

## Revelation Chapter 1 Handout

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

1. What does "The revelation of Jesus Christ" mean to you?
2. Can it have more than one meaning?
3. To whom was this book written?
4. Why is the audience important?
5. Is it important that John is a "servant"?
6. What are "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" in this context?

***Revelation*** - this is the word *apocalypso*, which means *unveiling, or revealing, making something seen that was unseen*

***Jesus Christ*** - we begin to see that Jesus is at the center of the story... this will be about him and about his presence, power and work being revealed

***God gave*** - this is not a novel, but a revealed word which was given by God and could not, in the midst of these terrifying times been discovered any other way

***His servants*** - the word "doulos" is offered to identify the audience. This book is written to those who see themselves as servants and slaves of God and who have already committed themselves to his service. This was not intended for neutral parties.

***Soon to take place*** - we are led to believe that God is at work and there are plans afoot to have something happen in and for the servants of God.

***Made it known*** - God has indeed revealed the contents of the future

***John*** - John is the servant who has been chosen by God for this effort. He is the one who will communicate. But he is a servant just like the rest of the servants. He is not an angelic being.

***Who bore testimony*** - to bear witness to what one has seen and heard... the same word used by angels to report what they have been told by God

3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

1. Why would you get a blessing from hearing the words read aloud?
2. Why would you be blessed by hearing it?
3. What do the words "blessed are those...who keep what is written here imply?"
4. If the end has not come how do we interpret the words "for the time is near"?

***Blessed*** - means to be given something by God that could not be earned or created or received by any other means. Thus there is something awaiting the servants in these words. This is the first of seven blessings in the book.

***Who reads aloud*** - these words are not meant to be taken apart and studied for academic purposes. These words are to be read in the context of worship for proclamation and for encouragement. They were intended to do something with

*power in public and not in secret. You are blessed in the reading aloud because you are proclaiming God's saving victory. You are a co-worker with God.*

*Words of prophecy – prophets are both fore tellers (of the future) and forthtellers (of what God desires of us). This book fits both categories.*

*Who hear them – their content has meaning. There is power in the very hearing even if not fully understanding.*

*Who keep what is written – there will be directions for life in faith. This will be a story meant to be applied to how servants of God live, move and have their being. Just as Old Testament prophets laid out ways of being faithful to God so too will John.*

*The time is near – This can mean near as in immediate or in an eschatological sense near as in intensely impending and important.*

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

1. Do you think there were only seven churches in Asia?
2. Why do you think John chose to speak of seven churches?

*Seven - This is John's introduction, he is known by all seven churches and therefore he simply calls himself John. There were more than seven churches in Asia. The seven churches in Asia, i.e. present day Turkey, are representative of the whole church. The number seven occurs 52 times in the book and indicates divine completeness, because God finished the work of creation and rested on the seventh day, see Gen 2:2. This letter would probably have been circulated around the churches as some of Paul's letters were circulated (Col 4:16).*

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, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1. What do grace and peace mean to you in your life?
2. What do you make of the "seven spirits"?
3. What do each of the titles (faithful witness, firstborn of the dead, ruler of the kings of the earth, who loves us, freed us from our sins by his blood, made us to be a kingdom, made us to...serve his God and Father) given to Jesus imply?
4. Which of the titles has most meaning for you?
5. What does it mean that Jesus has all glory and dominion?

*Grace and peace – this is what God offers his servants. He is always coming toward humanity not with curse and pain but with peace. He offers it to Mary and to the disciples when he greets them at Pentecost. He also offers it in the Old Testament. God is the one who wants to bring shalom to bear upon all the earth. It also means that God is willing to come to us not in judgment but in forgiveness.*

*From him who is and who was and who is to come – this is the great monotheistic proclamation that God is one, is eternal and will always be able to*

*accomplish what he proposes because he never dies. Also we have a vision of one who is moving toward humanity because he has something for us. Seven spirits - Seven refers to completeness, another reading is seven fold spirit. Isaiah gives seven modes (actually six modes) of operation of the Spirit in the life of Christ (Isa 11:2-4). See also John 14:16-27: the Spirit comforts (16), is the Spirit of Truth (17), lives in us (17), manifests Jesus (21), manifests Jesus and the Father (23), teaches us (26), gives us peace (27). The seven spirits are referred to again in the letter to Sardis (3:1), and as seven lamps blazing before the throne of God (4:5), and as the seven eyes of the Lamb, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth (5:6). John is not going against the traditional doctrine of there being one Spirit.*

*The faithful witness - word or witness is martyrion meaning one who says what they have seen. He was faithful even to death on the cross. This lends meaning to witness later in the text.*

*First born of (or from) the dead - in Jesus resurrection there is promise for us all. He is if you will the down payment for all who will be faithful witnesses.*

*Ruler of the kings of the earth - guess who is in charge? Jesus takes a back seat to no one, not Caesar, Satan or anyone else. Jesus has all the power and so one can have hope. This sets the stage for understanding almost all of what will happen. Like an episode of Law and Order where you know the bad guy will get caught. The suspense is in the telling and not in the outcome.*

*Loves us - this is an affirmation of the basic principle of the story. God and Jesus have not quit loving the servants even though they are suffering great affliction.*

*Freed us from our sins - we are no longer captives under God's judgment. We have been set free to make the right choices. We have been set free to be those servants who can follow.*

*Priests - we are here to serve God. We stand before God in a new capacity. The old priests whether at the Temple of YHWH or of Greek gods have nothing on us. In Exo 19:5-6 the Israelites were promised that if they obeyed God then they would be God's treasured possession out of all the nations of the earth and would be for God a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The tribe of Levites became the priests, and at the death of Jesus the veil in the temple was split into two because from then on all the saints, not just the Levites, are priests. 1 Pet 2:9 emphasises that the saints are a chosen people, a people belonging to God, a royal priesthood and a holy nation who will declare the praises of God who called them out of darkness (Satan's kingdom, Acts 26:18) into his wonderful light. In the OT a priest was a mediator between God and the people offering sacrifices and incense on their behalf and for their sins. In the NT the priesthood of believers means declaring to the world the good news of the gospel, that Jesus died for their sins and offering up prayer on their behalf.*

*All glory and dominion - another affirmation of God being in charge.*

7 Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

1. What can we gather from this verse about Jesus' second coming?

2. Who will be able to see it?
3. Will it be a private affair?
4. Why would the tribes of the earth wail?

***Every eye will see*** - In contrast to the two verses above which refer to our riches in Christ this verse brings mourning to the peoples of the earth who do not know the love of God and who are not cleansed from their sins. The second coming will be public, every eye shall see him (Mat 24:30), he will bring retribution on those who do not know him (2 Thess 1:7-9, Rev 6: 15-17, 11:18, 14:17-20, 19:15) but will be marveled at by the saints 2 Thess 1:10, Rev 19:6-9. This vision of Christ's second coming is a combination of Dan 7:13 and Zech 12:10.

***Wail*** - The announcement of Christ's second coming is a major theme in the book, this is based on Zec 12:10 see also Mat 24:30, for the church this will bring solace but for the world it will bring judgment. John 19:37 'They will look on the one they have pierced' is also based on Zech 12:10 and uses the same Greek word *ekkenteo* as in Revelation, the only two times it is used in the NT.

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

1. Why do we hear now from God?
2. What difference does this one verse make in the opening sequence?

***Alpha and Omega*** - are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. They are here to remind us that God is the author of history. God is the one who can and will make things turn out according to his plan.

9 I, John, your brother who shares with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

1. What do you gather from John's introduction of himself?
2. Which of the "titles" (brother, who shares with you in Jesus the persecution, who shares with you the kingdom and the patient endurance) carries the most meaning for you?
3. Why was John on the island of Patmos?

***Your brother*** - John has an intimate connection with these people. This is not merely some stranger writing to people with whom he had no connection. He is sharing life with them and sharing being part of the family.

***Shares with you in Jesus*** - Jesus is what binds them together and causes their lives to be difficult. To be in Jesus means to be those whose lives are oriented toward following regardless of the cost.

***Kingdom*** - God is already at work bringing his kingdom to be. This verse alone makes it hard to fathom how some can argue that the kingdom is only future, if John and the church are sharing in it at that moment.

*Patient endurance – this is the key to the entire book. All believers are called to be patient in the face of all that comes that they might collect what it rightfully theirs.*

*Patmos – an island where John was in exile because of his work for Jesus.*

10 I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

1. What does "in the spirit" seem to imply?
2. What do you think of John's use of language?
3. What do you see in the map below?

*Spirit of the Lord's day - This is wrongly translated in most English versions as 'the Lord's Day', a phrase not used until long after the apostles age. Most scholars believe that John was writing in the year 95 AD, towards the end of the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD). This particular Roman emperor conducted a terrible persecution of all Christians who refused to acknowledge his 'divinity'. On a certain day each year all Roman citizens had to go to their local city shrine, toss some incense on the official altar and declare, 'Caesar is Lord!' This became known as the 'lords day'. He was also 'in the Spirit' in 4:2, 17:3, 21:10, which could mark four major divisions in the book. Here at the start of the vision he sees the risen Christ, in 4:2 he sees God on His throne, in 17:3 he sees a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, in 21:10 he sees the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. Also it is the Spirit that allows John to see what he can see.*

*Seven churches - The order of the seven churches is geographically in a circular route.*

12 Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands, 13 and in the midst of the lamp stands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

1. How would you interpret the seven golden lampstands?
2. Where else in scripture do we find the image of the "Son of Man?"
3. Make a list of the color imagery in describing one like the Son of Man.
4. What do you make of all of the sevens?
5. What is the image of the two-edged sword about?
6. What story from the New Testament is alluded to by his face shining?

Seven golden lampstands - The image reminds us of Solomon's temple which had ten lampstands of pure gold (1 King 7:49). This also is an image of light in the darkness. Light was always necessary.

Son of Man - Someone 'like a son of man' is clearly a reference to Christ, it is used of Christ again in 14:14. The expression 'like a son of man' is first used in Dan 7:13. It is also a designation of Christ used in the gospels. 'Son of Man' is used 30 times in Matthew, 14 in Mark, 25 in Luke and 13 in John. Note 'Son of God' is only used 8 times in Matthew, 3 in Mark, 6 in Luke and 6 in John. Christ is among the lampstands, that is, he is among the church, this illustrates Christ's intimacy with His church.

Long robe and golden sash - he is dressed like a priest yet his belt is of the finest material because of his station.

White - the color of purity.

Flame of fire - he is able to penetrate the very nature of human beings, nothing can be hidden.

Burnished bronze - His feet were of bronze which indicates strength and stability, see Dan 10:6 in which his arms and legs are the gleam of burnished bronze. (6 His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude.)

Rushing waters - His voice was like the sound of rushing waters, see Dan 10:6 in which his voice was like the sound of a multitude, also Ezek 1:24, 43:2 in which his voice was like the roar of rushing waters. Powerful images of multitudes.

Seven stars, two edged sword - these will be defined in a moment.

Face shining like the sun - reminds us of the transfiguration

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.

1. Why did John fall as if dead?
2. What is the importance of Jesus pointing out that he was once dead and is now alive?
3. What are the keys to Death and Hades?

Fell as dead - you cannot see God and live. Moses was the only one who had done that. John is like a new Moses bringing his people out of captivity.

Right hand - the hand of approval.

Keys - Jesus is the one who has all power. No one can be lost unless Jesus allows it.

19 Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this.

1. Why should John write this all down?

2. What does “what is, and what is to take place after this” appear to imply about the time frame of what John is seeing?

*Write - this is insure that what he sees can be passed on appropriately to all churches. It is that important.*

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

1. What do you make of the idea of churches having angels?

*Seven stars - This begins to make clear that the imagery in Revelation is just that... imagery. Things represent other things. We will see that this plays itself out in the rest of the story*

*Angels - this is the concept that heaven and earth are not far apart.*