

REVELATION

Chapter 1 Notes

Revelation 1:1-3

- The first words of the Greek text, Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“The Apocalypse [or, Revelation] of Jesus Christ”), make it very clear up front whose revelation this is. It is not John’s revelation, but Jesus’ revelation, which He gives to John through His angel. Thus, it is wrong for us to give this book the title, “The Revelation of St. John.” Instead, it should be titled, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ Given to St. John.”
- Jesus Christ, our Lord, both receives from His Father and gives to men the revelation which only God can give (cf. Matt. 11:25-27; John 3:34-35; 5:20-23; 8:28; 12:48-50; 17:8).
- This revelation is given to the Son by the Father, who in turn, gives it to His Apostle, John, so that His “slaves” (or “bond-servants”) can be shown “what things must soon take place” (which, as we will see, refers to what must take place in every generation of believers until Christ returns). The fact that this revelation is given to John by Jesus through His angel to show His slaves, etc., indicates that this revelation is for all believers in Christ.
- “What things must soon take place” alerts the reader (or hearer) to the imminence of Christ’s return. Christians in every generation are to constantly “keep watch” and “be ready” for Christ to return at any moment (cf. Matt. 24:42, etc.).
- Many translations have “servants” instead of “slaves.” The Greek word here is the word for “slave,” not “servant.” This may seem like a trifle point, but it carries theological significance. Christ, our Lord, is our Master, not our employer. We serve Him out of obligation, not so that we can get something from Him in return for our service. The word “slave” carries with it some negative connotation today, but, in the theological realm, it more accurately describes our relationship with our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.
- John, having been given this revelation, “bears witness to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Here, again, the Greek helps us to understand something very significant that would be missed when reading a modern translation. Literally, the text says, “the Word of God, that is, the testimony of Jesus Christ.” The Word of God and the testimony (or witness) of Jesus Christ are one and the same thing. Jesus is the Word (see John 1:1ff., also see notes under 1:8 below).
- Many people are scared to read Revelation and shy away from it. Verse 3 makes it vividly clear that all Christians should read this book. In fact, it states that those who read and keep the words of the prophecy in this book are blessed. As Christians, we should read, study, learn, and inwardly digest the words of this prophetic book!
- The phrase “the words of this prophecy” is significant. Revelation is the only NT book that states that it is prophetic. John is writing as a prophet in line with the OT prophets. He is speaking on behalf of God and the prophecies he is given to reveal are just as real and true as all of the Messianic prophecies uttered by the OT prophets, and will certainly come to pass just as the OT prophecies came to pass.

Revelation 1:4-5a

- Who is the true King? Christ is! He is the “ruler of the kings of the earth.” Even though earthly rulers (especially the Romans at this time) seem to have all the power, Christ rules over them forever.
- One of the most frequent titles of Christ in Revelation is ὁ μάρτυς (the martyr, witness, testifier). Christ is the faithful martyr, who bore witness to His Father and to the Truth of

His Word by fulfilling His Law on our behalf and by dying on the cross for the world's sin. This is a paradigm for the Christian to be a faithful and true witness in the world. The churches in Asia Minor are in a battle with the Jewish synagogues and pagan religions and they are called to be a faithful and true witness. The same is true for Christians of all generations. Today, we, too, are called to be faithful and true witnesses in the midst of this sinful world.

- “John, to the seven churches” – shows that the entire Apocalypse was to be given to each of the seven churches. While each church has a particular message addressed to it within, the entire book would be sent to each church.
- “The One who Is . . . Was . . . is Coming” = This is a very interesting title for the Father (also used for the Son later on in Revelation, which shows us that the Son is indeed equal to the Father, a point the Apostle John makes repeatedly in all his writings). See Sean McDough’s study of this title of the Father in “YHWH at Patmos.” Cf. Ex. 3:14 – “I AM that I Am.” “The First and the Last” is another way of saying “The One who is and was”; “The One who is Coming” adds the eschatological significance. See Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, Ch. 2, for a nice, tight treatment of the titles, “the One who is and was and is to come” and “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.” The fact that Christ is identified with the same titles as the Father in Revelation was extremely significant in the eyes of 1st century Jews. The Father and the Son are One! We, who sit on the shoulders of 20 centuries of Christian confession, sometimes don’t realize how significant this was for 1st century Jewish Christians.
- Rev. 1:4-5 is one of the clearest testimonies of the Trinity in the NT – “One who is, and was, and is to come” = Father; “the Seven Spirits” = Holy Spirit; “Jesus Christ” = Son. The usual order, Father-Son-Holy Spirit, is not followed in order to emphasize the Son’s work of redemption. It is the Son who won salvation for the world. The Son died and rose again, not the Father nor the Holy Spirit. It’s not that the Father and Holy Spirit played no role in the world’s salvation. The Father sent the Son and the Holy Spirit filled the Son – all Three Persons of the Holy Trinity brought about our salvation. But, the Son alone died and rose
- “Seven Spirits” = The Holy Spirit. The number 7 is used throughout the Bible, but especially in Revelation, as the symbolic number for perfection (or fullness, or holiness, or righteousness). Here, it is used to show the fullness of the Spirit (cf. Isaiah 11; Zech. 3:9-4:10). When Jesus is Baptized and sent into the wilderness, it is the “fullness of the Spirit” (or, “sevenfold Spirit”) that rests upon Him. Thus, there are not literally “seven spirits,” but One, Perfect Holy Spirit.
- “The firstborn of the dead” refers to the Resurrection of Christ (cf. Col. 1). Witness leads to death, but Christ is the firstborn of the dead, so that death has lost its sting, and He continues to be the faithful martyr. He is the “*firstborn* of the dead” because all who follow Him will also be resurrected as He was.
- In Revelation, the Spirit is not really a focal point of worship. The Father and the Lamb (Son) are on the throne and are worshipped. This is not to say that the Spirit is not deity, but rather shows us what the Spirit would have us do, namely, worship the Father and the Son. We do not worship the Spirit apart from the reality of Christ. The Spirit always points us to Christ. However, when we do fall down and worship before the throne, we are worshipping the fullness of the Trinity, for the Spirit is before the throne. In fact, as we will see, the Angel that refuses to be worshipped in Rev. 19:10 is the Holy Spirit, who directs worship to the Lamb instead of to Himself. It is only when we worship the Son, the visible image of God that has been revealed to us, that we worship the True, Triune God. This is an

important point to realize, especially given the fact that so many Christians today completely misunderstand the nature and reality of the Holy Spirit.

Rev. 1:5b-6

- Good theology (study of God) leads to doxology (praise of God) – “to Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.”
- How did Christ love us? By loosing us from our sins by means of His blood. The image of Christ as the slaughtered Lamb (the Paschal Lamb) is vivid in Revelation. It is through His blood that we have been saved. This is a Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) image. The Passover was the atoning sacrifice for the Israelites and pointed forward to Christ, who is the atoning sacrifice, the ultimate fulfillment of the Passover lamb for New Israel, His Holy Christian Church.
- “He made us kings and priests” – The Romans were dominating the church and were the earthly kings. Christ assures Christians that, while they are subjected to the earthly rule of the Romans (or whatever powers will rule over them in the future), they are indeed kings in His Kingdom. The Jews were the earthly priests, who claimed to have the only access to God and told the Christians that they have no access. Here, Christ assures His church that they do have access to God, for they are priests themselves (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9-10). Through baptism, Christians have the divine name on them and can enter the Holy of Holies as priests (just as the OT priests had the Divine Name printed on them – cf. Exod. 28:29-41). When Christ died on the cross, the curtain in the Temple guarding the entrance to the Holy of Holies was torn signifying that His death removed that barrier and that all who believe in Him now have access (cf. Matt. 27:51). Thus, it is not the Jews who have access (they are the “synagogue of Satan” – Rev. 2:9; 3:9), but rather Christians who have true access to the True God. We Christians, as priests of God, enter the “Holy of Holies” each time we enter the church for Divine Service.

Rev. 1:7

- “Behold He is coming with the clouds, etc.” – emphasis on eschatology. This is a depiction of Christ’s Second Coming (cf. Dan. 7). This will be a universal, glorious, visible coming (“every eye shall see Him”), not a secret rapture, etc. When He comes, great consternation will occur upon the earth, for Judgment will take place. “Even those who pierced Him” alludes to the universal resurrection of all people on the Last Day to stand before the throne of Christ to be judged. When Christ comes, all people who have died, both those in heaven and hell, will be raised, believers to new, sinless, glorified bodies in which to dwell forever in Paradise, unbelievers to their same, sinful bodies in which to dwell forever in hell (“the lake of fire”). Those believers who are living when Christ returns will have their bodies “changed” to sinless, glorified bodies (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-53), while unbelievers will remain in their sinful bodies.

Rev. 1:8-9

- The Father is speaking in verse 8 – He is the “Almighty One.”
- “Says the Lord God” – John is speaking as an OT prophet (“thus says the Lord”), using first person language, speaking for God (“I Am, etc.”).
- John, as a fellow believer, is our “brother in the tribulation and kingdom and patient endurance of Jesus Christ.” As he receives this vision and records it for the church, he is in exile on Patmos. The Christian life is not to be a glorified, fun-filled life, but a life of suffering and tribulation for the sake of Jesus Christ. Those popular preachers today who

teach Christians that they should be healthy, wealthy, and happy, etc., do not understand the Scriptures. God never promises us an easy, glorified life in this world. On the contrary, He makes it very clear that we will suffer in this world and that our glory will come when we depart from this world and enter His eternal kingdom. This, in fact, is what the message of Revelation is all about.

- “On account of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus” – As stated above under 1:1-3, the Word of God and testimony of Jesus are one and the same thing; the Word of God = the testimony of Jesus. The entire Bible (Word of God) is the testimony of Jesus. Thus, the testimony of Jesus that the disciples brought forth is shown to be on equal ground with the OT, because it is equated to the Word of God.
- Textual Criticism Note: Some Greek manuscripts have “the Beginning and the End” following “the Alpha and the Omega,” which is most likely the result of scribes trying to harmonize this verse with Rev. 21:6, where “the Beginning and the End” does follow the “Alpha and the Omega.”
- *“The biblical name of God, YHWH, was sometimes vocalized Yāhōh and so transliterated into Greek (which has no consonant ‘h’) as IAW (Iota, Alpha, Omega). In the context of Jewish theological speculation about the divine name, the occurrence of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet in this Greek form of the name could have suggested that the name itself contains the implication that God is the first and the last” (Bauckham, 27-28).*

Rev. 1:10-11

- “A great voice, as a trumpet” – This is not Christ’s voice, which is described as sounding like “many waters.” This is the Spirit’s voice, which guides John’s revelation. He hears this voice again in 4:1 and it is the Trumpet Angels who are before the throne, which most likely refers to the Seven Spirits, which refers to the Holy Spirit. Thus, it is the Holy Spirit who guides John’s revelation (a very Lutheran interpretation).
- The seven churches listed are seven historical congregations. John was the overseer of these churches. Thus, Revelation is written primarily to comfort these churches at this time. However, it is a message that is given to all churches of all times, as well.
- In Apocalyptic literature, it is common for things to be sealed up. Here, John is told to write what he sees and send it. This message is to be heard and *understood* by God’s people, not sealed up to remain a mystery.

Rev. 1:12-16

- Christ as the Visible Manifestation of YHWH in Revelation 1 - Key OT Allusions:
 - 13a – “one like the Son of Man” – Ezek. 1:26-28; Dan. 7:13
 - 13b – “clothed to the foot” (“being clothed in a long flowing robe”) – Is. 6:1
 - 13c – “and ties around the chest with a golden girdle/sash” – Dan. 10:5; Ezek. 1
 - 14a – “and his head and hair were white as wool, white as snow” – Dan. 7:9
 - 14b – “and his eyes were like flaming fire” – Dan. 10:6
 - 15a – “and his feet were like fine brass, having been refined in a furnace” – Dan. 10:6
 - 15b – “and his voice was as a voice of many waters” – Ezek. 1:24; 43:2
 - 16a – “and having in his right hand seven stars” – Dan. 12:3, 6-7; Zech. 4:2
 - 16b – “and a sharp two-edged sword was coming out of his mouth” – Is. 49:2; 11:4
 - 16c – “and his face was as the sun shining in its full power” – Judges 5:31
- John sees this vision of the Risen Christ while worshipping on the Lord’s Day (Sunday). This is a significant point. It is when we are gathered around Word and Sacrament in the Divine Service that we receive God’s revelation. One might argue that the revelation John

received is far different from what we receive on Sundays, but it is not as different as one might think. We are not lifted up “in the spirit” to the heavenly throne room to witness all of the vivid imagery John witnessed. Instead, the heavenly throne room and the Lamb who sits upon the throne descend to be with us. Revelation makes it clear that heaven and earth come together during the Divine Service, a huge point far too many Christians fail to realize.

- The Risen Christ is the same reality who was seen by Ezekiel and Daniel in their visions. Just imagine how significant this was for John. In the midst of the suffering that he and the church are going through, he is shown that Christ is the exalted Lord. He is the same visible manifestation of YHWH that was revealed to the OT prophets.
- Nowhere in Revelation is there a direct quote of the OT, like in other NT books. However, no book in the NT is as filled, saturated, with the OT as Revelation.
- Christ’s “white hair” = Christ’s Oneness with the Father, His eternal nature, and shows that He is fully equal to the “Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7; cf. also 1 Enoch 46).
- Revelation is an authoritative interpretation of Daniel.
- John sees all of this amazing stuff and could have used many different words to describe what he saw, but he chooses (as inspired by the Holy Spirit) to use the language of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Isaiah to show that what he is seeing is in continuity with what they saw. For example, in describing Christ’s voice as “many waters,” he is using the same language as Ezekiel used to describe the voice of the Glory in 43:2. Thus, John is telling us that Christ is the same Glory of YHWH who spoke to Ezekiel!
- Summary: Christ is depicted as the Glory of YHWH, the visible manifestation of YHWH who showed himself at times to the prophets in the likeness of a Man/Son of Man. This identification is clear from the allusions in this periscope to the “Man” in Ezekiel and Daniel. Furthermore, the white hair of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7 is seen in Revelation 1 on Christ; this shows that he is fully identified with YHWH in this vision and in the understanding of John, the author of Revelation. This shows the continuity of YHWH’s revelation and presence between the OT prophets and the “prophet” John.
- The significance of this vision to John for the church is tremendous. Remember, the church is losing with the Jews, who say that they have no access to YHWH. They are losing with the pagans, who are persecuting them with their earthly power. Here, Christ shows the church that it is she who has true access to YHWH and that He, her Lord, is the King of Kings. Whatever they are suffering on earth cannot compare to the glory that is already theirs in Christ. Just as YHWH sustained His people throughout history, He will continue to sustain them through whatever befalls them in the future.

Rev. 1:17-18

- John’s immediate reaction to his vision of Christ is to “fall to his feet as dead.” This is the same fear that struck Isaiah and Ezekiel when they saw the veiled Glory of YHWH.
- “He placed His right hand upon me saying, ‘Stop fearing,’ etc.” – shows the personal nature of YHWH
- μη φοβου = μη + the present imperative = “Stop fearing”; if it was with the aorist imperative it would mean, “Do not fear in the future.” John is already fearing and Christ says “Stop.”
- “The Living One” – Christ, though He died, IS ALIVE – He was resurrected because He is the true source of Life, the Creator. The death of Jesus is not sidestepped at all in the book of Revelation. It is, in fact, emphasized, for it is the crucified Christ who is worshipped, the slaughtered Lamb of God, who won forgiveness for all sins, etc. Thus, His exaltation includes and has its central reality in the fact that He is the crucified Christ, who has risen

from the dead. Even in His glorified body, He still bears the scars from His Passion. This is a great comfort for the Church – her crucified Lord is alive and will come back for them. Also, the earthly powers may take the lives of Christians, but they have no power over their eternal reality – Christ is the source of Life and has “the keys of death and Hades.”

Rev. 1:19

- “Write the things you saw, that are, and are about to take place” – many commentators believe the book of Revelation is to be viewed as a linear progression (ch. 1 – “you saw”; chs. 2-3 – “things that are”; chs. 4-22 – “things that are about to take place”). This is wrong! The book of Revelation is like having several cameras on at the same time, some of them focusing on the past, some on the present, and some on the future. Throughout the book, we get images from these various cameras, so that sometimes we are shown past reality, sometimes present reality, and sometimes future reality – and, most importantly, we are shown what eternal reality is throughout the book.
- A more accurate translation: “Write the things you have seen, *both* the things that are *and* the things that are about to take place” or “Write the things you have seen, *namely* the things that are *and* the things that are about to take place.” What this is saying is that John is to write the present reality as it is being interpreted by the visions he will see and the future reality that is coming soon as presented in the visions. He will be seeing both an interpretation of present and future reality in the visions.

Rev. 1:20

- “The seven lampstands are the seven churches” – notice that Christ is in the middle of the seven lampstands; He is not just floating around somewhere up there, while His church is down here. No, He is right there in the midst of His churches; He is “with them always” just as He promised (cf. Matt. 28:20). This is a great comfort to the church, which sometimes feels all alone in this sinful world. And, theologically, it is significant for a true theology of worship. Christ is not an “absentee landlord” who sits on His throne in heaven waiting for us to reach him with our energetic praise and worship, as many Christians falsely believe. He comes to be with us in the Divine Service to give us His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation through His Holy Word and Sacraments.
- “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches” – Many commentators, including Louis A. Brighton, author of the Concordia Commentary on Revelation, interpret this literally as referring to seven, literal angels. However, the seven *angels* more probably refers to the seven *pastors* (or Bishops, or Overseers) of the seven churches. Letters would not be sent to seven heavenly figures on behalf of the church. Are there angels who watch over God’s people and His church? Yes, but we also know that the Greek word ἄγγελος (“angel” or “messenger”) has a broad range of meanings – God is sometimes called an “angel”; the angels are called “angels”; sometimes prophets are called “angels” (and prophet can also be understood as pastor in some contexts, like here). Thus, to call pastors “angels” is not all that strange. Cf. 2 Chron. 36:15-16 – prophets described as “angels/messengers” (cf. also Haggai; Malachi, whose name means “angel/messenger”). Thus, there is an OT precedent here. John is writing to the pastors (Christ’s “messengers”) of the churches, who are responsible for their congregations. These pastors are not alone, but in the very hand of Christ, who is right there in the midst of His churches.