Heb. 2:6-8). Further descriptions in the text at hand will reveal John is in the presence of the Christ.
* The descriptions of the Son of Man that follows, is heavily drawn from Dan. 7:9-10 and 10:5-6, 10. The first description of the Christ is that of a robe reaching the feet and golden sash girded across the chest. This description is probably illustrating the priesthood of Christ. Combined with the fact that He walks among the lampstands, this seems to be fitting (Ex. 27:20; 30:7-8).
* The clothing of the priests in the OT (Ex. 39:29) seem to be similar to what the Son of Man is wearing here in Revelation. Josephus says that the priest’s girdle was interwoven with gold (*Antiquities* 3.7.4). The figure in Dan. 10:5 was wearing something identical. All these together point to Jesus as high priest.
* This description thus completes Jesus’ threefold office of prophet (Rev. 1:1-2), king (1:5) and now priest (1:13). Chapter one seems to stress Jesus’ fulfilment of these 3 offices.
* **Verse 14**– The description of the Son of Man continues by applying the images of Daniel 7:9. His head/hair is said to be white like wool and snow which is indicative of wisdom and purity (Lev. 19:32; Prov. 16:31).
* John continues by saying that His eyes were like a flame of fire (cf. Dan. 10:6; Rev. 2:18; 19:12). The description indicates Jesus penetrating sovereignty over the course of human history as well as the churches.
* **Verse 15**– Jesus is described as having feet like burnished bronze (cf. Dan. 10:6; Rev. 2:18). The idea is that of fine brass after it has been refined by the fire. The picture here is that of strength, stability and purity. John continues by saying His voice was like that of many waters (cf. Ezek. 43:2; Dan. 10:6; Rev. 14:2; 19:6). His voice is awe-inspiring and fearful as the sound of a mighty rushing waterfall.
* **Verse 16**– In the right hand of Jesus are the seven stars (cf. Rev. 1:20; 2:1; 3:1). His right hand is a picture of strength, power and sovereignty. The seven stars represent the seven angels of the seven churches and thus indicate Christ’s control over the destiny of the churches (Dan. 7:14; Jn. 10:28).
* Out of His mouth proceeds a sharp two-edged sword (cf. Isa. 49:2; Heb. 4:12; Rev. 2:12, 16; 6:8; 19:15, 21). This is to be understood as the word of God and the power and authority it holds over all men everywhere and not just the churches themselves. It signifies divine judgment to those who do not submit to the Son of Man.
* The description of the Son of Man climaxes with John describing His face like that of the sun shining at full strength (cf. Ex. 34:29; Dan. 10:6; Matt. 17:2; Rev. 4:3). This Theophany no doubt demonstrates the brilliance and utter magnificence of Jesus. No one can witness Him in full glory yet what John sees is a great glimpse of His radiance.
* Verse 17– John’s response to all He saw is indicative of what others have experienced in relation to visions concerning God’s brilliance or some form of a Heavenly being (cf. Josh. 5:14; Ezek. 1:28; Dan. 8:17; 10:8-9; 15; Matt. 17:6; Acts 26:14). None of these instances indicate that they have seen God is His complete glory, yet the little they experience is far too overwhelming.
* The Son of Man touches John with His right hand and encourages him not be fearful (cf. Dan. 10:10; Matt. 14:27; 17:7). He then identifies Himself in accordance with what He has done and not by name. Jesus says He is the first and last which reminds us of the words of God in 1:8 (Rev. 22:13).
* The phrase *“The first and the last”* finds its roots in the OT (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12) and is used to speak of God’s absolute sovereignty and eternity. There is no God like Him and apart from Him, there will never be another. The phrase is both powerful and encouraging to John and the saints.
* **Verse 18**– Furthermore, Christ is the living One which expands on the previous idea (cf. Josh. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:26; Psa. 42:2). The phrase speaks of Christ’s possession of life and His resurrection from the dead (Lk. 24:5).
* Christ Has overcome death never to die again (Rom. 6:9; Rev. 2:8; 10:6). His possession of life is to be understood as a strong argument against the pagan gods and/or emperors. This is solidified by the fact that He controls Hades and Death (cf. Matt. 16:19).
* **Verse 19**– There is much that could be said about this verse but the point is that Jesus instructs John to write the things which He has seen which is present and yet future (Inaugurated Eschatology; See Rev. 1:1 for more information). There is a sense is which a lot of what John sees has already taken place and continues to happen but in another, the events are yet future.
* **Verse 20**– We are now told what the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands are. We have mentioned before what they represent and how they tie into the message of the Revelation. Notice that is stressed that God is the revealer of mysteries (cf. Dan. 2:47).
* That Christ walks among the lampstands (churches) is significant because He sees everything they do but He also identifies with them. As to the seven angels, they may be humans or *“guardian angels”* (cf. Dan. 10:13, 20-21; Matt. 18:10). Whatever the case be, this vision and commission has prepared us for a magnificent and inspiring message ahead.