

# THE REVELATION

## OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE

***Introduction to Revelation:** The formal title of the book, **The Revelation of St. John the Divine**, reveals its author which also is clearly noted in the first verse. It was written in about A.D. 96 by the Apostle John after he had been exiled to the Isle of Patmos. The book more accurately is what Jesus Christ directly revealed to John about things to come. The book clearly begins in the church age and looks directly into eternity. It presents greater detail of the Tribulation than any other one portion of Scripture. It then gives significant insight into the millennial reign of Christ and of the eternal kingdom to follow. Hence, the book looks forward from John's day on into eternity. The book might be outlined accordingly: I. Introduction - chapter 1; II. The seven messages to the seven churches of Asia - chapters 2-3; III. Things hereafter - chapters 4-22.*

*The prophetic portion of the book presents a general narrative account of the Tribulation and events following thereafter. Thus, it is generally sequential in nature. The book follows patterns of sevens such as the seven seal judgments, the seven trumpets judgments, the seven personalities, the seven vials, the seven thunders, and others. Interspersed in this generally sequential development of events are a number of parenthetical chapters which insert 'sidebar' information pertaining to the Day of the Lord. These likely include the Jewish remnant of chapter 7, the account of the two witness in chapter 11, the*

seven personalities of chapter 12, the Lamb on Mount Zion in chapter 14, along with Babylon the Great in chapters 17-18. These 'parenthetic' passages seem to summarize or give overview of the greater flow of events as adjunct thought.

Though the church is clearly in view through chapter 3, thereafter it vanishes from earthly view and is found in heaven in chapter 4 and later to return with Christ in chapter 19. Thus, a pre-Tribulation Rapture is clearly implied. Accordingly, the earthly focus from chapter 4 through chapter 20 pertains to Israel. From chapter 4 through chapter 22, the book synchronizes with the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel and from there on into the Kingdom.

The key personality of the book is Jesus Christ. The general theme is the consummation of the ages in His return. The primary focus from chapter 4 onward is eschatological.

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**Overview of Revelation 1:** *The first chapter of Revelation is essentially an introduction to the book, developing the general theme of the book, "things which must shortly come to pass." It also presents the occasion of its writing—the revelation of Jesus Christ to John on the Isle of Patmos. The final portion of Revelation 1 presents John's confrontation by Jesus Christ on the Isle of Patmos.*

**1:1** The essence of the book is summarized in this succinct statement, **the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servant things which must shortly come to pass.** Thus this revelation came ultimately from God the Father to Jesus who in turn relayed it via an unnamed angel to John. The word translated as **revelation** (αποκαλυψις *apokalupsis*) (from whence the English word

*apocalypse* derives), literally means ‘a revealing,’ or as it is properly translated ‘revelation.’ The words translated as **short-ly** (*εν ταχος en takhos*) literally has the sense ‘in swiftness.’ The thought therefore is not so much *when* the events prophesied will take place as to *how*. When the Rapture and the ensuing events following in the Day of Lord come to pass, it will be in swiftness. Thus, this climatic message was “sent and signified . . . by his angel.” This unnamed angel, in turn, presented these truths to John the Apostle. As the book unfolds, portions thereof are clearly direct revelation from Jesus Christ to John. Other portions were handled by this angel.

**1:2** John solemnly noted that he bore record (literally, bore witness) **of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ** and of all other things which he saw. Hence, John in effect became the court recorder of the solemn proceedings about to be witnessed.

**1:3** The sacred writer thus concludes his introductory remarks with the invocation of God’s blessing. Specifically, the Holy Spirit through John promised to bless all that (1) **readeth, and (2) they that hear the words of this prophecy, (3) and keep those things which are written therein**. The final phrase alludes to doing, observing, or obeying what was about to be written. This parallels the principle found throughout the Bible that God blesses obedience. Though the immediate application is certainly to the Book of Revelation, its greater application broadly applies to the entire Bible. See Revelation 22:7,14.

Thus God promises blessing for (1) reading His Word, (2) blessing for hearing His Word, and (3) blessing for obeying His Word. The sense of urgency thereto is made apparent: “for the time *is* at hand.” The thought literally has the sense, ‘the time is near.’ The events about to be unfolded are likely the case. Hence, the imminency of those things, about to come to pass,

are clearly implied. If that were true then, how much more today.

**1:4** The immediate recipients of this revelation are addressed. **John to the seven churches which are in Asia.** The *Asia* thus addressed was the Roman province of that name which encompassed a region along the southwestern coast of Asia Minor. In that region, seven churches had been founded which will be addressed in the following two chapters. In fashion similar to many of the other New Testament epistles, the salutation of the book begins with the familiar, **Grace be unto you, and peace.** Those lofty virtues have been invoked in most of the various epistles of the New Testament.

John thus notes the ultimate Author of the revelatory message: **from him which is, and which was, and which is to come.** Thus, the ultimate author is at once and the same time in the past, present, and future tense. Of course, this One is none other than God. His eternality is clearly in view. He always has been, He is, and He always will be. Further implied is His imminent return (in Christ). The final phrase, “him . . . which is to come,” literally is ‘Him which is coming.’

The unfolding book is also ascribed as being from **the seven Spirits which are before his throne.** These seven Spirits are left undefined. Some take the position they refer to the sevenfold qualities of Christ’s Spirit as prophesied in Isaiah 11:1 *ff.* Others take the position that this is symbolic representation of the seven-fold New Testament ministry of the Holy Spirit noted in seven, the number of perfection. In any event this (these) Spirit(s) is(are) before the throne of God. The heavenly origin of the message is thus indisputable. Its origin is from God (verse 1), through Jesus (verse 5), along with the Spirit(s) before the throne. The Trinity is thus strongly hinted as the composite author.

**1:5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.**

John makes clear the book is specifically “from Jesus Christ.” He then proceeds to issue one of the most encompassing and beautiful descriptions of our Lord in the New Testament. He is described as (1) “the faithful witness.” Our Lord thus is defined as a witness who is faithful in every sense, legally, ethically, and accurately. The fact He is a witness to God’s truth is an example for us to this day. Implied is the testifying on that behalf. He also is noted as (2) “the first begotten of the dead.” His resurrection is clearly in view. Moreover, implied is that many others will follow in the pattern of His resurrection. That is us, those redeemed in Him. Finally, He is described as (3) “the prince of the kings of the earth.” The word translated as **prince** (αρχων *archon*), among other things, has the sense of ‘chief’ or ‘ruler.’ The greater thought is that He is Prince over all the kings of the earth, both now and in the ages to come.

The book is thus dedicated unto Jesus Christ. The Apostle provides a majestic threefold description of the One to which this book is consecrated. (1) He has “loved us.” What a magnificent appellation to Him and blessing for us. (2) He has “washed us from our sins in his own blood.” The cleansing property of the blood of Christ is made clear. The cleansing of sin is by the blood of Christ and that alone, not baptism in any form. See I John 1:7.

**1:6 Finally, (3) He hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.** This third description of Christ’s work is prophetic. Someday in His coming kingdom, His beloved blood-bought saints will rule and reign with Him. To that degree, some in the church in that day will be kings and others

will serve in some capacity as priests before Him. Though there indeed is the priesthood of the believer now, then it will be even more apparent as some of God's people in that day will occupy such a visible office in His kingdom.

Thus to Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, John invoked **glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.** The final word, *amen*, simply in this context means 'so be it.' Indeed, to our Lord and Savior is due such glory and rule for ever.

**1:7** John continues with a further brief prophetic synopsis of our Lord's impending activity. **Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him.** The return of Jesus Christ is clearly set forth. That return is in two phases, (1) the Rapture of the church, and (2) His return in power and great glory. The latter is evidently that which is in view here. When Jesus comes in the Rapture, though it will be in the clouds, apparently not every eye will see Him. However, when He returns in power and great glory, the nations of the earth will see Him as recorded in Revelation 19:11,19. Moreover, in Matthew 24:27-30, He is noted as coming **in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.** The context there clearly is of His second advent, the final phase of His promised return. In that day, all who have survived the Tribulation will see Him. See also Matthew 26:64.

Moreover, **they also which pierced him** will see Him. Clearly, implied is that the Jewish nation in that day will not only see Him but also recognize Him. Zechariah 13:6 seems to refer to that poignant reunion. The greater mosaic of biblical eschatology seems to imply that by that time, most if not all, Israel will then be saved. They are thus brought face to face with the deed their forefathers perpetrated against Him at Calvary centuries earlier.

Finally, **all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.** The thought is how all nations of the earth in that day will mourn as they realize He who they had heretofore opposed and

rejected has now returned in power. They are on the losing side with all that implies, and they are brought forcibly to that realization. They can only wail before Him.

This section of John's salutary introduction is thus concluded. He thus invokes, **Even so, Amen**. That is, even so, let it be!

**1:8** Jesus Himself thus adds His own direct comment. **I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty**. The eternality of Christ is again noted as He describes Himself with the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet—(α) *alpha* and (ω) *omega*. It was idiomatic of being eternal and all inclusive. Lest one not so understand, Jesus further declared that He was both the “beginning and the ending.” All things in the universe have their beginning and termination in Him. He adds further comment that He is, was, and is to come. That same essential thought was ascribed to God the Father in verse 4. Jesus thus applied the same identity to Himself. His Deity clearly is in view. Moreover, His impending return is again implied. Finally, He applies to Himself a title reserved for only God—“the Almighty.” In His person, there is infinite power and might. The revelation of Jesus Christ through John in this book is thus well underway.

**1:9** **I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ**. John now presents the immediate occasion of this divine revelation. He first describes himself to his readers as (1) your *brother*, (2) and “companion in tribulation.” Clearly hinted at was that John had faced persecution for the testimony of Jesus Christ. As will be shortly noted, he had been exiled to the Isle of Patmos as a result.

The fact that his intended readers are thus described as companions in tribulation indicates they too were facing similar persecution. The Roman government had already begun its infamous opposition of the church. But John wrote that he also along with them were companions “in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.” Though persecution had become a harsh reality, they nevertheless found solace in the hope of glory ahead and the patience (sustaining perseverance) of Jesus Christ on their behalf. He never gave up on them though they were sorely persecuted.

John thus notes that he had been exiled to the Isle of Patmos “for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” This isle was a sparsely populated island off the southwest coast of Asia Minor in the Aegean Sea, adjacent to the province of Asia. It was about ten miles long and about five miles wide. It was a part of the Sporades group of islands about forty miles southwest of Ephesus. Ignatius says John was banished thereto by Domitian in about A.D. 95 or 96. Tertullian claims John had been first cast into a vessel of burning oil but suffered no harm. Therefore, Domitian exiled him to Patmos as a prison island.

John makes clear his offence. It was for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Allusion may be thus made to the writing of his gospel and epistles. The distribution thereof may have been the offence which brought his exile to Patmos. Moreover, even as an aged man, he was vocal in his testimony of Jesus Christ. See 1:2. John apparently died on this island at some point after the completion of writing Revelation.

**1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.** The Apostle now describes his encounter with the resurrected Christ on the Isle of Patmos. He describes himself as being “in the Spirit.” Implied is a state of spiritual transcendency perhaps similar to that which Paul described in II Corinthians 12:2-4. Paul there



portrayed himself being caught up into the third heaven. As the Book of Revelation unfolds, it is clear that John experienced a similar experience. God through the Holy Spirit evidently transported him in spirit to heaven where he saw what he thus reveals. (Several Old Testament prophets experienced events not dissimilar to John, for example: Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel.)

The time was “the Lord’s day.” Some have attempted to view this as the ‘Day of the Lord’ in an eschatological sense which the grammar might allow. However, the overwhelming historical position is that the day in question was a given “Lord’s day,” that is a ‘first day of the week’—a Sunday. From the earliest days of Christianity, the early church observed the first day of the week as the day of assembly in commemoration of our Lord’s resurrection. See Acts 20:7 and I Corinthians 16:2. This in all likelihood refers to the same. It therefore became a new term which has continued to this day.

Though Sunday is a term hearkening back to pagan Rome, the Lord’s Day denotes the special significance which Bible-believing Christians attach to the first day of the week. John perhaps was in special prayer and meditation on this particular Lord’s day. God in His divine purpose chose to thus reveal to him on that day what lay ahead.

On that day, John heard behind him “a great voice, as of a trumpet.” Of interest is the phrase “great voice.” The two Greek words translated thus are (μεγας) *megas* and (φωνη) *phone*. The English word *megaphone* is not an inaccurate illustration. The idea is of a powerful, overwhelming voice. John likened it “as of a trumpet.” Of note in Scripture is the association of the voice of God and that of a trumpet. See for example Exodus 19:16, I Thessalonians 4:16, and Revelation 4:1. Implied is a startling, overriding, and perhaps even overpowering sound.

**1:11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto**

**the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.**

That great voice announced, “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.” As noted in verse 8, *alpha* and *omega* are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. And as the voice noted, He was the first and last. As the text will unfold, the speaker clearly was Jesus Christ. He succinctly set forth His eternity once again.

He instructed John, “What thou seest, write in a book.” John soon would be shown events through the course of time, especially into the future. He thus was told to write “in a **book**.” The word so translated (βιβλιον *biblion*) referred to a small book and specifically a scroll type of document.

John was further instructed to send this book “unto the seven churches which are in Asia.” The province of Asia is that to which he refers as noted in verse 4. It encompassed the western tip of what also was called Asia Minor (or modern Turkey). Implied is that there were seven churches in this province. They all were relatively close to the Isle of Patmos whence John was. John evidently sent to each church the message delivered for it. He may also have sent the compiled whole to each of these churches.

The seven cities containing these seven churches were: (1) *Ephesus*—the church there had been founded by Paul as noted in Acts 18; (2) *Smyrna*—a port city on the Aegean Sea about 40 miles north of Ephesus; (3) *Pergamos*—further still to the north and west of Ephesus; (4) *Thyatira*—the arc of the cities thus described now turns back to the south and east; (5) *Sardis*—a city to the south and east of Thyatira; (6) *Philadelphia*—a city east of Sardis; and (7) *Laodicea*—a city southeast of Philadelphia. The latter five cities were connected by a Roman military post-road which accommodated communication between them.