

# REVELATION 1

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## I. INTRO / BKGRD.

**A. Author:** Five times the book is autographed by John (1:1, 4, 9; 21:2; 22:8). Is John the Apostle really the author? NO...God! Cf. v. 1.

**B. Date:** ca. 96 AD.

During the persecution of 66-70 AD under the Roman emperor Nero, John fled to Ephesus and led the church there after Paul's death in winter 67/68 AD. Under the next Roman emperor, Domitian (81-96 AD.), the next great wave of persecution hit; 40,000 Christians were martyred. He attempted to boil John alive in oil (per Eusebius' *Eccl. Hx.*) but would not die. According to several early church fathers (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius), John was sent to the island of Patmos as a prisoner following his very effective pastorate at Ephesus.

The island of Patmos was a roughly horseshoe-shaped rock-quarry island (6 mi. x 10 mi.) 50 miles SW off the coast of Turkey, and apparently a Roman penal colony. Victorinus, the first commentator on the Book of Revelation, stated that John worked as a prisoner in the mines on this small island. John possibly labored in the rock quarries alongside the rogues, criminals and slaves of the empire, chipping out the materials for pagan temples and state edifices. In the midst of such agonies, the Lord was uniquely revealed to John in a vision (cf. 1:1, 10-12). When Domitian was assassinated in 96 AD, emperor Nerva took the throne, released John, who returned to Ephesus and penned the Gospel, and his three short epistles, 1, 2 and 3 John. The Church at this point was about 66 years old; John approaching 100!

## C. Occasion / Purpose

The main purpose of the book is to provide the setting for the revelation of Jesus Christ. Principal attention is given to the time of the tribulation (chs. 4-19), which is believed to coincide with Daniel's seventieth week ("seven") (Dan 9:24-27). The Great Tribulation, the latter half of that "week," is especially in view. The climax of the book begins with the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ in ch. 19.

In the unfolding of this central theme, Jesus Christ is revealed in glory in contrast with His presentation, in the four Gospels, in His humiliation.

## D. Literary Form / Literary Features:

The book is a record of what the Apostle John saw and heard. Constant use is made of symbols. References to OT events and prophecies abound. Frequent shifts of locale from earth to heaven and back to earth may be observed. It is an account of divine judgment and conflict which sweeps the whole world.

It is the only book in NT exclusively apocalyptic; in literary type it is similar to Ezekiel, Daniel, Zec. It is the unveiling of Jesus Christ (Greek, ἀποκαλύψις; late Latin, *revelatio*). Many feel it is a sealed book; exactly the opposite: it is the revelation or unveiling of Jesus Christ. Don't be afraid to read it! However, we DO need the help of the Holy Spirit who will:

- 1) "Bring to your remembrance..." (Jn. 14:26);
- 2) "Teach you all things.." (ibid);
- 3) "Show you things to come..." (Jn. 16:13): Revelation!

## E. Methods of Interpretation:

1. Preterist -- all fulfilled in 1st. c.
2. Futurists -- place the book primarily in the end times.
3. Historicists -- since chs. 1-3 are in the historical past, and chs. 19-22 obviously future, the events in between must span the ages in between. Thus the book spans from the 1st. c. to the end of history.

4. Idealists/Allegorists -- see the book as mystical, allegorical, non-literal; only general principles; i.e., light vs. dark, good vs. evil. They see symbolism in everything.

**Our scheme of interpretation** will be the literal grammatico-historical method. Symbolic portions will be cross-referenced with other apocalyptic Scriptures to ascertain their meaning.

Three major divisions of Revelation must be recognized. John was commanded in 1:19 to write concerning:

- (1) things past, "what you have seen," i.e. the Patmos vision (1:1 - 20);
- (2) things present, "what is now," i.e. the existing churches (2:1 - 3:22); and
- (3) things future, "what will take place later [lit. <after these things>]," i.e. events after the Church Age ends (4:1 - 22:5). It is important to observe that, beginning in ch. 4, the book presents future events.

The third major division of Revelation (4:1 - 22:21) is characterized by series of sevens:

- seven seals (4:1 - 8:1),
- seven trumpets (8:2 - 11:19), thunders, signs, crowns, plagues,
- seven bowls (15:1 - 16:21), hills, kings,
- seven dooms (17:1 - 20:15), and
- seven new things (21:1 - 22:21), eyes, thunders, crowns, plagues, hills, kings . . .

IN FACT, 54 x's THE NUMBER SEVEN IS MENTIONED! (54x's in the Greek, KJV; 55x's in NIV:  $3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 2 = 54$ ).

Interpreters of Revelation should bear in mind two passages of Scripture: 1 Pet 1:10ff; 2 Pet 1:20-21. Much that is now obscure will become clear to those for whom it was written, as the time approaches.

## II. TEXT

Read vv. 1-3 together...

**v. 1 "Revelation"** – Greek, *apokalupsis*: the unveiling, manifestation or revelation of something previously hidden under wraps, or veiled. The revelation is of the glorified Jesus and His return. The book details by means of visions the plan of God as we head towards the end of time. Note that the Father gives it to Jesus. As the Head of the Church (Mt. 16:18 "...I will build My Church..."; Eph. 5:23 "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His Body, of which He is the Savior." Col. 1:18 "He is the Head of the Body, the Church; He is the beginning and the first born from the dead, so that in everything he might have supremacy."), He reveals it to them.

**"Angel"** (*angellos*) can mean *angel* or *messenger*; occurs over 70 x's in Revelation!

**v. 2** John records what he saw with his own two eyes, not a dream, vision, trance or hallucination: "saw" is *eido*; in Latin: *video*.

**v. 3 "Reads"** is *anaginosko*; to know up or again, i.e. (by extens.) to read:--read. **"Hear"** is *akouo* (like *acoustic*). **"Take to heart"** translates the verb *tereo*: (a watch); to guard (from loss or injury, prop. by keeping the eye upon).

**v. 4 "Seven"** the number of perfection, completion; fully matured or of full age, or complete. Mentioned 52 times! ( $7 \times 7 = 49$ ; add 3, the number of God, and you get 52).

Many churches not written to: Galatia, Colosse, Heirapolis, Miletus. The seven churches addressed gives us a complete picture of the Church down through the ages and today.



But first is a description of God: describes the eternal nature of God. No past or present w/ God: "I Am that I Am..." (Ex. 3:14).

The **"seven spirits" before His throne** can be interpreted "the seven-fold Spirit" speaks of the completeness of the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa. 11:2). The "grace and peace" flow from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit! The description of Jesus follows...

**"Grace"** is used only twice in Revelation (here and 22:21) but over **100 x's** by Paul! This is a book not of grace, but of judgment; the time of grace has passed. Grace is the age in which we live now...

**v. 5 "Witness"** here is *martus*; where we get our word *martyr*. Willing to die to present His testimony; do you want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus! He's FAITHFUL! When Philip asked to see the Father... We also are to be God's witness; when people see us, do they see an accurate image of Jesus? Are we true and faithful? **"Firstborn from the dead"** means first to get a glorified body never to die again; first to put on the glory soon to be revealed in the saints!

**"To him who loves (pres. act. part.) us and has freed (aor. act. part.) us from our sins ..."**

**v. 6 "...and has made (aor. act. ind.) us to be a kingdom and priests..."** Cf. 1 Peter 2:9 *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*

**v. 7 Note:** 1) He **IS** coming! **7 x's** in Rev. Jesus personally says He will!

2) "...with clouds." Zec. 14:3,4; Mt. 24:30; Acts 1; Heb. 12:1.

*"And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"* (Matthew 24:30).

**v. 8 "Almighty"** is *pantokrator*. Nine of the twelve occurrences of this term in the NT are in Revelation. In the OT "Almighty" was always used of YHWH: *Shaddai*: 345x's in OT! First in Gen. 17:1 when Abraham was 96 yrs. old; this is how God revealed Himself.

**v. 9** All the other disciples are dead; John more than 90 yrs. old! Patmos a rocky crag 6x10 miles (ZPEB, BEB, J.Vernon McGee, Halley's Bible Handbook, though the NIVSB has 4x8 mi.) approx. 50 SW of Ephesus, 35 mi. SW of Miletus. The Roman historian Tacitus informs us that the Romans used some of the Aegean islands as places of exile and banishment during the 1st c.

Note the humility of John. He is not coming on as a great leader demanding submission to his authority. He calls himself a **"brother."** God never intended a spiritual hierarchy to be established within the Church. We're all part of one body. God has no favorites or specials. *"God is no respecter of persons,"* (Acts 10:34) which means that God is as interested in you as He is in Billy Graham and as He was in Dwight Moody, Charles Finney, John Wesley, John Knox or Martin Luther. God didn't love them any more than He loves you. God didn't listen to them any more readily than He will listen to you. John said, "I'm a brother and a companion." Pray to God that men within the ministry today will have the same attitude as a brother and a companion. As Paul said, *"We are co-laborers together with God."* (1 Corinthians 3:9). We're all one in this body of Christ. We all share together. We're all just people. When the crowd was going to worship Paul, he tore his clothes and said *"Hey, I'm just a man like the rest of you! I'm no god!"* (Acts 14:14-15). We're all equal in the eyes of the Lord. God considers us as individuals and loves us as individuals. He is no respecter of persons.

**v. 10** Lit., "I became **in the Spirit...**" (aorist middle indicative) on the **"Lord's Day"** = Sunday (day Jesus rose from the dead, day the early Church gathered, Corinthian offerings, Christians break bread, etc.).

**v. 12 "Lampstands"** are *luchnia*, diminutive of *luchnos*, a portable lamp or other illuminator (lit. or fig.); here, seven are listed; symbolic of the seven churches of Asia. Apparently these were individual lampstands rather

than one lampstand with seven lamps as was true of a similar piece of furniture in the tabernacle and the temple. They were to be a light to the world (Mt. 5:14-16).

**v. 13 "Son of Man"** was Jesus' favorite self-designation. Cf. Dan. 7:13 Daniel's vision of the 4 beasts (p. 1310; also Dan. 3:25 in the fiery furnace with Daniel's 3 friends). Jesus dressed like the High Priest (Ex. 28:4; 29:5; cf. Heb. 4:14-15; 5:1-10; 8:1-13; 9:11-28).

**v. 14** Description similar to Daniel's vision of God (Dan. 7:9) and Isaiah's (Isa. 1:18).

**v. 16 "Stars"** - cf. v. 20; **"sword"** (*hromphaia*; a long Thracian sword); equals **divine judgment!!!** "*The Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword (makarah) . . .*" Jesus' face like the account of the Transfiguration (Mk. 9).

**v. 18 "Keys of death and Hades"** -- Jesus has absolute control over the domains of death and hell.

**v. 19** Lit., **"after these things"** (*meta tauta*); same as in 4:1! "After these things" – after the end of the Church age; after the Church age is completed. Three major divisions of Revelation must be recognized. John was commanded in 1:19 to write concerning:

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- (2) things present, **"what is now,"** i.e. the letters to the existing churches (2:1 - 3:22); the Church Age and
- (3) things future, **"what will take place later** [lit. *<after these things>*]," i.e. events after the Church Age ends (4:1 - 22:5). It is important to observe that, beginning in ch. 4, the book presents future events.

**v. 20 "Seven churches"** - speaks of completeness; in these messages we have a picture of the complete church history.

### III. SUMMARY / APPLICATION / RESPONSE

- In 1:1-20 John sees a vision of the risen Christ in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.
- From 2:1 - 3:22 he records the messages of our Lord to seven churches in Roman Asia.
- At 4:1-2 the apostle is pictured as caught up "in the Spirit" into heaven, from where he observes future things in heaven and upon the earth as recorded from 4:1 -- 22:5.

Notice especially that Jesus is AMONG the seven churches in vv. 9-20; He still is today - HE IS AMONG US!!!

Application is threefold:

1. The local 1st c. application; specific churches, situations, circumstances, needs, etc.
2. Seven broad periods in church history;
3. Univ. message to today's church setting.