

Revelation 1

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Overview

A common structuring pattern throughout the Revelation is a setting followed by a group of seven somethings. In the first such round, the setting is the vision of the Lord in 1:9-20, followed by the seven letters to the churches in ch. 2-3. This sets off 1-8 as a prologue to the book.

1:1-8, Prologue

Once we get to v.4, starts like a letter

- Salutation in vv. 4-5a
- Doxology in 5b-6

In this case, 1-3 are like a book jacket write-up. Giving the subject and importance.

7-8, the angel's brief synopsis of the book, interrupted by John's acquiescence.

Textual note: in Rev, KJV differs from the Majority Text much more often than in the rest of the NT. So expect changes.

1-3, Superscription

Gives three roles.

1, The Lord's role

He gives the revelation. Note difference between KJV title and 1:1. This is not a revelation either FROM or ABOUT John; it is FROM the Lord Jesus.

John's role

To bear witness. Twofold object:

- The Word of God: primarily, the OT scriptures, but also probably the Olivet Discourse.
- The testimony of Jesus Christ, which he saw ("and" lacking in MT).

Point: he interprets what he sees in the light of the scriptures. It is appropriate that this book come last, since without understanding the rest of the Bible, one can't understand this.

Recipient's role

Note usual pattern of one person reading aloud and the others paying attention.

All are expected to keep these words. Implies responses in both mind and will. Not just abstract

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theory!!!

- Mind: keep in view these prophecies, so as not to be surprised or caught off-guard when they are fulfilled.
- Will: they are full of practical injunctions. Regulate your life by them.

4-5a, Letter Opening

John. Nothing more said about his ID. Traditionally supposed to be the John of the Fourth Gospel.

Seven churches in Asia. Named in 1:11 and addressed individually in ch. 2-3.

- Historical churches, not periods of church history.
- Distinguished from other churches of Asia by being on the main postal road. Letters may have been disseminated from them to other nearby churches.
- Listed in CW order around that road, starting with Ephesus.

The greeting distinguishes all three members of the trinity:

- He who is, was, will be: Exod. 3:14, the eternal "I AM." Jehovah. MT actually calls him "God."
- Seven spirits: probably derived from Isa. 11:2.; perhaps Zech. 4:10 "seven eyes of the Lord." Emphasizes
 - his multiple functions;
 - his omnipresence.
- Jesus Christ. His titles emphasize progress of his life.
 - Faithful Witness. Cf. John 3:11. His earthly ministry was one of witness, and now he continues that in revealing the future to John.
 - Firstbegotten of the dead: death and resurrection at the end of his period of witness.
 - Prince of the kings of the earth. Not yet, but will be, 11:15.

5b-6, Doxology

Like most other NT epistles, John begins with praise: in this case, of the LJC. As the greeting emphasized the Lord's own history, so this blessing focuses on the historical sequence of what he has done for us.

Note how this sequence sets our redemption in context. Common errors today result from neglecting either its roots in God's elective love or its necessary issue in worshipful service.

- Loved us. His elective purpose, upon which all else rests.

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- Washed us. Redemption.
- Made us a kingdom: priests to our God. Our practical duty as believers: to worship him.

7-8, Synopsis

John speaks the "Even so, Amen" in the middle. The preceding and following probably come from the angel. Two great truths here, which will be reiterated over and over through the book:

7, The Lord Jesus is coming back.

- With clouds, Dan. 7:13, the Son of Man coming near to the Ancient of Days to receive his kingdom.
- Every eye. Cf. Matt. 24:26-27, 30. Won't be hidden. Public and unavoidable. Two groups singled out:
 - They which pierced him. Fulfillment of Zech. 12:10; the Jews who rejected him at his first advent.
 - All kindreds of the earth. Drawn from Matt. 24:30 (Gk the same).

8, God is eternal and all-powerful, in spite of man's sinfulness.

Note the timelessness already emphasized in v.4. Cf. "ancient of days" in Dan. 7.

- "Almighty" is Gk reflex of Heb. "Tsebaot," [YHWH of] Hosts. Clear title of deity.
- There and here, MT has "God"; "God the Lord."
- Yet in 1:11-13, the "son of Man" calls himself the "alpha and omega." The deity of the LJC.

Reminds us of the old farmer's summary of Revelation: "Jesus wins."

Summary:

Jesus is coming again soon, and wants us to be prepared. He has given us this book to help us in our walk as we wait for him.

1:9-20, John's Vision of the Lord

The book as a whole is "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (NOT of John), and it begins with a vision of the Lord that emphasizes his nature as true God and true man. From this position as Lord of all, he deals with the churches through his angels, and John is privileged to hear and record the events of one such heavenly council meeting.

9-10a, John's Condition

His relation to them

Brother. Cf. 2 Pet. 3:15. The term by which believers referred to one another. Not "apostle," or "teacher," or "pastor," or "elder," but (following the Lord's instruction in Matt. 23:8-10) simply "brother."

Companion. Shares their experience of three realities:

- The present tribulation (*glipsis*--45x in NT, of which 37 refer to the trials and difficulties that believers are to expect. The burden of the NT is not assuring us that we shall escape the great tribulation, but rather exhorting us to be patient in the general tribulation!
 - general tribulation, 37x: Matt. 13:21; 24:9; Mark 4:17; John 16:21,33; Acts 7:10,11; 11:19; 14:22; 20:23; 5:3 (2x); 8:35; 12:12; 1 Cor. 7:28; 2 Cor. 1:4(2x),8; 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2,13; Eph. 3:13; Phil. 1:16; 4:14; Col. 1:24; 1 Thes. 1:6; 3:3,7; 2 Thes. 1:4; Heb. 10:33; Jas. 1:27; Rev. 1:9; 2:9,10;
 - Great Tribulation, 8x: Matt. 24:21,29; Mark 13:19,24; Rom. 2:9; 2 Thes. 1:6; Rev. 2:22; 7:14
- The hope for the coming kingdom of God
- The patient endurance that enables them to endure one while awaiting the other.

His physical location

Where? Patmos. 16 sq. miles, 40 mi. wsw of Miletus.

Why? "for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus," a phrase that is twice later cited (6:9; 20:4) as the basis for persecution; consistent to take it in this sense here also.

His spiritual condition

Not Paul's sense of *en pneumati*, which is the usual condition of the believer's life (Rom. 8:9), but a special ecstatic condition produced by the Spirit (cf. Rev. 17:3; Ezek. 3:12).

10b-11, The Angelic Command

The speaker is probably not the Lord, but the angel (cf. 1:1) who guides John throughout:

- The introduction, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last," would clearly make this the LJC, but these words are not attested in the vast majority of mss.
- The Lord's voice is described as "many waters," v.15.

His message: instruction to write what John sees (probably, the entire book of Revelation) and send it to the seven churches in Asia. If this is John the apostle, who lived and ministered in Ephesus in his latter years, it would be natural for him to have a primary concern for these Asian churches.

12-16, Vision of the Lord

Not what John expects. He is looking for the source of the voice like a trumpet, but instead comes face to face with one with a voice like many waters.

12, **Candlesticks**: the piece of furniture that holds a candle. In NT times the "candle" was an oil lamp rather than a stick of wax, so "lampstand" is better. Holds the lamp up so that its light can be shed abroad (Matt. 5:15).

The Tabernacle had the Menorah, a seven-armed lampstand; in the Temple, there were ten separate lampstands. John's vision combines the number of the Tabernacle with the Independence of the Temple.

13-16, **The Lord**. His description is a combination of images from Dan. 7, Dan. 9, Ezekiel 1, and Isaiah 49. See handout for collation. These are drawn from two main lines of material:

- OT prophecies of the Messiah.
 - Isa 49, one of the Servant Songs, the classic prophecies of the Messiah., the See handout for correspondences.
 - Dan. 7 "son of man," the Messiah.
 - Dan. 9, the Angel of the Lord, the standard humanoid manifestation of deity in the Old Testament.
- OT images of God himself.
 - Ezekiel 1 and 43, the Glory of the Lord as it appeared to Ezekiel.
 - Dan. 7 "Ancient of Days," God, true deity.

Summary: the one who appears to John is the Messiah, in the full strength of his claim to deity. As is usually the case, the scriptural evidence for the deity of Jesus Christ rests not only explicit statements (such as Phil. 2:6) but in applying to him OT statements about YHWH.

17-20, Words of the Lord

Begins with John's response in 17:a, followed by a series of actions by the Lord in 17b-20.

17a, **John** responds to the vision by falling down as though dead. Common response of people in the Bible who come face to face with God (Ezek 1:28; Dan. 10:9; Matt. 17:6, transfiguration) (or even an angel, Dan. 8:18; Matt. 28:2-4). A direct, personal encounter with the Lord is a terrifying thing. All our excuses and clever explanations will vanish away; we will be overwhelmed with his glory and holiness, and our unworthiness.

An excellent touchstone when we face decisions: how would I explain it to the Lord?

17b, **The Lord** comforts John with a touch and a word.

17c-18, **The Lord** introduces himself. Confirms the union of humanity and deity represented by his appearance in the vision.

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- "first and last"--Title of YHWH in Isaiah. Confirms his absolute deity.¹
 - 44:6 Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I [am] the first, and I [am] the last; and beside me [there is] no God.
 - 48:12 Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I [am] he; I [am] the first, I also [am] the last.
- "he that liveth ..."--the crucified and risen Messiah. Confirms his true humanity--no one else could die.
- "keys of death and hell"--the authority to raise from the dead, discharging other people from the realm of the dead in preparation for judgment (John 5:21,25). Mounce cites Tg.Jer on Gen. 30:22 and Sanh. 113a as evidence that the Jews ascribed these keys to God alone.

19, **The Lord** commissions John to record his vision for us. This verse is commonly taken in dispensational circles to give the outline of the book:

- "what you have seen" = ch. 1
- "things that are" = 2-3
- "things that shall be hereafter" = 4-22, thus not the church age.²

Challenge: we will find on comparing ch. 6 with the Olivet Discourse that this neat chronological division does not hold; the first four seals were open during the first century, perhaps even by the time that John wrote. Furthermore, there are prophetic matters in ch. 2-3.

Alternative: reference is to the sequence of events in John's vision, not the sequence of prophesied events.

- Take "are" in the sense it has in v.20. "Write the things that you have seen, and what they mean." Interpretation given in v.20.
- "the things that shall be hereafter"--not world events that will happen in the future, but subsequent visions that John will observe.

Vanni offers a combination of the two explanations: "The things that you have seen" is a summary, with two parts, "the things that are" (ch. 2-3) and "the things that shall be hereafter" (ch. 4-20). This interpretation relies on the parallel of the third clause with 1:1; 4:1; 22:6. But note that all three of those are *dei genesqai*, while here we have *mellei genesqai*.

20, **The Lord** explains the stars and the lampstands

Stars = angels of the churches.

Source of much confusion. What is said to these angels is clearly intended for the churches as a whole.

- 1 Note added 3/5/08: see Easter sermon from 2007 for evidence that this phrase should be understood to refer, not to the Lord's deity, but to his humiliation.
- 2 Note the singular verb *mellei*, but the subject is plural; cf. Isa 48:6. These are the only two places in the Greek Bible where *mellei* disagrees with its subject in number, and both compare what the hearer has seen with what is about to come. The Isaiah passage is emphasizing God's predictive power. Is the Lord in Rev perhaps alluding to the earlier prophecy? But in general, see Robertson p. 404, Wallace 399: the use of singular verb with neuter plural was the rule in Attic, and it's really the previous clause that is anomalous here.

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To them is addressed condemnation and praise. Leads some to see them as human representatives of the churches: pastors, bishops, correspondents (PB's), or a synagogue officer in Jewish-Christian assemblies (Bullinger).

But Rev. has a LOT to say about angels, and we should understand the term here consistently with its use elsewhere in the book. "Angel" in general means "messenger," and there are cases where the term is applied to humans (Matt. 11:10), but this is never the case in Rev. The notion of "angel of a church" is a natural extension of the association of angels with individuals (Matt. 18:10; Heb. 1:14) and with entire nations (Dan. 10, a passage that John has already forcefully brought to our attention through his vision of the Lord).

OT usages

- "Stars" for angels: Job 38:7, cf. Job 1:6; 2:1 for "sons of God"
- "Host of Heaven"
 - Angels 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Kings 18:18; Neh. 9:6
 - H(eavenly bodies--ref to sun, etc. explicitly) Isa. 34:4H; Jer 33:22H;
 - W(orshipped objects) 2 Kings 17:16W; 21:3,5W; 2 Chr 33:3,5W; Jer 19:13W; Zeph. 1:5W; Acts 7:42W
 - Merger of the two: visible as heavenly bodies, but demons behind them? Deut. 4:19HW; 17:3HW; 2 Kings 23:4,5HW; Jer. 8:2HW
- Saints once: Dan. 8:10 (or is this heavenly conflict behind the earthly activity?)

If these are real angels, why does the Lord send messages to them through John? Bring two ideas together:

- John has already been instructed to write to the churches, 1:11. In fact, each letter ends with a reminder that they are ultimately addressed to the churches themselves (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).
- In dealing with churches through angels, the Lord would naturally discuss with them the problems that each church is facing, and the purposes he has toward them. Compare the heavenly court as pictured in 1 Kings 22.

Thus the giving of the messages reflects the transactions of Lord's heavenly council, while the writing of them down is intended for the church's benefit. Take dative as reference, rather than indirect object: "with reference to the angel of the church of X, write." John is taking minutes in the heavenly council, so that the churches can learn what is of concern when the Lord discusses their cases with the angels given charge over them. More generally, we can learn the kinds of things that the Lord discusses with our angel.

Lampstands = the seven churches

Recall the distinction from the Menorah: these are free-standing. Autonomous churches, united not by organization with one another but by their unity with the Lord Jesus.

If the church is a lampstand, what is the lamp? The believers, compare Matt. 5:14-16. The church ought

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to enable the light of the individual believer to be seen more clearly and have a broader impact. How can I hold your light up higher and enable it to shine more clearly?