

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

I. THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE SEEN. (1:1-20)

A. The Introduction: (1:1-8)

John gives us seven distinctive features in the introduction of this book.

The Specific Title: (1:1) *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*

The Greek word is *apokalupsis*: The literal meaning of this word is "an uncovering," "a laying bare." Its derived meanings are "a revealing," or "a revelation." Its meaning may be expanded into the further ideas of "a disclosure of divine truth, or a manifestation from God."¹ Another definition emphasizes a further feature of its meaning, that of a prior concealment: "a disclosure of what had been concealed."²

It may be best translated as an unveiling, much like an artist unveils a new painting for the first time. The painting had previously been veiled, but is now uncovered for all to see. So we see this revelation had previously been veiled or sealed as in the book of Daniel (12:9). This unveiling, now given to John was not to be sealed up (Rev. 22:10).

The Subject of Revelation: (1:1) *The things which must soon take place*

There is much discussion on what kind of revelation is being given. Some see Jesus Christ as the object of the revelation and thus Jesus Christ is the one being revealed. Others see Jesus Christ as the subject of the revelation and thus Jesus Christ is the revealer, the one giving the revelation.

Is Jesus Christ the one being revealed or is He the one doing the Revealing?

It is best to understand Jesus in the role of the revealer. He is the one doing the revealing for the following reasons:

It is the plain statement as vs. 1 continues: "*which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place;*" This revelation is given to John by Christ as God (the Father) gave it to Him.

Verse 1 also tells us what the true subject of the revelation is: "*the things which must soon take place;*" Future events are the actual subject of the revelation from Christ Jesus.

Christ functions in the role of revealer by opening the scroll of destiny (5:5,7) and disclosing its contents (6:1,3,5,7,9,12; 8:1).³

Jesus is specifically addressing the seven churches in Revelation 2 & 3.

Apokalupsis is used in the same sense in Galatians 1:12 and 2 Corinthians 12:1, where Jesus once again is in the role of the revealer.⁴

The Gospel of John also shows Christ in the role of the revealer of what the Father shows Him. (John 3:35, 5:20, 7:16, 16:15)

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Jesus Christ is the revealer and the content of His revelation are the things which must soon take place. While some suggest that the unveiling of Jesus Christ Himself is the topic under consideration, the future events in Revelation 4-22 are truly the subject of the revelation given by Jesus. This is further supported by the relative clause; "*the things which must soon take place.*" "This clause identifies the content of what is to be shown. The same clause occurs again in Rev. 4:1 and marks the subject under discussion as beginning at that point. A second repetition of this clause occurs in Rev. 22:6 where it marks the conclusion of the books central body of material. Chapters 1-3 are regarded as introductory to or preparatory for 4:1-22:5, while 22:6-21 are closing remarks."⁵ This is supported by the comment in Rev. 1:19 which lays out the overall structure or outline of the book of Revelation.

Note on "*soon*": This term is one indication of the time of fulfilment of the prophecies given to John. The idea behind this term is one of imminence. These events could occur at any time without any warning. These end time events often referred to as the Day of the Lord, will begin with the rapture of the church. Nothing else has to happen. These events beginning with the rapture are imminent. There has been a worthy case made that this term can refer to the speed with which these events take place and would thus be translated, "*speedily*" however it is best to understand this term as one of imminence or suddenness. Christ can come back for His church at any time, and at that time the timetable of these events will begin.

The Steps of Revelation: (1:1-2)

The Source: (1:1)God

"It is important that we keep in focus the true source of the book of Revelation. It did not originate with John but came to him through a fourfold sequence of transmission. The true source of the book of Revelation is God."⁶ All Scripture has God as its source through the superintending of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21).

The Steps:

"There are five agents in the chain of revelation outlined in 1:1. The Father revealed to Christ who, in turn, revealed either directly or through the angel to John whose responsibility it was to transmit data to Christ's servants. Instances when Christ used the angel are illustrated in 17:1 and 21:9. Sometimes, however, Christ revealed directly to John as in 6:9-17."⁷

"It originated with God, it was given to Jesus Christ, He gave it to His angel, His angel gave it to John, and from John it goes to His servants that they might know what is coming to pass. And that is the way it has come to you and me today."⁸

God (The Father)

Jesus Christ

the angel

John (the Apostle)

the servants

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The Scribe of Revelation: (1:1-2)

The Apostle John is the human author of Revelation.

It is the testimony of the early church.

The earliest Christian tradition says that this John, the fourth link in the chain of revelation, is none other than John the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. This list includes Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian.

It is an accurate representation of the historical record.

John served as a leader of the Ephesian church, having moved there shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. It was from Ephesus that he wrote his gospel and epistles. John was exiled to the island of Patmos (a barren island in the Aegean Sea about 70 miles southwest of Ephesus) during the reign of Domitian.

It is represented by linguistic resemblances with John's other writings.

The use of the term *logos* for Christ is only in John's writings (John 1:1, Rev. 19:13).

The imagery used in John and Revelation are similar.

-of the lamb, the water of life, he that overcometh, keeping the commandments, an invitation to the one who is thirsty, and sharp contrasts between good and evil.

The Apostle John bore witness to what he wrote.

* In this verse each of these phrases further expand the idea of the previous phrase.

The Source:

-"*The word of God* denotes any declaration, revelation, or truth coming from God."⁹ (Remember the source of this book is God)

It is the word from God. E. W. Bullinger says, "that *the word of God* is the common idiomatic phrase for a direct prophetic communication."

The Revealer: {*Jesus Christ*}

"*The Testimony of Jesus Christ* is the testimony borne by Jesus Christ. "The testimony borne by Jesus" makes more specific "the word from God." It is understood as the testimony given by Jesus Christ as the revealer."¹⁰

The Witness: {*to all things that he saw*}

John witnessed in a series of visions *the things which must soon take place*. This revelation of these things came from the Father, was revealed by the son shown through visions to John who bore witness (he saw these things that must soon take place).

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This verse is understood as: *John, who bore witness to the word from God, that is the testimony given by Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.* In regards to verses 1 and 2, Beckwith says, "These two verses are summarizing the contents of the book, and both connect the testimony borne by Jesus with said content." Verse 2 is emphasizing Jesus' role as revealer and further explains the steps of revelation.

The Spiritual Blessing of Revelation: (1:3)

This is a Beatitude:

Special blessing such as Jesus Himself had promised in the Beatitudes (cf. Matt. 5:3-12) is offered to the reader and to the ones hearing and complying with the moral and ethical standards established in this book.¹¹

This is the first of 7 Beatitudes in the book of Revelation. (cf. 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14)

Vernon McGee calls this *the Beatitude of Bible Study*.

This is a Call to Obedience:

The grammatical construction is such that *those who hear* are the same ones as *those who are to heed the things which are written*. In other words, simply hearing the book is **not helpful** without **obedience**. "To inherit the promised blessing, every individual in the group had to combine obedience with hearing."¹²

In addition this obedience is in the present tense in the Greek which signifies a continual action. Obedience should be the habit of one's life.

"In light of common New Testament usage of the word (*heed / terountes*) and this book's frequent exhortations to repentance, faith, endurance, obedience, and the like, it is much preferred to assign it the sense of "give heed to" or "observe." This is a call to be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only (cf. James 1:22). We are not to be a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer. (cf. James 1:25).¹³ Read James 1:22-25.

This is the Practice of the Early Church.

"This verse reflects the Jewish custom of reading aloud the Scripture in the services of the synagogue. One party would read and the rest of the group would listen. With the scarcity of copies of the Scripture, this was the only means that most had of familiarizing themselves with the sacred writings. This same custom was carried over into the services of the first Christian churches."¹⁴

"Because writing materials were expensive and scarce, so were copies of the books that were parts of the Biblical canon. As a rule, one copy per Christian assembly was the best that could be hoped for. Public reading was the only means that rank-and-file Christians had for becoming familiar with the contents of these books. An individual would therefore read aloud for the benefit of the rest of those assembled. It behooved the listeners to pay close attention, a habit in which they were well-trained. When written resources were unavailable, the memory had to be keen or else the data were lost. A good memory was vital not only for the sake of retaining information. Obedience also depended on remembering what was commanded."¹⁵

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The Reason for the Blessing.

The conjunction *for* introduces the reason for the blessing. The reason consists of a motive assigned for hearing and keeping these things in this book: the motive being the nearness (*imminence*) of their accomplishment.

The *time* spoken of here is a reference to the period of end time events (*the things which must soon take place*).

These end time events can take place at any time. Nothing else has to happen before Christ comes back for His church and these end time events begin to unfold. This should motivate us to obey the commands of God's Word. As we are effectual doers rather than forgetful hearers, we will receive spiritual blessing.

The Salutation: (1:4-5a)

This is a typical New Testament style epistolary salutation. It includes the author of the letter, the recipients of the letter, and the greeting given in the letter. Revelation includes additional information in its salutation, that is the source of the greeting.

The Author:

As examined earlier under point 4, The Apostle John son of Zebedee is the human author of the Book of Revelation. He left Jerusalem in the late sixties in the midst of the Jewish revolt against Roman rule and made his way to Asia Minor where he became a leader of the church at Ephesus and ultimately to all the churches in the surrounding area.

The Recipients:

As discussed in the introduction, these are seven specific churches in Asia Minor. These are the direct recipients of John's writing. They indicate the circular route which the messenger would follow in delivering this letter. John had a heart for these seven churches as he spent many years ministering in Ephesus and thus to all those churches in the surrounding area. These seven churches also adequately represent the various spiritual situations of the church as a whole.

The Greeting: *Grace to you and peace*

This is the epistolary greeting that came into general use among Christians of the early church. It is used frequently by Paul in his epistles. It is also used by Peter in his two letters.

Charis {Grace}, This is a Christianized form of a secular greeting of the time. The secular greeting *Charein* {Greetings}, was widely used in Greek letters of a non-Christian type. It was transformed likely by Paul, to reflect the distinctive spiritual benefit that belongs to Christians. It emphasizes the favor of God bestowed upon Christians even though they deserve the opposite.

Eirene {Peace} was a commonly used greeting among the Jews. It is the Greek word used for the Hebrew *shalom* which is used throughout the Old Testament. "The Hebrew *shalom* is a wish of well being to the other party, including all aspects of his person. The New Testament term, *eirene*, goes even deeper, because of Christ's death and the fulfillment of the Old Testament anticipations accomplished thereby. A person can experience and know that he has peace with God through Jesus

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Christ (cf. Rom. 5:1), a peace resulting from the grace of God and the ultimate peace that a person can enjoy. Such a meaning lies behind the Christian use of the word." ¹⁶

"Both of these generate from God and not from man. One's relationship to God determines his possession of grace and peace." ¹⁷

The Trinity:

At the end of verse 4 and the beginning of verse 5 three prepositional phrases occur using the preposition (*apo*, from). These prepositional phrases which are grammatically related denote the source of the greeting of grace and peace.

"from Him who is, and who was and who is to come;"

This prepositional phrase is regarded as a title and to be treated as a proper name. The person designated by this title is God the Father. This position is held by most every commentator. This is due to the mention of Jesus Christ as the third member of the source in verse 5. The title is used to emphasize the eternality and immutability of God. *"Him who is"* emphasizes His continual existence in the present. *"And who was"* emphasizes His continual existence in the past. *"And who is to come"* emphasizes His continual existence in the future. The title used by John here bears a strong resemblance to the Old Testament name for God (YHWH) translated in Exodus 3:14, *"I Am Who I Am."* God is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. He always has been and He always will be. He is the continually existing God.

"And from the seven Spirits who are before His throne;"

This designation names the second source of the greeting of grace and peace given by John to the seven churches. This is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Some have suggested the possibility that this could be a reference to seven angels before the throne of God. This is inadequate for the following reasons. 1) The Greek term is not the normal term for angels. 2) Only God is the true source of grace and peace, not angels. 3) It seems inappropriate to include angels in an expression with the other two members of the Godhead.

-Why is the Holy Spirit spoken of as seven spirits?

Some suggest that since the number seven represents completeness or perfection, it is thus the completeness and universality of working of the Holy Spirit.

Others suggest that it is derived from Isaiah 11:2 and that John has in mind a seven fold ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Septuagint translation of the Old Testament lists in Isaiah 11:2: The Spirit of Godliness, Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Might, Knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. The original Hebrew text however does not include the term Godliness and thus there exist only six units here not seven.

A strong view is that since the specific audience in mind is the seven churches that John is depicting the Holy Spirit ministering within those seven churches as seven spirits.

The most probable view is that John is using the imagery of Zechariah 4:1-10. Zechariah describes the Spirit as seven lamps (Zech. 4:2b & 4:6) and as seven eyes (Zech. 4:10b) of the Lord. John

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picks up this imagery again in Rev. 4:5, where he speaks of the Spirit as seven lamps of fire and in Rev. 5:6 where he speaks of the Lamb having seven eyes which are the seven Spirits of God. The seven Spirits (The Holy Spirit) represent "the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth."

"And from Jesus Christ,"

The third and final source of the greeting is the Second Person of the Trinity: Jesus Christ. Jesus is normally mentioned second in the listings of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, but here He is listed last. This could be dictated by the order of in which the three persons appear in chapters 4 & 5 from which the terminology of this salutation is taken. It could also be for the purpose of emphasis. John goes on to speak in detail about Christ in the remaining of this introduction. John intends to enlarge on several aspects of Christ's Person and work, as he proceeds.

The Savior: {1:5-8}

John now moves on to speak in detail about Jesus Christ. In the following verses of the introduction, John will emphasize 1) Titles of Christ, 2) The work of Christ, and 3) The Character of Christ.

The Titles of Christ:

The faithful witness: Jesus is also referred to as the faithful witness in Revelation 3:14 and He is called the faithful in Revelation 19:11. "The title "the faithful witness," is an allusion to Psalm 89:37 where regarding the throne of David it is written, "It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful." Jesus Christ is of the seed of David and will sit on the Davidic throne that will endure forever as the sun (Ps. 89:36)."¹⁸ He is the faithful witness. "Jesus Christ is the only trustworthy witness to the facts of this book. The facts are about Him. He testifies of Himself."¹⁹ His testimony is true. Remember back in Rev. 1:3, this book is testified to by Christ.

The first-born of the dead: This title also finds its source in Psalm 89. God promises to make David's seed, His "first-born," "the highest of the kings of the earth" (Ps. 89:27).²⁰ This is identical to the title used by Paul in Colossians 1:18. Jesus was the first to be resurrected, never to die again. Christ is supreme.

Others will be raised from the dead, but Jesus Christ is the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:23).

The ruler of the kings of the earth: "John is once again drawing from Psalm 89 where the psalmist notes God's promise to make David's seed "the highest of the kings of the earth" (Psalm 89:27). Here is a clear foreshadowing of Jesus Christ's future role as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16). As with the first two titles, this too is by virtue of His Davidic lineage."²¹ This is speaking specifically of Christ's ultimate role during the Millennium. "John's intent was to direct attention to the fulfillment of the promises made to David regarding an eternal kingdom in 2 Samuel 7."²²

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The Work of Christ:

To Him who loves us: This is in the present tense and emphasizes His constant attitude toward His own. This present work of Christ is described as a continual action by using the present tense. He demonstrated His continual and habitual love for us by dying on the cross and redeeming us from our sin. He continues to love us with an everlasting love.

And released us from our sins by His blood: The captor from whom Jesus Christ has obtained our release is "our sins." "The action of Jesus Christ has provided for our release from bondage to sin. This pictures sins in the role of slave-master in much the same way Paul sees sin in Romans 6:12-14. A similar redemption will come to Israel in the future according to Psalm 130:8. The blood of Jesus shed at Calvary was the purchase price to obtain our release. It was "by means of" His blood that He provided this great benefit for believers."²³

And He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father: "Kingdom" is a collective noun designating all believers in Christ as a whole. Corporately we are a kingdom. "This word is used in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, the Jewish Targum, and the New Testament to depict the Messianic rule and kingdom."²⁴ This is a reference to the future period described in Revelation 20 when the saints will share in Christ's earthly Messianic rule. (cf. 2 Timothy 2:12, Revelation 5:10, 20:4)

Corporately believers will be a kingdom, individually we are priests to God. Believers are a kingdom of subjects with direct priestly access to God. The priestly service is directed to "His God and Father." Believers are described as "a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Believers are urged "to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1). Believers are urged "to offer the sacrifice of praise to God"(Hebrews 13:15).

Behold, He is coming with the clouds: Verse 7 describes the future work of Christ's coming to reign as King over the earth. This coming is described in detail in Revelation 19:11-21 (cf. Daniel 7:13 & Matthew 24:30). This expression indicates that the whole human race will witness this return of Christ, even those who pierced Him. The mourning mentioned here is the mourning of despair by a sinful world at the time of Christ's coming in judgment. It refers to the people of the world (unbelievers) who will no longer have opportunity to repent.

The Character of Christ:

I am the Alpha and the Omega: This is the statement of Christ. Jesus uses this statement of Himself again in Revelation 21:6 & 22:13. Jesus is the central figure discussed in the preceding verses. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and the Omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. Jesus refers to Himself as the first and the last in Revelation 1:17, 2:8, & 22:13. This expression stands for totality. It expresses eternity and infinitude. Christ is eternal, which means that He is infinite in relation to time. He is without beginning or end. He is not bound by time but is the cause of time. Christ is infinite. He is without measure. He is not bound by or limited to space.

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Who is and who was and who is to come: This expression used here of Christ emphasizes His eternal nature. Like God the Father, God the Son is eternal. His existence has always been continual and always will be continual. The emphasis once again is on continual existence.

The Almighty: The Greek term literally means All Powerful. "The emphasis is upon authority so that the term could be translated "all-ruler" as well as "almighty." It focuses on sovereignty."²⁵ Remember the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Christ is All Powerful, and He has been given all authority. Jesus is Almighty God! He is deserving of all glory and dominion forever and ever.