

# The Revelation of Jesus Christ

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## Revelation 1:1-3

Revelation is God's foretelling of events that will come upon all creation. It is both the prediction of future events, and also the proclamation, or preaching, about *who* God is and *what* He will do. It is the revealing, or as I imagine it, the pulling back of a veil revealing God's salvation plan to those willing to hear it. It reveals the culmination of the salvation plan that began with Jesus' death on the cross, includes his second advent on earth, and finishes with the establishment of the New Creation, or New Jerusalem. While the book of Revelation is most known for its mysterious and strange prophecies of death and destruction, it also contains a message of hope for the believer. It points to a time when justice will be brought against the wicked, those who oppress the people of God and refuse to acknowledge God's sovereignty. It points to a future time when the wickedness of mankind has nearly overshadowed the light and truth of the message of Jesus Christ. If we turn to another time when God brought judgment against the earth it may help us to understand how God can bring such destruction upon his creation. Genesis 6 tells the story of Noah and the flood. In particular look at Gen 6:5 which says:

***"The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. <sup>6</sup> The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. <sup>7</sup> So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth--men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air--for I am grieved that I have made them."***

We live in a very privileged time and place, we see the world through relatively rose colored glasses that are obscured by neat and tidy rows of neat and tidy homes with neat and tidy lawns in a neat and tidy neighborhood where crime is moderate, and murder is shocking. We know that the world beyond our community and our country is very different than what we experience. We hear about the horrors going on in Africa and the Middle East and we are shocked and horrified by it. But it is far away, it is removed from our lives. It is difficult for us to imagine a world where God seems ready to wipe out creation. Look again at verse 5 of Gen 6. It says "**every inclination**" of man's "**heart was**

***only evil all the time***” (Emphasis added). As bad as our world seems, I don’t think we’ve quite reached this point yet. Personally, I think the message of impending doom for creation is a ways off, but there is still something to be gained by studying Jesus’ message to the seven churches which while they at one time held a time and place in history, are also symbolic of the universal Church. We’ll explore this symbolism further at another time, but there is a strong reason to believe that the seven churches also have a symbolic meaning.

Returning back to Revelation 1:1, we see the progression of the message given to John. The message of the revelation originates with God who gave it to Jesus who in turn sends his Angel to make it known to John, who is instructed to send it to the seven churches.

John testifies that everything he receives in this revelation, both what he *sees* and what he *hears*, is true and is from God and from Jesus Christ. It is not simply something he dreamed, it was something imparted to him from God Almighty and Jesus Christ. According to the NKJV, the verse says, “*And He sent and **signified** it by His angel to His servant John...*” The word “*signified*” is translated from the Greek word *semaino*, which carries the meaning “of expressing by signs” or “to give a sign”.<sup>1</sup> The revelation given to John by God is revealed in a language of symbolism. Symbols and signs become a primary means of portraying spiritual truth that is difficult for mankind to comprehend. In order for us to understand the full meaning of Jesus’ Revelation we must recognize the prevalence of symbolism in the revelation. When we come across numbers and images we must take into consideration the symbolic meaning of those numbers and images as the primary meaning. While a literal understanding maybe accurate or acceptable in interpreting the revelation, the figurative meaning may carry an even more important aspect of the message.

The phrase “the revelation of Jesus Christ” in the original Greek conveys that the revelation is both *from* Jesus and *about* Jesus. Jesus is both the one making the revelation as well as being the subject of the revelation. The revelation reveals the full extent of Jesus’ identity as the Messiah, the Son of God, and ultimately the King of Kings. It is the completion of what began with Jesus’ work on the cross. Perhaps that is why John sees Jesus as the lamb that was slain while the inhabitants of the Heavenly throne room see Jesus as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5-6).

The final phrase of Rev. 1:1 says the revelation is to be shown to the servants of Jesus Christ of “*what must soon take place.*” “Soon” in this context does not necessarily carry the connotation of immediacy. The events may not occur immediately in the lifetime of those receiving the message. Eventually God’s timetable will reach the point when the

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<sup>1</sup> Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

events described in the revelation will commence. When they do commence, they will progress rapidly, one event following *soon* upon the next.

John's introduction ends in verse 3 with the blessing, "*Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.*" The intention of John's letter to the seven churches is that the revelation, as well as each letter, would be read aloud before the congregation. Therefore the one reading aloud the revelation as well as those hearing it would receive the blessing if they took "*to heart what is written in it*". Not only is the blessing meant for those who first heard John's message, but all successive generations to hear and read it also receive the blessing. It is not enough just to hear the words of Jesus, but to consider them carefully and act upon them, obey them. "*The time is near*" because we never know when we must give an accounting for our life. It could come at any time and we must be prepared. Whether one is taken by death, or be part of that generation that will experience the end time events described in the revelation, our time is near because we do not know when it will come upon us.



#### Revelation 1: 4-8

Verse 4 begins the epistle to the seven churches in Asia [Minor]. John desires that those receiving his epistle will find both the blessings of grace and peace. Grace, (or *charis* in Greek) signifies the extended gift of God's forgiving loving-kindness granted to each believer by Him, and is thereby extended from believer to believer. Grace was the favored greeting of one Christian to another. Peace, or the Hebrew *Shalom*, reflects the idea of wholeness or harmonized relationship between man and God that is accomplished through the gospel. It translates to a similar harmonious or unifying relationship between men in this greeting. Peace was the favored greeting among Jewish believers. In this greeting we see that the churches of Asia were comprised of both Jewish and gentile believers.

According to John the double blessing contained in the greeting originates from a triple entity, the Trinity. First we see identified "*him who is, and who was, and who is to come*", a reference to Almighty God, *El Shaddai*. This identification seems to echo the similar name by which God identified himself to Moses, "*I AM WHO I AM*" of Exodus 3:14. The second entity is a bit more difficult to understand. Who or what are "*the seven spirits*" before the throne of God? A second translation would be "*the sevenfold Spirit*" before his throne. With both translations we have the number seven in common. Isaiah 11:2 speaks of the Spirit. In it he identifies

*"The Spirit of the LORD ...*

*The Spirit of **wisdom** and **understanding**,  
The Spirit of **counsel** and **might**,  
The Spirit of **knowledge** and of the **fear** of the LORD*

I added emphasis to the seven aspects Isaiah identifies in order to make the connection between Isaiah's Spirit of the Lord and the Seven-fold Spirit more obvious. I believe this seven-fold spirit is the Holy Spirit. The number seven recurs frequently throughout the book of Revelation. Aside from a literal meaning of the number seven and seven corresponding characteristics, we must consider a symbolic meaning as well. Seven often denotes completeness, fullness, perfection.<sup>2</sup> The Holy Spirit is the complete, full, perfect manifestation of God Almighty in Spirit. The third entity is clearly identified as "*Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.*" The three titles imparted to Jesus serve to comfort the audience of this epistle. As the faithful witness, Jesus sets the example for those called to bear witness to God's call of love and forgiveness in a hostile world where that ministry can bring persecution and even death. Being "*the firstborn from the dead*" focuses attention on Jesus' resurrection and reminds believers of their own eventual resurrection as promised. Should their faith demand their life, their life will be vindicated by God himself in the Last Days. Paul wrote about this assurance in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23. Finally, reminding his hearers that Jesus is "*the ruler of the kings of the earth*" lifts the audience's perspective from the tyranny of Rome to the eternal sovereignty of Christ. Rome may be the visible source of their sufferings to even the point of death, but Christ is enthroned in Heaven above the rulers of the earth. (Proverbs 21:1; Daniel 2:21; 4:17) Their sovereignty is temporary, Christ's is eternal. Perhaps it was for such a time as this that God's revelation came down to John while the believers of Christ were under such heavy persecution. Divine comfort and encouragement in the face of immense hostility was needed to bolster the Church then, and for times to come.

Verses 5-7 give us our first glimpse of a Jesus very different than the one we come to know in the Gospels. John points out that this same Jesus whose death freed us from our sins has made us, appointed us, to serve him and his father in their kingdom as priests. His phrase here takes us back to Exodus 19:5-6 where Almighty God makes a covenant with Israel:

*"...if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."*

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<sup>2</sup> Revelation: Four Views, a Parallel Commentary; by Steve Gregg

The holy nation is expanded to include the whole body of believers, both Jew and Gentile. Jesus Christ, the ruler of the kings of the earth, is king of kings and bestows upon us the position of priests in his kingdom. *Every* believer is made priest in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God does not possess a priesthood to serve in the Heavens; it is, and functions as, a priesthood on earth. The priesthood is sacred and holy, set apart to serve God by mediating between man and God. The role of the priesthood is to bring mankind into a closer relationship with God through teaching the ways of God (Leviticus 10:10-11; Matthew 28:19-20) and offering spiritual sacrifices (Isaiah 66:20; Romans 15:6).

Rev 1:6 says, “and has **made** us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father....” The word “made”, from the Greek *poieo*, means to appoint, ordain. The New King James and the Complete Word Study Bible (Hebrew and Greek interlinear based on the KJV) versions read Revelation 1:6 slightly differently: “...and has made us **kings and priests** to His God and Father....” Not only are we appointed or ordained as priests, but also as kings in the kingdom of God. Only he with divine sovereign authority can appoint kings and priests to serve his father, Almighty God in his kingdom. John concludes verse 6 with a doxology that very correctly ascribes glory and power to Jesus Christ who is the divine Son of God. A doxology is a praise of God’s glory. Glory, or *doxa*, is the **perfect-ness** of God Almighty’s character, his everlasting power, divinity, and his righteousness, that we see manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. Here John praises not only his glory, but also his power, or in some translations, his dominion (NKJV). Both are accurate translations of the Greek word, *kratos*, as originally appears in his letter. Both carry the meaning of inherent and manifested power to perfect or complete. The inherent power is the authority and dominion over all things.

Verse 7 announces the long awaited moment for which all Christians everywhere have watched:

*Look, he is coming with the clouds,  
and every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him;  
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be!  
Amen.*

With these words comes comfort to the suffering and warning to those who refuse to acknowledge their Lord and Savior. The image set forth tells us that people everywhere will see his coming. No one will miss seeing Christ’s second coming, even unbelievers. A select few saw his first advent in the small town of Bethlehem and rejoiced. But when Christ comes again, the people of the earth with *wail* or *mourn* (Gr. *kopto*) in fear because they will know who he is despite their persistent denial. They will cry out in fear because they know he has come with authority to judge wickedness upon the earth. Denial will no longer be an option to justify their actions and their obstinate refusal to acknowledge him

as God. *"Those who pierced him"* likely refers to the Jews who did not recognize the Messiah upon his first coming.

Divine presence shrouded in the clouds is an image running through the Bible. From God's presence in the pillar of cloud, and the cloud descending on Mt. Sinai and the Tabernacle the theme develops. Deuteronomy 33:26 tells us *"There is no one like the God of Jeshurun<sup>3</sup>, who rides on the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty."* The clouds of heaven are the abode of the divine. God lives among them, is present in them, manifests himself through them, and rides upon them. Psalm 68:32-35 is a song of praise to God acknowledging his presence among the clouds:

*Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth,  
sing praise to the Lord, Selah  
33 to him who rides the ancient skies above,  
who thunders with mighty voice.  
34 Proclaim the power of God,  
whose majesty is over Israel,  
whose power is in the skies.  
35 You are awesome, O God, in your sanctuary;  
the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people.*

Ezekiel's vision begins, *"I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north--an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light."* (Ezek 1:4) and what follows is a frightening and awesome description of God's presence. Isaiah 19:1 contains a description of God coming against the Egyptians in power and judgment upon the clouds:

*"See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud  
and is coming to Egypt.  
The idols of Egypt tremble before him,  
and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them."*

In John's revelation verse 7 says, He will be *"coming with the clouds"* goes back to numerous prophecies of the Messiah coming on the clouds of Heaven to judge the earth and its inhabitants. Jesus himself made several remarks regarding the Son of Man's return on the clouds of Heaven. He tells Caiaphas (in Mark 14:62) *"And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."* Mark 13:26 tells us that his elect, or his chosen, will be gathered from the ends of the earth. If the chosen are taken up in the clouds as 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 say, then those left behind

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<sup>3</sup>Jeshurun: "the dear upright people"—Easton's Illustrated Dictionary

will face a God coming not only in glory, but in power, and well should they tremble and mourn.

A voice is heard saying *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."* Revelation 1:8 is an echo of Isaiah 44:6:

*Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty:  
I am the first and I am the last;  
apart from me there is no God.*

The voice speaking is proclaiming that *He* is the beginning and the end, the eternal one, the one who has always been, the Almighty. He is God Almighty. The Greek word for "Almighty" is *pantokratōr*, "the all-powerful One."<sup>4</sup> He is El Shaddai, the name for which we see translated the most frequently as the LORD. He is the eternal Lord and ruler of the past, present and future. He is the beginning and end of all things: creation, life, knowledge, wisdom, power. There is no other God, Christ is the divine manifestation of God Almighty in human form.

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<sup>4</sup> Bible Knowledge Commentary