
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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Revelation 1: 1-8: "Greetings to the Seven Churches!"

General idea: This Epistle opens with Christ testifying to the visions of God given to John the Apostle through an angel of what is going to happen to the Church. The purpose was not for information for John or encouragement for his captivity and isolation; rather, it was meant to be shared with the rest of the Christian community. Its purpose is to bless and encourage us so we can stand firm and grow further in our faith. What has been revealed will happen to us personally and in a future culmination. This book has meaning and application for all who read it as well as a glimpse of a hope to come.

This letter is primarily targeted to seven, actual churches in Asia Minor, which is now modern Turkey. John is proclaiming the Divine Authority, Sovereignty, and Lordship of Christ as well as the important relevance of Christ in us, so that we can have peace and anticipation in Him. Christ is Lord. This is reality for us, both now and when He comes back for us. Even when all seems lost and hopeless, He is in command and His plan is in commission. Although it is John who pens the words of this book of Revelation and an angel delivers it, it is witnessed to as truth by Christ Himself who is faithful to us. We are exhorted to praise and worship Him Who is worthy of our praise because He has freed us from our sins and separation from God by the shedding of His own blood. He has made us a home, a kingdom, and a dwelling for eternity.

Now, the theme switches to the magnificent glory to come as we are given a glimpse of the coming of our Lord that all will see. It will be the ultimate of shock and awe. Christ is proclaimed as the All in All of all things, the Beginning and the End, the Almighty One!

Vs. 1-3: Revelation has often been identified as an ominous apocalypse of chaos and catastrophe. But, this is not necessarily the point. Revelation opens with an elaborate greeting so we can more firmly connect our relationship with Christ and receive hope and encouragement. John calls us to the privilege and necessity of reading and hearing His Word (most people could not read and needed it to be read to them), because the authority is Christ Himself.

- The word, *Revelation*, is from the Greek title word "apokalypsis." This means "discourser of events," as opposed to secret or hidden. Thus, even though Revelation is symbolic in places, it is not hidden to us when we take an honest look and compare it to other Scriptures rather than trends or newspapers. It also means an *uncovering*, an *unveiling* or, as we have it in the English, a *Revelation*. The other title that has been used is "The Apocalypse." Thus, Revelation is a book of disclosure of John's seven visions

and God's exhortations; hence, this is why sometimes it is rendered in the plural, *Revelations* (Judges 6:11-23; Dan. 7:16; 10:5-21).

- *Him...John* was John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee (Matt. 10:2), a prophetic witness and disciple of Jesus, and the writer of the Gospel of John (John 1:1; Rev. 1:1, 3-4, 9; 22:6-10, 18-19). He was exiled to the Island of Patmos around 95 A.D. during the writing of this Epistle (Matt. 20: 20-23; John 21:24; Acts 12:1-2).
- *Show* is the hope in the midst of the reality of life and suffering. Being in Christ is eternal security, but dangerous in the world in which we live; we may experience *martyrdom* (Rev. 12:11).
- *His servants* suggests that there is no special elite class in the Kingdom of God. We all are His servants; we are all special and anointed to serve.
- *Soon/swift/shortly* (Greek "*Tachos*") means quickness and speed. The events that will happen *suddenly* and *unexpectedly* (Matt 24:32; 2 Pet. 3:8-18) refer to God's divine providence and the final phase. The time of waiting is over, for Christ is here. The time is near for God who lives outside of space and time, but not necessarily near for us. This is similar to the *last days*, referring in context to the sudden nature of the *Christian era*, not necessarily a time reference (2 Pet. 3:3). Many Christians took this to mean that it would happen soon. We need to understand God's perspective, not our desires. This word is critical to which approach and view of Revelation one takes. If we take this word as it is in English and do not pay attention to the Greek or the context, we will jump to the conclusion of immediate fulfillment. This also suggests that we will see *spiritual warfare*. Our battle with Satan is real and will engage us in conflict and strife with one another until the end of the age (Acts 2:16-17; 1 John 2:18; Rev. 22:6-12, 20).
- *Testifies/witness* are legal terms. In contrast to the early Christians who were being betrayed and prosecuted in courts by false witnesses and fake evidences, nothing is fake in Christ. He is our hope and light (Isa. 43:8-12; 44:8-9).
- *The testimony of Jesus Christ* indicates that even though an Angel delivered this message to John, Jesus is the principle and prime Witness we look to so we can have strength of faith and perseverance, and so our testimony is strengthened (Rev. 3:14; 19:10-11; 22:6, 16-20).
- *Blessed*. Those who are faithful in Christ will receive the *good will* of God as blessings from Christ; those who reject Him will be judged. Being blessed also refers to the emotional states of satisfaction, well-being, and contentment that result from being approved by God and by the fulfilling of our duty. It is enjoying God's special favor and His Grace working in us. It is like being told

by parents that they are proud of us (Matt. 5:1-12; Rev. 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7-14). This is a book more of blessings than of just predictions, as there are also seven *beatitudes* in Revelation (Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).

- *Prophecy* points toward Revelation, which contains visions of future events meant to help us fortify our faith and remain faithful (Isa. 1:1; Jer. 1:1; Hosea 1:1; Rev. 19:10; 22:7-19).
- *Take to heart/keep*. The purpose of this epistle is to strengthen our spiritual formation, not to seek melodramatic theories or sensationalistic ideas.
- *The time is near*. God is ushering in the last days and revealing to us His previously hidden agenda and plans. The concern is not just for future events, but also how we conduct ourselves in them. Whatever unfolds is irrelevant if we do not have the strength of faith to endure and learn from it (Heb. 1:1-2; Rev. 22:10).

The Church was undergoing the beginnings of more severe persecution than what they initially went through in James' and Peter's time when the Roman Emperor Nero was blaming the Christians for the burning of Rome (which he had caused), making them the scapegoat (54-68 AD). And/or (depending on date; see background article) at this time, the Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD) had stepped up the persecutions. They were harsh, perhaps the worst ever endured in church history (Rev. 1:9; 2:9-13; 13:7-10).

Vs. 4-8: John is proclaiming an important fact we must all agree upon—that God is Sovereign and in control! He gave us grace that we did not deserve and a precious plan that will unfold. We have hope both now and in the future.

Grace and peace is an ancient greeting, as John sends his blessings.

- *Seven churches*. The principle theme is the seven churches which all were real, actual churches in Asia Minor with real, actual problems. These are not allegories; rather, they are relevant to your church now and symbolize the various ages of the Church in history and also represent how each individual church is, through all times and places, in its operation and faith (Phil. 2:15; Matt. 5:14-16; Rev. 1:1-3; 2:1-3:22; 22:7-21).
- *Him who is, and who was, and who is to come*. *The Lord's Supremacy* echoes the words of God given to Moses in the burning bush. This is a Divine Name of Christ meaning Eternal Deity and Authority (Ex. 3:14-16).
- *Seven spirits*. The word, *seven*, means its importance is compounded. This is a name for the Holy Spirit referring to His Fullness, not a split personality. Some believe this is referring to the seven celestial beings (Rev. 8:2).

However, context and word meaning attest of the Holy Spirit and His various roles as Counselor, bearer of Wisdom, Fruit... (Isa. 11:2) etc., just as this passage gives several titles for Christ. It also testifies to the profundity (depth and reality) of the Trinity (Zech. 4:2-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; Rev. 4:5; 5:14).

- *Faithful witness, the firstborn... ruler* means *reliable*. It sets Jesus as Divine and Lord over all the living and the dead. This also refers to the roles of Christ in His Church. As He is faithful to us, we are called to be faithful to Him, too (Psalm 2:7; 89:27; Prov. 14:5, 25; Isa. 8:2; Acts 13:33; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:20-23; Col. 1:15-18; 1 Tim. 6:13; Rev. 2:10-13; 3:14).
- *Him be glory... To him*. Christ is the quintessential subject and prominent theme of Revelation. This is a doxology of praise, used to wholeheartedly worship and praise Christ as exalted and worthy because of His Sovereignty and the redemption He gives us. Praise is also our frontline weapon against spiritual warfare (Rev. 4:8, 11; 5:9-14; 7:12; 11:15-17; 12:10-12; 15:3-4; 19:1-8).
- *Kingdom and priests* in the O.T. meant that all God's people were holy to Him. Under law, there were specific roles in the priesthood that people were called and ordained to fill. Priests were to be bridges from God to man. Now, through Christ, we have direct, intimate access to Him, and in the future, each of us will reign with Him. Each of us is a *royal priest* as a representative of Christ (doctrine of the *priesthood of all believers*) on earth, and as ministers, we model His character and thus have no need for a Temple. God's Kingdom is now; those who say the Temple must be reconstructed before Christ returns do not get this vital point (Ex. 19:1-6; 20:6; Lev. 10:10-11; Isa. 66:20; Matt. 21:43; 28:19-20; Rom. 15:16; 2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 2:1-10; Heb. 7; 10:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:1-10; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:9-10; 20:4-6).
- *He is coming* is one of the main themes of this epistle, the announcement that Christ is coming back. This is comfort for the suffering Christians and chastisement for those who are evil and reject Him (Deut. 33:2; Isa. 19:1; Zech. 1:16; Mal. 3:1-2; Matt. 10:23; Rev. 2:5; 3:20).
- *The clouds* means a spectacular event, such as numbers of angels testifying to God's glory. It could also mean an extraordinary storm of clouds. This also means judgment (Ezek. 30:3; Dan. 7:13; Zech. 12:10; Matt. 16:28; 24:30, 34; 26:64).
- *Peoples of the earth*. This means Jesus loves us and has washed our sins away from God's presence. Not just the Israelites, but also all people in Him are those *elected* ones and have courage, comfort, and faith in Christ. He rules over all (Prov. 21:1; Dan. 2:21; 4:17; Zech. 12:12).

- *Mourn* points to the distress of Christ's Second Coming. Those who refuse Him will be judged. The realization will come that our will is not in control and our desires and sin have gotten us a raw deal. What comfort to those in persecution at the hands of such people to know that they will get what is coming (Zech. 12:10)!
- *I am* refers to God the Father testifying that the Son, Christ, is God (Heb. 13:8).
- *Alpha and the Omega* means God is eternal and rules over all places and time. He is *omnipotent*, all-powerful. Referring to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet meaning His Sovereignty, Christ is all in all; He is LORD of all that is past, present, and is to come. His will and purpose will come true, and ours will not; so, to grow, we must surrender to Him (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; Rom. 8:18-25; Gal. 2:20-21; Rev. 22:12-16).
- *Who is to come*. Christ is coming and all will consummate His will and purpose. Justice and His Kingdom will be fulfilled, and *every knee will bow* (Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10; Rev. 21:1-22:5)!

Our call is to be blessed so the character qualities we receive from the Spirit come from the inward love we have for our Lord and we will desire to spill them upon others around us (Psalm 1).

John begins His book by reminding his readers of whom and what Christ is, His supremacy, and His role of Redeemer and Judge. He then gives us a glimpse of end-time events. We must never forget who we are in Christ. If we do, we will quickly fall to pride and apostasy, buying lies and living in our depravity. God is beyond time and space, and beyond our comprehension other than what He has clearly revealed to us. He has a plan; let's face Him, not our fears or our doubts or other's misgivings. Let us swim in His *living waters* (Jer. 2:13; 17:13; John 4:10-11; 7:38; Rev. 7:17). God may seem to be slow, taking His time, but He does this for good reason. Life is about learning and growing, about becoming faithful, infused with His Spirit, spiritually responsible and character-driven. It is not about how we feel or what we want.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of

- my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
 9. What can I model and teach?
 10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Have you ever had such a real, vivid dream that when you woke up, you were not sure what was real and what was not? How do you think John felt when these visions came to him?
2. How would you feel if you got a glimpse of your future? What if it is a hope to come in your life? How would that change your attitudes and plans? (Keep in mind that Christ is your hope!)
3. One of the main themes of Revelation is the call for us to stand firm and grow further in our faith. Does this surprise you? What did you expect to find from Revelation?
4. Why do you suppose most people see Revelation as an ominous apocalypse of chaos and catastrophe? How do you see it?
5. Do you feel that Revelation is about what will happen to us personally as well as in a future culmination?
6. When all seems lost and hopeless, how does the fact that Jesus is in command and His plan is in commission give you perseverance to continue on?
7. What is your take on the word and theme of *soon*? Does it mean the sudden nature of the *Christian era* and the unexpected return of Christ, or is it a time reference? This has been the crux of the debate for theologians since the 1840's. How would this affect how you view Revelation?
8. How does it make you feel that there is no special elite class in the Kingdom of God? How can this help motivate you to pursue your dream and the call that Christ has given you?
9. Has a parent or boss ever told you that he or she is proud of you? How is this like being approved by God?
10. Most people see Revelation as only about future events. What does it mean to you that it is actually more about how we should conduct ourselves in times of distress and the strength of faith to endure and learn from those times?
11. Do you see God's Word as a privilege? How can this help you see the

necessity to read and hear it more? Consider that it is the authority from Christ Himself that compels us to read the Bible. How can this help you be more constant in your devotions?

12. What needs to take place to better connect your relationship with Christ more firmly? How would this help you receive hope and encouragement?

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