

# Revelation Chapter 1:1-8

## Preface: The purpose of the book

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants -- things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John,

2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

3 Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near.

### Triplets

Note the occurrence of triplet points:

- The unveiling: The Revelation of Jesus Christ, / which God gave Him to show His servants -- / things which must shortly take place.
- By whom the unveiling was sent: And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, / and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, / to all things that he saw.
- The result of the unveiling: Blessed is he who reads / and those who hear the words of this prophecy, / and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

This is indicative of several things:

- There is a significant divine purpose and plan going on here.
- There is going to be numerical symbolism in this prophecy.
- Triplets (the number three) signifies something testifying to God, or something of God.

### What is this book?

Again, triplets.

#### *It is an unveiling*

'Apocalypse' means: revelation, unveiling, and manifestation.

The word is **avpoka,luyij apokalupsis** (ap-ok-al'-oop-sis), Strong's No. 602. It means: 1) a laying bare, making naked; 2) a disclosure of truth, instruction concerning things before unknown; used of events by which things or states or persons hitherto withdrawn from view are made visible to all; 3) manifestation, appearance. 'Apocalypse' does not literally mean the end of the world, although the end of the world is apocalyptic in that it leads to an unveiling of a new age.

#### *It is a witness or testimony*

'Witness' is **marture,w martureo** [mar-too-reh'-o]; Strong's No.3140. It means: 1) to be a witness, to bear witness, i.e. to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something, or that he knows it because taught by divine revelation or inspiration; 1a) to give (not to keep back) testimony; 1b) to utter honourable testimony, give a good report; 1c) conjure, implore . It is the origin of the word 'martyr'.

‘Testimony’ is very closely related. It is **marturi**, a *marturia* [mar-too-ree'-ah]; Strong's 3141. It means: 1) a testifying; 1a) the office committed to the prophets of testifying concerning future events; 2) what one testifies, testimony, i.e. before a judge.

*It is a prophecy*

‘Prophecy’ is **profhetei**, a *profheteia* [prof-ay-ti'-ah]; Strong's 4394. It means: 1) prophecy; 1a) a discourse emanating from divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of God, whether by reproving and admonishing the wicked, or comforting the afflicted, or revealing things hidden; especially by foretelling future events. 1b) Used in the NT of the utterance of OT prophets 1b1) of the prediction of events relating to Christ's kingdom and its speedy triumph, together with the consolations and admonitions pertaining to it, the spirit of prophecy, the divine mind, to which the prophetic faculty is due 1b2) of the endowment and speech of the Christian teachers called prophets 1b3) the gifts and utterances of these prophets, especially of the predictions of the works of which, set apart to teach the gospel, will accomplish for the kingdom of Christ.

So the book is a revelation, a witness / testimony, and a prophecy.

It is a revelation of the supreme glory of Christ; a witness to the divine victory of Christ and a word spoken by Christ to the apostle John.

## Summary of the purpose

**1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants -- things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,**

### Revelation

There are two apocalypses associated with the Lord Jesus, the first and second appearances. These are identified by the two mentions of the word apocalypse in the Gospels and Revelation.<sup>1</sup>

The first is in Lk 2:32, ‘A light to bring revelation [apokalupsis] to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel’.

The first coming is the revelation of the Messiah, the God-Man, that would bring deliverance and salvation to those waiting for him. This is the beginning of the work of salvation. It announces or unveils the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, the light to dispel the darkness caused by sin, death and Satan (Jn 1:4-5). This is the mystery (unveiled in Christ) of God in the flesh.

The second is the Second Coming, when Jesus consummates his work of salvation by applying the full benefits of redemption to his people and brings deliverance for a permuted church at the end. [In fact, ‘apocalypse’ is used to speak of the Second Coming in 1 Pt 1:7, 13; 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Cor 1:7.]

The book of Revelation is an explanation about the second apocalypse – the full revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ in triumphant glory. This is the light that fulfils the decree of God which destroys sin, death and Satan. This is unveiling of the mystery of Christ triumphant over all.

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<sup>1</sup> The word is also used by Paul and Peter.

### **To show His servants things which must shortly take place**

The purpose of the book is to encourage the elect saints in a dark world where they have tribulation and suffering.

To comfort and exhort the elect when they are tempted to despair because of the evil being perpetrated in the world, the Lord Jesus Christ explains, in this book, what will occur in the future, starting with what will shortly take place, in order to show that he is in control of world history. It is a testimony to the sovereignty of God.

### **Servants**

The elect are servants of God. The real meaning of *doulos* is a slave.

### **He sent and signified it**

Jesus sent his words via an angel because he is in the glory and to appear on Earth would destroy the world of sin. His appearing is scheduled in God's plan for a certain time in the future when the appearance of Christ will usher in the Final Judgment. When John sees Jesus it is in a vision of heaven seen by his spirit.

'Signified' is *shmai, nw semaino* [say-mah'-ee-no]; Strong's No 4591. It means: to give a sign, to signify, indicate or to make known. The use of this word tells us that there are things in the book which signify other things. Like other apocalyptic books there is a heavy emphasis on typology and symbols.

### **Servant John**

Note that John is also a slave. He is on a par with the rest of the elect.

Now this is the beloved apostle; the only one that Jesus specifically stated that he loved and the one who lay on Jesus' breast. This was one of the chief three apostles; one who saw the transfiguration and the one that looked after Jesus mother. This is perhaps the greatest apostle after Peter and the one that lived the longest and who is said to have been transfigured at his martyrdom by stoning before he was actually killed.

Despite all this greatness, John is called a 'slave' just like any other saint. Modern day so-called Charismatic apostles ought to take note. OT prophets were also called 'servants'.

'John' is also significant in the first verse. 'John' is *Ioannes*, of Hebrew origin, which means: 'Yahweh (the covenant God) is a gracious giver'. This book is a gift to the church for comfort and assurance.

John is named here, though he is not in his Gospel, because the weight of this prophecy required significant authority to prove its authenticity.

### **Shortly take place**

See later ('for the time is near').

2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

### **Triplets**

- Who bore witness to the word of God.
- and to the testimony of Jesus Christ.
- to all things that he saw.

See earlier regarding ‘witness’ and ‘testimony’.

John gives in this book a perfect witness to the things that Jesus showed him – a revealing of the future victory over Satan. This testimony is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

**3 Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near.**

This is the only book in the Bible where there is a specific promise of blessing if you study it. Before widespread printing, most people would only have heard the words of this book read out in church.

### Triplets

- Blessed *is* he who reads,
- and those who hear the words of this prophecy,
- and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near.

### Keep those things which are written

Revelation is not just a foretelling of future events. As with all prophecy, it is a word from God, a forthtelling, and as such contains instructions and commands. We must heed these carefully and obey them. For example, the letters to the churches contains very specific commands to those churches.

### For the time *is* near

a.r kairo.j evggju,jÅ “For the time is at hand’ (lit. ‘for time on the verge of’). Similar to dei/gene,sqai evn ta,cei( ‘shortly take place’ in 1:1 (lit. ‘should appear with speed’).

How do we explain this?

Some things mentioned in the book were going on at that moment, such as the situation in the seven churches. However, much of the book relates to things in the far distant future; and still in the future 2,000 years later.

Firstly, one day with God is as a 1,000 years (2 Pt 3:8) and here we see a compression of prophetic events within a short narrative. This is a bird’s eye view of history unfolded like a scroll.

The persecutions described in Revelation had already begun. James had been martyred early on. Peter and Paul were killed in the Neronian persecution. John himself was in the midst of the persecution by Domitian,<sup>2</sup> being imprisoned on a small rocky island.

In verse one ‘shortly’ (εν τάχῃ) is used; in Lk 18:8 it means something in the distant future.

This does not mean that the end is near at hand, but that the sort of events described is near at hand. The warfare between Satan and God was hotting up and would continue.

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<sup>2</sup> Domitian (51–96), son of Vespasian, Roman emperor 81–96; full name Titus Flavius Domitianus.

## Appellation and salutation

That is, in whose name is this prophecy spoken?

**4 John, to the seven churches which 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.**

### John

See on verse 1. Note that he does not use any formal title of office, such as apostle, unlike Paul. Paul had to defend his apostleship from enemies that beset his churches such as from Judaisers. John, however, was not in this situation but was accepted as an apostle and companion of the Lord in Ephesus and throughout Judaea.

### Asia

The Roman province of Asia, Proconsular Asia, that is modern Turkey, which included the western part of Phrygia and was the western part of Asia Minor. It was chiefly the kingdom of Pergamus left by Attalus III to the Romans, including Lydia, Mysia, Caria, and parts of Phrygia. The name 'Asia Minor' did not come into use until the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

There were other churches in Asia such as Troas, Ephesus, Colosse and Hierapolis and possibly at Magnesia and Tralles. However, these churches were the key points in seven districts.

### Seven churches

There were more than seven churches in Asia. The choice of these seven is as a representative of the church throughout history. These seven characteristics would be exhibited in churches throughout history and the letters serve as a warning.

### Triplets

- Grace to you and peace from Him who is,
- and who was,
- and who is to come,

### Him who is and who was and who is to come

This is referring to God the Father. It is a paraphrase of the divine name Yahweh, the eternal and unchangeable God (Ex 3:14). This sort of phrase was familiar to Greeks who used it of Zeus [*Zeus was, Zeus is, Zeus will be*].<sup>3</sup>

### The seven Spirits who are before His throne

The Holy Spirit: unified in person but sevenfold in grace.

'Seven spirits' is used in Rev 3:1; 4:5; 5:6; and also appears in Zech 4:2-10. It is not the seven angels of Rev 8:2 who are not a source of grace and peace. Angels are never called spirits in this book.

Seven, symbolically, means divine perfection; especially in connection with the covenant. It does not mean that the Godhead has seven Spirits (as claimed by several Pentecostal heretics). This is a symbolic book. The meaning is a sevenfold (perfect) manifestation of the Spirit to the seven churches. In the same way, Rev 5:6 pictures Jesus symbolically as a lamb with seven horns. That is just a reference to perfect power.

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<sup>3</sup> Pausanias X. 12.

5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

### Triplets

*Who Christ is; the person of Christ.*

- Jesus Christ, the faithful witness,
- the firstborn from the dead,
- and the ruler over the kings of the earth.

*The work of Christ, what Jesus did.*

- To Him who loved us,
- and washed us from our sins in His own blood,
- and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father.

### And from Jesus Christ

Completing the Trinity. The book is in the name of the whole Godhead. [The Father: 'from Him who is and who was and who is to come', the Son: 'And from Jesus Christ', the Holy Spirit: 'and from the seven Spirits'.]

### The faithful witness

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness of God and the demonstration of the word of God. As such, John identifies him as 'The Word' (*logos*) in his Gospel. Jesus is not some Arian prophet or some Hebrew rabbi. Neither is he a Gnostic Docetic phantom that is not a real man. Jesus is a real person, descended from David in the flesh but born of the Holy Spirit via a virgin so that he has no sin but is perfect manhood.

Jesus, during the incarnation, was a real man that fully and perfectly testified to God in all that he thought, said and did. He was the perfect witness to God.

The prime task of Jesus as Messiah was not to heal or to preach but to witness to the character and purposes of God.

'Faithful' refers to the perfect execution of the testimony of Christ: the one who is faithful in the discharge of duty and completion of a trust.

'Faithful' is the Greek word **pisto,j pistos** [pis-tos'] Strong's 4103. It means: 1) trusty, faithful 1a) of persons who show themselves faithful in the transaction of business, the execution of commands, or the discharge of official duties; 1b) one who kept his plighted faith, worthy of trust; 1c) that can be relied on. Of other people: 2) Easily persuaded 2a) believing, confiding, trusting 2b) in the NT one who trusts in God's promises 2b1) one who is convinced that Jesus has been raised from the dead 2b2) one who has become convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and author of salvation.

Richard of St. Victor lists Christ's faithfulness as:

- A faithful testimony concerning all things which were to be testified to the world by the word of God.
- Whatever He heard from the Father, he faithfully testified to his disciples.
- He taught the way of God in truth without fear of men.
- He announced condemnation of the reprobate and salvation of the elect.

- He confirmed his divine calling by miracles.
- He never denied the Father's testimony even in death.
- He will give testimony on the Day of judgment concerning the works of the good and of the evil.

### **The firstborn from the dead**

This has nothing to do with healing resurrections in the OT and NT; it is something entirely different, for example, from the resurrection of Lazarus – which was just bodily resuscitation for a while – an extension of normal life.

Jesus is the firstborn of a new race of people [2 Cor 5:17: 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation']. Jesus is the Second Man; the head of a new people of God. [1 Cor 15:47: 'The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven'.]

He is the firstborn of many brethren (the elect; Rm 8:29).

He is the firstborn over all creation (Col 1:15).

He is the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence (Col 1:18).

As the firstborn of God's new creation of spiritual, righteous men, he is the head over all angels (Heb 1:6). Thus those in Christ are also over angels (1 Cor 6:3).

He is the head of the church of the firstborn (Heb 12:23).

Thus 'firstborn' refers to Jesus as the God-Man that is head over an entirely new species of people that represent God as faithful witnesses.

### **The ruler over the kings of the earth**

This is a testimony of Jesus' divinity. Throughout Scripture, God is said to be ruler over the kings of the Earth (Prov 8:15-16; Jer 27:5). Jesus is thus equated with God. As the God-Man, authority was given to Jesus over all things after his resurrection (Matt 28:18; cf. Ps 89:27).

Note that in Revelation and the OT the warfare between Satan and God is reflected in the opposition to God from the kings of the world (Ps 2:2, 33:10, 110:5).

### **To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood**

This is a summary of the cause and effects of redemption.

Jesus was sent by the Father to obtain the work of salvation for those loved by God – the elect. The cause of salvation is the love of God for his chosen people, chosen in eternity.

The instrument of salvation is the blood of Christ. This is the most precious substance in the universe. It is the value of the infinite life of Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, given up in sacrifice. This value thus obtains for all those included by God in it. The payment of God's legal justice against sin is paid for by the blood of Christ.

'Washed' is not *baptizo* but *louo*, meaning to bathe or wash in this context. The imagery is: to be washed clean or set free by the application of the blood of Christ by the Holy Spirit. The actual form of the word is *lu,santi* in the eclectic text and *lou,santi* in the Scrivener (TR) and the root word *louo* can have various meanings in different contexts. Thus some

translations prefer to use 'loosed' (ASV), 'freed' (RSV, NRSV) or 'released' (NAS, NAB). 'Released' is probably the better translation based on the original meaning of the word.

### **Has made us kings and priests to His God and Father**

Because we are in Christ and filled with the Spirit, we have privileges in the New World as representatives of the Great King and High Priest, Jesus. Our authority as priests and exercisers of power is entirely derivative. However, the word 'kings' is really 'a kingdom'. The term 'king' is never applied in the New Testament to individual Christians; what is emphasised is the reigning of the saints in Christ. 'Kingdom' refers to the entire body of the elect. Compare Peter's 'royal priesthood' (1 Pt 2:9). Compare Ex 19:6, 'you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests'.

This fact of the priesthood and sovereignty of all believers must be remembered in the church even today. Believers must not let some leader allow himself to have dominion and authority over them. There are no special people in the kingdom – all are royal and priests.

Note the diversity in the Trinity despite equality. God the Father is such to Jesus and to us. Compare Matt 27:46<sup>4</sup> and John 20:17.<sup>5</sup> The apostles use similar terms in Eph 1:17<sup>6</sup> and 1 Pt 1:3.<sup>7</sup>

### **To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen**

A fitting doxology for the wonderful Saviour.

Glory is **do,xa doxa** [dox'-ah], Strong's 1391. Usually translated as 'glory' but it can mean: opinion, judgment, a good opinion resulting in praise, honour, and glory; splendour, brightness, magnificence, excellence, pre-eminence, dignity and grace.

Dominion is **kra,toj kratos** [krat'-os], Strong's 2904. It means: force, strength, power, might, dominion. Jesus does not have a merely nominal authority to rule the universe, he has the power and strength to enforce it. Jesus was given authority to rule after the cross as a man but in his Person he has the greatness of power to rule because he is God.

### **Forever and ever**

Literally 'unto the ages of the ages'. Compare Gal 1:5; Heb 13:21; 1 Pt 4:11. It occurs twelve times in Revelation, but not in John's Gospel or letters. It describes eternity.

### **Amen**

The English word is a transliteration of the Greek and Hebrew. It is a verbal adjective meaning firm or faithful and is applied to Christ in Rev 3:14. It passes into an adverbial sense by which something is asserted or confirmed. It is often used by Christ as 'verily'. John alone uses the double form, 'verily, verily' (Jn 1:51, 10:1).

7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

### **Triplets**

- Behold, He is coming with clouds,
- and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him.

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<sup>4</sup> 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'

<sup>5</sup> 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'

<sup>6</sup> 'The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.'

<sup>7</sup> 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.'



- And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him

Having established that the origin of the prophecy is Jesus in his sovereignty, we are then told about the critical point of this book – the coming of the Lord in glory to judge the world.

The root of the assurance given by this prophecy to the church is based upon the certainty of Christ's return. There is no sense of earthly glory of the church before the Second Coming. There is no mention of a secret rapture. There is no global revival that puts the church in charge of the nations, ruling under apostles and prophets. All these claims are lies with no doctrinal foundation.

The focal point of the book is the coming of the Lord as ruler, and judge who will set all things straight in the great accounting.

### **Behold, He is coming with clouds**

Jesus returns to Earth as King in full glory in the manner that he ascended (Acts 1:9, 11), in clouds.

Clouds are mentioned frequently in connection with the Second Coming (Matt 24:30, 26:64; Mk 13:26, 14:62; Lk 21:27).

Note the comparison with the giving of the law at Sinai (Ex 24:16-18), the glory of the Lord in the camp (Ex 16:10) and the Transfiguration (Matt 17:5; Mk 9:7). God speaks out of a bright cloud, but in the end God speaks through his Son who appears in a glorious cloud. Compare: Ps 18:11, 97:2; Isa 19:1; Nah 1:3.

### **And every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him**

Note Zech 12:10. [Note that this proves that John used a Hebraic OT version and not the LXX.]

The verb denotes the physical act, but it emphasises the mental discernment accompanying it, and points to the result rather than to the act of vision. Appropriate here as indicating the spiritual discernment engendered by the Lord's appearing, in those who have rejected Him, and who now mourn for their folly and sin. (Vincent).

This puts paid to any odd notion of a secret coming of the Lord. When he returns, every eye will see him. This in itself is a miracle due to the curvature of the earth. In a miraculous way, Jesus will be seen descending from heaven in glory in the same way in antipodal countries.

The inclusion of those who pierced him means that the general resurrection has taken place and the dead arise to be summoned for judgment.

### **And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.**

Note Zech 12:10.

Tribes: not the tribes of Israel, nor the tribes of Jews and Gentile Christians, but all the tribes of the world. Every eye will see him; that is every tribe of man.

The mourning is because the day of repentance has passed and hell looms. Many who derided and blasphemed Christ will be awe-struck and terrified that they submitted to the enemy of God and not the Saviour.

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

A statement affirming the eternity of the Lord Jesus.

### Triplets

- 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End', says the Lord,
- 'who is and who was and who is to come',
- 'the Almighty'.

### I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End

The change of speaker here is not announced; cf. Rev 16:15 and 18:20. Only here and 21:5f. is God introduced as the speaker.

Alpha and the Omega are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet; here each with its own neuter (grammatical gender) article. 'The first and the last' appears in Rev 1:17 and 2:8.

Compare the statement about the eternity of God in Rev 21:6 and of Christ in Rev 22:13.

### Says the Lord

This is according to the Scrivener text (TR); others have 'the Lord God' (Kurioj o` qeoj); literally, 'The Lord the God'; which is a common phrase in Ezekiel and frequently in this book.

### Who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty

'The Almighty' is a late compound word that is common in LXX and Christian papyri, but in the NT only appears in 2 Cor 6:18 (cf. Jer 38:35) and Revelation: 1:8, 4:8, 11:17, 15:3, 16:7,14, 19:6,15, 21:22.

## Conclusion

These verses form the first part of the introduction to the book. They focus upon announcing the glory of Christ as king as the spokesman of God. They also explain that the purpose is to encourage the saints regarding what is going to happen to the church throughout history.

The prophecy will go on to explain that Jesus is absolutely sovereign in all the events that occur in the persecution of the church which follow a plan and timetable set by God in eternity. God is in complete control of what happens to the church.

## Resources

- Friberg: GNT Morphology.
- Friberg: NT Greek Lexicon.
- Luow-Nida NT Greek Lexicon.
- Robertson's Word Pictures (NT Greek).
- Scrivener – Beza: Greek NT.

- Strong's Concordance and Lexicon.
- Thayer: NT Greek Lexicon.
- UBS4-NA27 NT Greek Text.
- Vincent: Word Studies in the NT.

I deliberately wrote this without any reference to the major commentaries to retain individuality of thought.

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