

CONTENTS

Publisher's Note	7
List of Illustrations	8
Introduction to Revelation	9
1. The Prologue	17
SECTION 1: "THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE SEEN"	
2. The Vision of the Risen Christ	21
SECTION 2: "THE THINGS WHICH ARE"	
3. The Seven Churches	31
SECTION 3: "THE THINGS WHICH SHALL TAKE PLACE"	
4. The Throne in Heaven	49
5. The Seven-Sealed Book	55
6. The Six Seals	61
7. The Redeemed of the Tribulation	69
8. The Seventh Seal and the First Four Trumpets	77
9. Woes on the Earth	85
10. The Angel and the Little Opened Book	93
11. The Temple, the Two Witnesses, and the Seventh Trumpet	99
12. War	107
13. The Beast and His False Prophet	113
14. Various Announcements	121

15. Prelude to the Last Judgments	127
16. The Seven Bowl Judgments	131
17. Religious Babylon	137
18. Commercial Babylon	145
19. The Second Coming of Christ	151
20. The Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment	157
21. The Eternal State	165
22. Epilogue	173
Notes	177
Some Helpful Commentaries on Revelation	181



THE PROLOGUE

1:1–8

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THE SUPERScription, 1:1–3

The Title, 1:1

Although it is true that this book reveals Christ, the genitive expression “of Jesus Christ” means that it is a revelation given *by* Christ. It is a revelation of “things which must soon take place.” The words translated “soon” (*en tachei*) mean that when the time for judgment comes there will be no delay in its execution (see Luke 18:8 and other occurrences of this phrase in Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 22:6–7). The time of the fulfillment may seem distant, but, when it starts, the events will transpire rapidly.

The Means of Communication, 1:1–2

The chain of communication was God the Father, to Christ, to an angel, to John, to God’s servants. John, the human instrument, testified of the Word of God (he considered himself in the prophetic succession, transmitting God’s message to humanity) and the testimony of Christ (that is, the witness Christ imparts about Himself).

The Value of The Book, 1:3

A blessing is promised the person reading and those hearing and keeping the words of the book. Note the change from singular to plural—one reads and several hear—indicating that the book was to be read publicly. Since public reading was one test of canonicity, the fact that John indicates that it should be read publicly means that he considered it canonical. The entire book is called a prophecy. The phrase “the time is near” is repeated in the epilogue (22:10). “Near” (*engus*) means “impending or at hand”; these events are near because a thousand years are as a day with the Lord (2 Peter 3:8).

THE SALUTATION, 1:4–8

The Writer, 1:4

The Hebrew idioms in the book, the authority of the author in relation to the churches, the use of distinctively Johannine terms such as *logos* and “Lamb of God,” and the corroboration of Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, and Clement all affirm that the apostle John was the author of this book.

The Readers, 1:4

The fact that John specifically addressed the seven local churches in Asia Minor prevents anyone from saying that the book is simply a piece of poetic idealism.

The Greeting, 1:4–5a

This is a greeting from the Trinity. The Father eternally existed and will always exist (the phrase “who is and who was and who is to come” occurs also in 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5). The “seven Spirits” likely represent the sevenfold ministry of the Spirit as depicted in Isaiah 11:2. Christ is designated as (1) the faithful Witness (summarizing His life on earth, cf. John 7:7; 8:18; 1 Tim. 6:13),

(2) the Firstborn from the dead (His resurrection), and (3) the Ruler (not “prince”) of the kings of the earth, which refers to His future reign over the earth.

The Dedication, 1:5b–6

The book is dedicated to Christ, who was its Author and about whom it speaks. Three things are ascribed to Him: (1) He loves (present tense) us. (2) He released us (some translations say “washed,” the difference in Greek being one letter) from our sins by His blood. Blood is the evidence of His death, which is the basis for our cleansing. (3) He made us a kingdom (not “kings”) and priests to God. “Kingdom” views believers corporately and anticipates our association with Christ in His future reign (5:9–10), whereas “priests” sees them individually ministering to our Lord forever.

The Keynote, 1:7

Verse 7 is the text, theme, or keynote of the book and is a reference to Christ’s second coming. It is after the Tribulation (note Matt. 24:29–30), it will be public, and all shall see Him and bemoan His crucifixion. This is partly quoted from Zechariah 12:10. “Tribes” is not limited to Israel but includes all the peoples of the earth.

The Authentication, 1:8

Some understand the speaker in verse 8 to be God; others, Christ. It is probably God verifying the contents of this prophecy. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, signifying the completeness of God. He is the Lord God, eternally existing, and all-powerful. “Almighty” is used eight times in Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6; 21:22) and includes the ideas of omnipotence and universal rulership.

OUTLINE OF REVELATION

I "The things which you have seen" (chapter 1)

- The Risen Christ

II "The things which are" (chapters 2–3)

- The Letters to the Seven Churches
Ephesus · Smyrna · Pergamum · Thyatira
Sardis · Philadelphia · Laodicea

III "The things which shall take place after these things"

- The Tribulation (chapters 4–19)

CHAPTER

4. The Throne in Heaven	13. Antichrist & False Prophet
5. The Scroll in Heaven	14. Announcements
6. SEALS	15. Prelude to Bowls
7. The Redeemed	16. BOWLS
8-9. TRUMPETS	17. Religious Babylon
10. The Little Scroll	18. Commercial Babylon
11. The Two Witnesses	19. Second Coming of Christ

- The Millennium (chapter 20)
- The Eternal State (chapters 21–22)

THE VISION OF THE RISEN CHRIST

1:9–20

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Although there is more than one way to divide the book of Revelation, most commentators see in 1:19 the divinely given outline. In this verse the book is divided into three parts: (1) the things John had seen up to verse 19, (2) the present state of the church (chaps. 2–3), and (3) the things that shall be after the church is completed (chaps. 4–22). The same words translated “after these things” (*meta tauta*) are found in 4:1, indicating that chapter 4 begins this last section of the book. However, it is possible to combine the first two sections because verse 19 may well be translated, “Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and . . .”

In other words, John saw two things: present things and future things. The present things include the vision of Christ in 1:9–20 and the letters to the churches in chapters 2 and 3. Of course, it does make sense to see 1:9–3:22 as one unified section, simply because in the vision in 1:9–20 Christ is walking in the midst of those churches mentioned in chapters 2 and 3. But it is equally valid to consider the vision of 1:9–20 as that which John had

seen and thus as a separate division of the book. The important thing is to notice that according to 1:19 the book has to divide at 4:1, regardless of whether one combines the vision of 1:9–20 with chapters 2 and 3 or divides it into a separate section. Understanding that 4:1 begins the section that describes the future after the times of the churches ends supports a pretribulation Rapture view. In other words, the period of the churches ends at 3:22, and the events of the Tribulation begin to be described at 4:1—“things which must take place [the future Tribulation, return of Christ, and the Millennium] after these things [the completion of the church age].” Posttribulationists who believe that the church will live through the Tribulation on this earth understand 4:1 to indicate only the time when John saw the vision, that is, after he received the letters to the seven churches. But since “after these things” is similar to the phrase in Daniel 2:29, “what will take place,” where it clearly refers to the content of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, which concerned the future, then it should be understood in John’s use as also referring to the eschatological future.

SECTION 1:

“THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE SEEN,”

1:9–20

Circumstances of the Vision, 1:9–11

John’s Physical Circumstances, 1:9

John does not exalt himself above his fellow believers but calls himself a brother. Patmos is an island about fifteen miles in circumference in the Aegean Sea southwest of Ephesus. The reason for his banishment was because of “the word of God” (God’s claims on men) and “the testimony of Jesus” (the gospel message).

John's Spiritual Circumstances, 1:10-11

John's being in the Spirit seems to indicate a trancelike state of spiritual ecstasy. "Was" is literally "became," indicating that this was something unusual. The phrase "the Lord's day" could refer to Sunday or the Day of the Lord, that is, the Tribulation and the Millennium, which are the subject of much of the prophecy. "Lord's" is an adjective (*kyriakos*), used only here and in 1 Corinthians 11:20 in the New Testament. Outside the New Testament it means "imperial." Unless this is a reference to Sunday, there is no place in the New Testament where this expression is used for that day, since the usual designation is "first day of the week." It could, therefore, refer to that imperial day in the future when Christ will take the reins of earthly government, which is what John saw in his vision. The voice John heard was that of Christ, who is identified as the First and Last in verse 17. All that John saw (cf. 22:8), not just the particular letter to each church in chapters 2-3, was to be communicated to all these seven churches mentioned in verse 11.

The Content of the Vision, 1:12-16

The Position of the Lord, 1:12-13

We have very little knowledge of what our Lord looked like while He was here on earth. He apparently had a beard (Isa. 50:6). There was nothing in His overall personal appearance that would especially attract people to Him (Isa. 53:2), though children liked Him (Matt. 18:2). In this section, however, is a description of how He appears in glory and how we shall see Him some day, for, as John wrote elsewhere, "we will see Him just as He is," not as He *was* (1 John 3:2).

The Picture of the Lord, 1:14–16

This picture of the risen, glorified Lord is depicted under a number of similes (note the occurrences of “like” and “as”)—the only way He could be described to finite creatures. There are seven features to this picture, and the meaning of these similes may have been left unexplained deliberately in order to convey more than one thing to our minds.

His head, 1:14. It was white as wool or snow. This may represent the wisdom of age and the purity of holiness (Prov. 20:29).

His eyes, 1:14. They were piercing in their fiery holiness. The true character of each church is transparent to His eyes. There may also be a connection between this verse and 1 Corinthians 3:13; that is, the fire that shall try human works at the judgment seat of Christ will be the penetrating gaze of our Lord, which will of itself consume works of wood, hay, and straw.

His feet, 1:15. John’s eyes dropped from the Lord’s eyes to His feet, which were like burnished bronze. (“Burnished” means “highly rubbed and polished.”) This may picture the trials He experienced in His earthly life that make Him a sympathetic High Priest (Heb. 4:15) and an experienced Judge.

His voice, 1:15. It was to John as the sound of many waters. Like the noise of a mighty waterfall, His voice of authority stands out above all the rest and drowns out all who try to talk back or offer excuses to Him.

His right hand, 1:16. In His right hand, the place of honor, were the seven stars, which are explained in verse 20 as the messengers of the churches of chapters 2–3. The word *angelos* (“angel”) means “messenger” and could refer to a supernatural being, implying that each church has its guardian angel. The word could also be used in the nontechnical sense of a human messenger (see James 2:25 and Luke 9:52)—the human leader or pastor of the church.

His mouth, 1:16. The Word of God, the basis for all judgment, proceeded out of His mouth (Heb. 4:12; Rev. 19:12–15).

His countenance, 1:16. Christ's overall appearance was such that it overwhelmed John.

Consequences of the Vision, 1:17–20

A Word of Comfort 1:17–18

The awesomeness of the vision caused John to prostrate himself before the glorified Christ, waiting for His mercy. This resulted in a threefold word of comfort for the aged apostle. Christ presented Himself as the self-existent, eternal One, “the first and the last”; the Conqueror over death; and the One who controls (by having the keys) Hades (the place that holds the immaterial part of humans after physical death) and death (the experience of the material part).

A Word of Command, 1:19–20

The apostle is then commanded to write the things that he had seen and would yet see. As stated, this forms an outline of the book and is followed in verse 20 by the Lord's own explanation of two features of the vision. The “stars” are the angels (either guardian angels or the human leaders) of the churches, and the “lampstands” represent light-bearing local churches.