

# Ministry of Grace

## Revelation Chapter 1 John's 1<sup>st</sup> Vision

The book of Revelation is a book of unveiling, or revealing. This book is actually a letter that was written by the Apostle John while he was exiled on the Island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. He was instructed to write this letter to the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia (modern day Western Turkey). This entire book is the revealing of Jesus in his majesty and glory, both now in heaven and in the future when he comes to earth to judge sin and sinners. In Jesus' first incarnation He came as a humble servant offering Himself as the perfect Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. In His second coming He will come as the conquering King of Kings to judge and to rule the world.

Why did God give us this prophetic book of the New Testament? There is at least a two-fold reason that God gave this message. It was not sent just to satisfy the curiosity of the readers. It was sent, to God's people who, at the end of the first century, were undergoing intense persecution for their faith, to give these believers courage and hope. And, not just that, it was sent to help them examine their own lives individually, as well as to examine the focus and witness of each local church assembly, to determine those areas needing correction. This letter commands all of us not only to hear the Word, but also to keep it — that is, guard it as a treasure and practice what it says. The blessing will come, not just by hearing, but by doing.

But I said that there was a two-fold reason for God's sending this book. It was also given to those of us in the end times. As we encounter more and more resistance and persecution from the world around us, it helps us to see that there is retribution coming to those who resist God's message. It gives us hope and it gives us courage to stand and fight with Christ by our side.

The book is full of imagery and symbolism. In this chapter we are introduced to John's vision. John was "in the spirit" when he was given a vision of one "like a son of man" standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands holding seven stars in his right hand. He was told that the seven lampstands are the seven churches and the seven stars are the messengers (angels) of the seven churches. He was then instructed by the angel that he was to write specific messages to these churches. These messages occupy chapters two and three of the book of Revelation.

The outline for this book is given to us in verse 19, [the things that you have seen](#) (Chapter 1), [those that are](#) (chapters 2 and 3), and [those that are to take place after this](#) (chapters 4 through 22). Remember that this is expressed in relation to the time of John's writing.

## Revelation 1:1, 2

**<sup>1</sup>The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup>who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.**

“The revelation ” (literally “A revelation”)

This is from the Greek “*apokalupsis*,” from which we get our English word apocalypse. This word is made up of *apo*, meaning “from” or “away from” and *kaluptō*, meaning “to cover.” So, *apokalupsis* means “an uncovering,” “an unveiling,” or “a revelation.”

This revelation, this uncovering of future things about Jesus Christ, was given by God the Father to God the Son (Jesus Christ), who then gave it to his messenger (an angel) to give to John. Now, John in return, is giving it to all mankind. Although this describes messengers between God and us, it is nonetheless a message given from God to each one of us individually.

The revelation was given to Jesus to show (Greek *deiknuō* meaning “to present to sight” or “to cause to see”) to His servants (Greek *doulos* meaning “voluntary bond servant”). Jesus only causes his own bond servants (saved Christians) to see the revelation. That is why this book is indecipherable and enigmatic to the unsaved.

“soon take place”

A literal translation of this phrase is, “which is to come into being in a short space of time.” *Tachos* is the Greek word translated “soon.” It is derived from *tachus*, meaning “prompt” or “swift.” In this instance, it is preceded by the preposition *en*, meaning “in.” In this construction the words mean “quickly, shortly, speedily, or soon.”

We must keep in mind that God’s “soon” is different from man’s “soon.” As Peter said in his second epistle, “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (2 Peter 3:8) Notice that this says “a day is as ...” and “a thousand years as ...” Peter is not saying that a thousand years are a day to God. The word translated “as” is the Greek word *hōs*, meaning “like.” So, Peter is saying that a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. Well, what the heck does that mean? Since God is omnipresent (everywhere present and at every time present), He is at the beginning and at the end simultaneously. So, what God considers a short time, may to us be a long time, what God considers a long time may to us be a short time, and what God considers “soon” is not necessarily what we would consider “soon.”

“John”

The author of this letter is generally accepted to be the Apostle John.

“angel”

This word is transliterated (brought directly from Greek to English) from the word *aggelos* (angelos). It literally means “a messenger.” We will encounter this word a lot in chapters two and three.

## Revelation 1:3

**<sup>3</sup>Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.**

Initially, the letters and writings of the various New Testament books were copied and passed-on to other churches. These were then read to the congregations at local church meetings. At the time, this was the only way believers were exposed to “The Bible.” It was not until the end of the fourth century that all of the writings contained in our Bible were gathered together and proclaimed to be God’s Inspired Word. This is why John says that both the one who reads and the ones who hear are blessed.

“prophecy”

This is the only book in the New Testament that claims to be prophecy. For this reason, it must be read and interpreted differently than the remainder of the New Testament. *See the Introductory Notes in this study series.*

“keep what is written”

The word “keep” is translated from the Greek word *tēreō*, meaning “to keep an eye on” or “guard” as a soldier watches over a prisoner.

“time is near”

This is from the Greek *kairos engus*. *Kairos* refers to a period of time, a season, or an occasion and “*engus*” means “close at hand.” This verse proclaims that the period of time spoken of in Revelation is close at hand.

## Revelation 1:4-6

**<sup>4</sup>John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood <sup>6</sup>and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

John’s letter was written to the seven churches in Asia (modern day western Turkey). This is the area where John the Apostle ministered. His home church was Ephesus where he was pastor until his exile. Chapters two and three of Revelation contain the specific messages to these churches.

Notice the greeting of “grace and peace” from all three members of the trinity

“Him who is and who was and who is to come” – God the Father.

“the seven Spirits who are before His throne” – God the Holy Spirit. This is most likely the seven spirits identified in **Isaiah 11:1, 2**. They are:

The Spirit of Yahweh, the Spirit of Knowledge, the Spirit of Counsel, the Spirit of Wisdom, the Spirit of Understanding, the Spirit of Strength, and the Spirit of the Fear of Yahweh.

“Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler over the kings on earth” – God the Son.

“ruler”

This is the Greek *archon*, which means “first in rank or power.”

“Amen”

This is transliterated from the Hebrew word meaning “it is truth.”

## Revelation 1: 7

**<sup>7</sup>Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.**

“Behold”

Greek *idou*, which means “look!” or “pay attention!” Whenever we read this word in Revelation we are to pay attention to what is about to be revealed.

“with the clouds”

This could also be translated as “in the midst of clouds.” Clouds are a common occurrence with the appearance of God. He led the Israelites out of Egypt as a pillar of fire by day and a pillar of

cloud by night. When He appeared to the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai, He appeared in the cloud covering the mountain. When He met with Moses in the wilderness tabernacle He appeared in a cloud. When the glory of God entered and left the Temple, He appeared as a cloud. When Christ ascended to the Father, he ascended in clouds.

John's statement that he is coming with the clouds is a reference to his second coming at the end of the Tribulation. It is not a description of the rapture. It is significant that after chapter three (the letters to the churches) there is no mention of the church until **Revelation 22:16**. This is one more piece of evidence of the fact that the rapture of the church occurs before the Tribulation.

“all tribes of the earth will wail”

This does not mean that everyone will wail. It means that there will be people from every tribe who will wail. The word translated “tribes” is *phulē*, meaning “a tribe, clan, or lineage.” It is a smaller group than race or nation. The most likely reason for their wailing is the realization that they have been wrong about God and are about to receive the punishment that is due to them for their lack of belief.

### **Revelation 1:8**

**8" I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."**

“the Alpha and the Omega”

Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In some Greek text, the words “Alpha” and “Omega” do not appear, just the letters.

The phrase “*the beginning and the end*” is not present in the best Greek texts and has not been included in this translation.

Note that he says “**is**” before “**was**.” Word order is very significant in Greek. When something is expressed first in a series, the writer is calling attention to it. The most significant thing about Jesus Christ is that “He is,” now and forever more

“Almighty”

Greek *pantokrator*, meaning “one who rules over all” or “one who has dominion over all.”

### **Revelation 1:9**

**9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.**

John was exiled to Patmos by the Roman Emperor Domitian who reigned from AD 81 to AD 96. Since John claims to have been on Patmos when he wrote this book, it must have been written during that time, probably close to the time that he was released (shortly after Domitian died). Also since verse 19 refers to “the things which are to come to pass,” it pretty much puts the final nail in the coffin of the preterist view, which culminates in AD 70.

According to John MacArthur in *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*:

“Patmos is a barren, volcanic island in the Aegean Sea, at its extremities about ten miles long and five to six miles wide, located some forty miles offshore from Miletus (a city in Asia Minor about thirty miles south of Ephesus). John was probably sent to Patmos as a criminal (as a Christian, he was a member of an illegal religious sect). If so, the conditions under which he lived would have

been harsh. Exhausting labor under the watchful eye (and ready whip) of a Roman overseer, insufficient food and clothing, and having to sleep on the bare ground would have taken their toll on a ninety-year-old man.” [John MacArthur]

### **Revelation 1:10, 11**

**<sup>10</sup>I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet**

**<sup>11</sup>saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."**

“in the Spirit”

It is most likely that John was in some kind of spiritual trance, perhaps not unlike the state we are in when deeply engrossed in prayer. It is also possible that John was moved from the physical world into the spiritual world not bound by space or time.

“the Lord’s Day”

This is the only place in the New Testament where this expression is used.

“*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last*”

Though some translations include it here, this phrase does not occur here in the best Greek manuscripts.

“Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

The word translated “book” is the Greek word *biblios*, which we would refer to as a book. In John’s day however, it would have been in the form of a scroll.

John was instructed to write down everything that he saw and to send it to the seven churches of Asia. (see **Revelation 1:4**). Even though John spent much of the latter years of his life ministering in Ephesus, it is likely that he also had an itinerant (traveling) ministry to the other churches in Asia.

### **Revelation 1:12, 13**

**<sup>12</sup>Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup>and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.**

The seven golden lampstands, as explained in verse twenty, are the seven churches in Asia (modern day Turkey).

“one like a son of man”

The word “like” is *homoios*, meaning “similar to.” It does not mean that two things are the same, only that they are similar. There is another Greek word used for comparisons. It is *hōs* which is sometimes translated “as.” It also does not indicate equality, but similarity. As you read through the book of Revelation (the entire Bible, in fact), notice carefully when you see the words “like” and “as.” It doesn’t mean the thing being described “is” something else, but that it has the form, quality, or appearance of something else.

So, in this verse, John says that the person he sees is “like” a son of man. He does not say that he is “the Son of Man” (a reference to Jesus Christ), but one like a son of man. In other words, John saw a human-like figure standing in the middle of the seven lampstands and he didn’t know who

it was. In verse 17, this person will declare himself to be “the First and the Last,” an obvious reference to God himself. And then in verse eighteen he will declare that he is:

... the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.

So, in these later verses John leaves little doubt that this is a representation of Jesus Christ himself. However, at this point John does not know who he is, so he says that he is “one like a son of man.”

“clothed with a long robe”

Kings and prophets were dressed in garments that came down to the feet, but these were typically tied with a sash or a belt about the waist. The High Priest was also arrayed in a robe that came down to the feet. Unlike the king or prophet, however, his was tied with a golden sash across the chest. It would appear from this that John was describing the “one like a son of man” as the High Priest. In **Hebrews 5:10**, we are told that Jesus is a “high priest after the order of Melchizedek.” And we know that Melchizedek was also the king of Salem (king of peace). And - we know from other places in the New Testament that Jesus is not only our High Priest and King, but He is also the Prophet spoken of in the Old Testament.

### **Revelation 1:14-16**

**<sup>14</sup>The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup>His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. <sup>16</sup>In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.**

Notice the repeated usage of “like.” This was John’s attempt to describe something that is indescribable.

“hairs of his head were white, like white wool”

The whiteness of His hair is a symbol of the holiness of God. The brightness is a picture of the Shekinah glory.

“His eyes were like a flame of fire”

Fire is an expression of God’s righteous anger and judgement against sin and sinfulness.

“His feet were like burnished bronze”

This, again, is a picture of God’s judgment. Although, this represents a substitutionary offering. The Bronze Altar was where the lamb was burned as a substitutionary sin offering to cleanse the people of their sins. The fact that it is “burnished bronze” indicates that it has been purified in the fire of God’s judgment.

“sword”

Greek *romphaia*, which is a large broadsword, used to swing a fatal blow. It is different than *machaira*, a short dagger-like weapon used by Roman soldiers for close-in fighting with a stabbing like motion. The two-edged sword spoken of in **Hebrews 4:12** is translated from the Greek word *machaira*.

“his face was like the sun shining in full strength”

The brightness of his face is a picture of the Shekinah glory. John had seen this before. This same glory appeared when he was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. (**Matthew 17: 1-2**)

## Revelation 1:17, 18

**17**When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, **18**and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

"Fear not"

Greek *mē phobou*, meaning "do not be frightened!"

"I died"

This is not a completely accurate translation of the Greek. A literal translation of the Greek is "I became dead." Notice that He does not say, "I was dead;" this would indicate a continuous state. Instead, He says "I became dead," a reference to His death on the cross.

"I have the keys of Death and Hades"

Jesus has the power over life and death now. Notice, however, that before Jesus' resurrection, Satan (the devil) possessed power over death:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, (**Hebrews 2:14**) [NASB]

## Revelation 1:19

**19**Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

This is an outline of the book of Revelation and must be interpreted in the context of the time in which Revelation was written.

"the things that you have seen" refers to the vision of Jesus in the midst of the lampstands (chapter 1).

"those that are" refers to the messages to the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3).

"those that are to take place after this." refers to the visions of the future which occupy the remaining chapters of the book of Revelation (chapters 4 through 22).

## Revelation 1:20

**20**As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Most of the visions in the book of Revelation are not interpreted for us. This, however, is one that is interpreted for us.

"the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches"

The word "angels" is from the Greek word, "*angeloi*" meaning "messengers." There are three ways to look at this word as it is used in this and the following two chapters:

- Angelic Beings.
- The people chosen to deliver these messages to the seven churches.
- The leaders (Pastors) of the seven churches.

It is unlikely that this refers to angelic beings, since that would mean that the message was given to Jesus who delivered it to an angel to deliver to John to be then given back to angels to take to

the seven churches. Additional evidence against this view is that there are reverences to people in the churches. For instance, in **Revelation 2:24**, it says:

**But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching ...**

*Angeloi* may be a reference to people who were assigned by each of the seven churches to carry John's message to the church. Most likely, however, it is a reference to the leaders of the seven churches whose job it was to deliver God's message to the church members just as a church pastor does today.

**“the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”**

Notice that the lampstands “are” the seven churches; they are not “like” the seven churches. In other words, the seven lampstands are a direct representation of the seven churches.

## **So What?**

Do you remember what I said regarding why God gave us this New Testament book of prophecy? As we who are living in the end times encounter more and more resistance from our old adversary, we can take comfort in the fact that our Father, our God, will win the ultimate spiritual battle. As we go through this book, we will see our loving God as a vengeful God who will pour out His wrath on those who choose to oppose Him by rejecting His gracious offer of salvation. On the one hand, this gives us hope and courage to stand and fight with Jesus by our side. However, for those of us who have loved ones who have not accepted God's gracious gift of salvation, the book of Revelation causes us to come face-to-face with the reality of His wrath against those whom we hold dear. And, that's frightening!

So, as we go through this study of Revelation, we need to heed the encouragement given in verse three:

**Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near. (Revelation 1:3)**

The Greek word translated “hear,” is *akouō*. It means more than just the mechanical process of detecting sounds. It means to hear with understanding. It is an active verb expressed as a participle. Therefore, it means to be continually listening, hearing, and understanding what is being read. But it is more than that, even. We are told that it is “those who hear, and who *keep* what is written in it” who will be blessed. The word translated “keep” means to guard it as a treasure and to observe and obey what it says. There are a number of warnings given in Revelation, especially chapters two and three. If we read these warnings and ignore them, we're not guaranteed any blessing. As we read these warnings, we need first, to understand them, then to heed the warnings, by ensuring that we are obedient servants of God.

Remember, that God the Father gave this book to Jesus to show His “servants” things that will soon come to pass. The word translated “servants” refers to a common slave who is owned by another and who is required to be submissive and obedient to his or her owner. Therefore, a Christian cannot simply read through this book as an intellectual process. Understanding without applying what we learn from this book is more than laziness. It is insubordination.

We have a God who loves us so much that He gave His only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. And – we also have a God who is gracious and forgiving. In His grace, He does not give us what we deserve, and in His mercy, he gives us what we do not deserve. However – our God has a limit as to how much He will put up with. At some point in the near future, God will reach the end of His mercy for



rebellious mankind and He will show the world what the wrath of a loving God looks like. In this book, we will observe God's righteous wrath as it is poured out full strength from the cup of His anger (Revelation 14:10).

Those who desire to understand the book of Revelation have no reason to fear what is written in these pages. However, the one who wants to understand this book must be an obedient servant of God who is willing to share His message of salvation by grace, through faith.

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!  
(Revelation 22:20)

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