

Revelation Chapter 1

I. (v.1-2) – Identification of the Genre and contents

- A. It is “Revelation” or “apocalupsis” (See introduction)
- B. It concerns things which must “soon” take place
 - 1. Some believe that most of Revelation deals with what is in the distant future from John’s perspective
 - a. A problem with this is that it has little relevance to those in the first century facing severe persecution
 - b. It also ignores the fact that this verse clearly says it concerns things that were to happen “soon”
 - 2. One common defense of the distant future interpretation is based on a statement by Peter in 2 Peter 3 which states that 1000 years is as a day to the Lord.
 - 3. It is helpful to compare other similar statements in apocalyptic literature, such as Daniel
 - a. Dan 8:26 – Daniel was instructed to seal up a vision which pertained to the Persian empire, Alexander the great, and his successor states (v.22)
 - Daniel was taken captive to Babylon in 605 B.C.E.
 - Belshazzar reigned Babylon in his father’s place beginning in 553 B.C.E., which would have placed Daniel’s vision at about 550 B.C.E. (Dan 8:1)
 - The Persian Empire took over Babylon in 539 B.C.E.
 - Alexander the Great began his campaign in 336 B.C.E.
 - Alexander’s successor states ruled until 164 B.C.E., when the Maccabees overthrew them.
 - b. So, Daniel received this vision in 550, and it covered events up until 164 B.C.E., a period of about **386 years**
 - c. That 386 years is called “many days in the future,” and as a result, Daniel was to **seal up the vision**
 - d. A similar statement is made in Daniel 12:4 – He was to seal of the vision until the time of the end. (when Rome destroys Jerusalem)
 - 4. In contrast, John is told the following
 - a. (Rev 1:1) – The vision concerns things which must “soon” take place
 - b. (Rev 22:10) – John was told **do not seal up** the words of the prophecy because the time was near (at hand)

- c. There is a nearly identical phrase in Greek at Matt 26:18 where Jesus says “my time is near” speaking of his crucifixion
- d. Same word is used in Greek in Mk 1:15 when Jesus said the kingdom of God is “near” (see also Mark 9:1).
- e. So the phrase “time is near” should be understood as something about to happen.

C. This answers a question of persecuted Christians – “How long?”

- 1. This question is asked in 6:10
- 2. The answer from the beginning of the book is – “not long.”

II. (v.3-8) Beginning of the “epistle”

A. The fact that the genre is also epistle shows that this is an “occasional” document, written to a specific people at a specific time to instruct them in their current situation.

B. Why are these seven churches addressed and not others?

- 1. These seven churches were centrally located in Asia
- 2. They may have exemplified traits to condemn or praise for all churches
- 3. Emperor worship was very strong in Asia as well as Christianity (after 70 C.E.) which led to conflict
- 4. Asia was fertile ground for various cults and religions, which also lead to conflict between pagans and Christians

III. The effect of this introduction on suffering Christians (v.3-8)

A. People used to seeing Rome’s power displayed in pompous military parades and such. This may have disheartened Christians who may have wondered if God really was with them, or all powerful

B. John displays the power and triumph of God in this introduction

- 1. From God who was, who is and who is to come
 - a. Readers would have thought of Exodus

- Exodus 3:14 – God is the great “I AM” (him who is)
- b. God was around before Rome, and still is, and will be after Rome is gone

2. From the Seven Spirits of God

Eph 4 says there is only one Spirit, so the seven should be understood as symbolic of God’s perfect ability to strengthen believers through the Spirit

3. From Jesus

- a. His name, Yeshua, means “deliverer”
- b. He is the “faithful witness”
 - Word is “martus” which is where we get “martyr”
 - He was a “witness” in that he, like so many Christians also stood before the Roman authorities
 - He was “faithful” in that he did not deny God
- c. The faithful witness is the first-born from the dead
 - The authorities killed him, but he came back to life
 - (1 Cor 15:54-57) – He rendered death powerless
- d. He is ruler of the kings of the earth
 - Rome and Caesar are not in charge, Jesus is
 - All authority originates from God (Rom 13:1-7)
- e. He loves us (unlike Caesar and Rome) and frees us from our sins, something no one else could do
- f. Made us to be a kingdom or priests
- g. He has the glory and dominion and power forever!

C. (v.7-8) Jesus is coming with the clouds

1. This is apocalyptic thought and imagery. When the Lord comes it does not necessarily mean the second coming, but the emphasis is often on the Lord coming in judgment
2. Example of this in Matt 24:27-35 where Jesus uses apocalyptic imagery to describe the fall of Jerusalem
3. Prophets used same imagery
 - Isa 19:1 – Lord riding a cloud to execute wrath on Egypt
 - Jer 4:13 – God’s terrifying judgment in the clouds
 - Ezek 30:3 – Judgment against the nations in clouds
 - Dan 7:14, 26 – Ancient of days in the clouds, dominion of wickedness taken away
 - Joel 2:2 – Day of the Lord comes with clouds and is a day of doom for the wicked
4. The “cloud” may also remind one of the Lord’s presence in

Exodus which was in the form of a cloud by day

5. Other examples of apocalyptic imagery: Isaiah 13:9-10; Ezek 32:7; Joel 3:15; Nah 1:3; Zech 1:15
6. So the “coming” of Jesus is a coming of judgment for those who are persecuting God’s people. This image of Jesus “coming” will be used several times in Revelation.

IV. (v.9-16) – JESUS AMONG THE LAMPSTANDS. First, Jesus “tells us” that Jesus loves us and cares, now he “shows us” that Jesus loves us and cares

A. The vision as a whole: This picture shows that Jesus has not abandoned his persecuted church, he is “among” them, and he knows their suffering.

B. Seven golden lampstands

1. Lampstands elevate the lamp, so all can see the light
2. As lampstands, churches are to elevate Christ so all can see his glory, even in persecution. (Mt 5:14-16; John 8:12)
3. The lampstands were made of gold, a precious material which indicates that God’s churches are precious to him. (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 1:18-19, Eph 5:25-29)
4. Some churches are big, some are small, some struggle more than others, but they all precious to God



C. One like a Son of Man walking among the lampstands

1. “Son of man” a common Hebrew idiom which means “human.” So John saw someone that looked human
2. Robe reached his feet and he wore a golden sash
 - a. Could be an indication of priestly garb (Ex 28:4, 27)
 - b. Could be an indication of royal garb (1 Mac 10:89)

3. White hair
 - a. Denotes purity, wisdom, holiness, and age
 - b. Parallel to Dan 7:9
4. Flaming Eyes
 - a. Eyes denote knowledge in apocalyptic imagery
 - b. Psalm 139 – The Lord knows all
 - c. In the subsequent letters to the seven churches, he begins with, “I know your deeds”
5. Burnished bronze feet
 - a. They are hot and trample down the wicked
 - b. Micah 4:13 – The Lord treads down the wicked
6. Voice like the sound of many waters – Power and majesty
7. In his right hand – Seven stars
 - a. Many in ancient world thought the stars held their destiny. However, the picture offered here is that Jesus holds their destiny in his hand
 - b. In Hebraic idiom, the right hand symbolized power
 - c. At the end of the chapter, Jesus says the stars represent the angels of the churches. See below
8. Out of his mouth, a sharp two-edged sword
 - a. In apocalyptic imagery, sword denotes judgment
 - b. Other uses of a sword in Revelation
 - Rev 2:12, 16 – Sword of judgment against unfaithful
 - Rev 19:15, 21 – Sword of judgment against nations
 - c. Isaiah 11:4 – God would slay the wicked with his mouth
 - d. Heb 4:12 – Word of God
 - Living and active
 - God “spoke” the universe into existence
 - God spoke judgment against unrighteous
 - e. Ezek 37 – Word of God also can bring life and comfort
9. Face shining like the sun
 - a. Refers to God’s glory
 - b. Mt 17:2 – God’s glory could be seen on bright clothes at mount of transfiguration
 - c. Exod 34:29 – God’s glory caused Moses’s face to shine

V. John’s reaction and the response of Jesus (v.17-20)

- A. Fell at his feet – Both reverence and fear

B. Jesus said “do not be afraid”

1. In the case of John he did not come to judge, but the comfort
2. I am the first and last – He has existed before Rome and still exists even after they put him to death
3. I am the living one, I was dead, but alive forevermore
 - Jesus rose from the grave
4. I have the keys to death and Hades
 1. Hades means the abode of the dead, but not Hell. It is a way of referring to death and the grave, or underworld
 2. Jesus has control over death and life
 3. Heb 2:14; 1 Cor 15:54-57

C. Jesus commissioned him to write what he sees

D. Explanation of the stars and the lampstands

1. The lampstands refer to the seven churches
2. The seven stars refer to the “angels” of the churches
 - a. “Angel” (Greek – Angelos) means “messenger”
 - b. Word is often used of human messengers
 - Example – Mark 1:2, John the Baptist an Angelos
 - If this is the case, a couple possibilities for the identity of these angels exists: (1) An elder, preacher, or leader or other leader in each church (2) A messenger or courier of some sort attached to each church
 - c. Word is more often used of heavenly messengers
 - Example – Matt 22:30 – Angels of God in Heaven
 - If this is the case, this verse is yet another verse indicating that God charges heavenly beings to watch over his people
 - d. Examples of Heavenly Angels that watch over God’s people
 - Matt 18:10 – Watching over children

- Heb 1:14 – Ministering spirits for God’s people
- Heb 13:2 – Some entertained Angels unaware of it
- Dan 8:16; 9:20; 10:5-21; 12:1 – Here they are called “prince”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what way have you ever seen the church of being in danger of being disrupted or destroyed?
2. How did it affect you? (How did you feel? Did it affect your view of God?)
3. Have you ever suffered in any way because of your faith in Christ?
4. What do you make of the phrase, “tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Christ Jesus” (v.9).
5. Of all the titles for Jesus in this section, which means the most to you? Why?
6. What overall impression does this passage give you about Jesus?
7. In what way can you remind yourself of the power of Christ?
8. In what areas of your life do you need to strive for patience and endurance?
9. Is there a way you could use this lesson to encourage others? How?