

**The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ**  
*An Introduction*  
Revelation 1:1-3

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**Text:**

Revelation 1:1-20 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup>who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. <sup>3</sup>Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

<sup>4</sup>John to the seven churches that 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, <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood <sup>6</sup>and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. <sup>7</sup>Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

<sup>8</sup>“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

<sup>9</sup>I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup>I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup>saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

<sup>12</sup>Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup>and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup>The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup>his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. <sup>16</sup>In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

<sup>17</sup>When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup>and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. <sup>19</sup>Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. <sup>20</sup>As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

**Introduction:**

Today we will begin brand new territory as we start with Revelation chapter 1. This means that today we have to do the tedious work of simply setting the stage. You may find this to be a bit academic, but it is vital for preparing the ground for digging.

I thought about having you all repeat after me: “The Book of Revelation is impossible to understand” because I think you have been brainwashed into believing this. But remember that this book is part of the revelation of God to man and it was meant to be understood by its original audience! In fact, as we unfold the seven letters to the seven churches of Asia, I will contend that the entire book is to be read in light of these seven churches who are being called on to persevere.

Repeat after me: “The book of Revelation is meant to be understood!”

We live in a day when “end-times” literature is at an all-time high as far as popularity goes. The Left Behind series by Tim Lahaye continues to be a best seller. I came across this humorous list by Keith Krell.

You are “End Times” Impressionable” if...<sup>1</sup>

1. You don't shop at Costco (or Sam's Club) because you don't think you'll be around long enough to eat a 37-pound box of cornflakes.
2. You are afraid to get money from the automated teller machine because the bank assigned you the PIN number of 666.
3. After watching one of those global-disaster movies, you boldly proclaim: “That could never really happen,” and then you quickly glance around to see if anyone is nodding in agreement.
4. You freaked out when you went to church and found no one there (only to realize later that you showed up an hour early because you forgot to change the clock for daylight savings time).
5. An earthquake had you scrambling to find that Bible you haven't read since eighth grade.

While I am confessing what I thought about doing today, let me throw this one in as well. Notice what John says in v.3: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this book...” I seriously thought about beginning in v.1 and reading all the way through to the end and then closing in prayer. I think it would be profitable for a couple of reasons: (1) It would acclimate you to how it first came to the original audience and (2) It would demonstrate that the symbolism of the book is meant to conjure up mental pictures not literal pictures. But for other and more compelling reasons, I will forgo such a good idea.

Notice the first words of v.1: “The revelation of Jesus Christ...” The book of Revelation is extremely relevant because it is part of God's revelation of Jesus Christ. If the author of Hebrews wrote to the embattled first century Jewish church to communicate the supremacy of Christ over all things, then John is writing to the persecuted and threatened Asian church to communicate the sovereignty of Christ over all things. This really is the central message of the book: Jesus Christ holds the church in his hand.

Revelation 1:16 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars...

Revelation 1:20 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup> As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

The symbolism of stars and lampstands will come later; but for now, we need not fear what man can do to us; we need not fear what Satan can do to us; we need not fear what any government can do to

us. Christ holds us in his hand. Therefore, the letter written to the seven churches (the book of Revelation) is meant to be understood because it carries a massively encouraging word. The book of Revelation is one of the strongest tools in Scripture for urging a church forward in persevering faith.

This book is the revelation of Jesus Christ. The first word in the Greek text is the word *apokalupsis* from which we get the word *apocalypse*. The word *revelation* is the Latin translation that Jerome used in the 400's. This book is the unveiling, the revealing of Jesus Christ. He is going to finish his work. He is going to judge the world.

And while this revelation contains truth *about* Jesus Christ, I think John means something else when he says it is the revelation of Jesus Christ. I think he means it as the revelation *from* Jesus Christ. This fits with what John next demonstrates: the way in which this letter came to be transmitted. Read vv.1-2 again:

“The revelation of [from] Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,<sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.”

Notice the distinction between the words *servants* (plural) and *servant* (singular). The message came to John, Jesus' *servant* so that it might ultimately come to Jesus' *servants* (plural) – the seven churches, or the church at large. But notice how it came down to us:

First, God gave the message to the Son: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him.”

Second, Christ gave the message to an angel who, third, revealed it to John: “He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.”

Fourth, John “bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all he saw” in writing to the seven churches. In this way, then, God revealed to his church “the things which must soon take place.”

This is the revelation from Jesus to John via an angelic messenger. This is the revelation from Jesus to his church via a human prophet named John. Jesus can only give what the Father has given him. Have you heard that before? In John's Gospel, Jesus portrays himself as completely dependent upon the Father for everything he does, says, possesses and prays (cf. John 5:36; 6:39; 12:49; 17:7, 9, 11, 12, 22, 24; 18:11).

“From God-to Jesus-to an angel-to John-to the seven churches” is the order of transmission. Now bear with me for a minute because this transmission of the revelation helps us follow the story as it unfolds.

The process begins to unfold in John's vision in chapters 4-5.

Heaven is opened and John is summoned to “come up” into the throne room of God to be shown “what must take place after this” (4:1). There John sees God seated on his throne and holding the sealed scroll on which is written everything which must take place after this. But it appears that there is no one present who is worthy or authorized to open this scroll. John is moved to tears as he immediately realizes that he will not receive the knowledge of what is to take place if no one is found worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. Indeed, unless someone is found who exceeds the authority of the four living creatures and the 24 elders, the scroll will remain sealed and John's mission will be aborted. John weeps bitterly.

Suddenly, however, John's sorrow is turned to joy when he hears the announcement of the worthy Lion from the tribe of Judah. Upon hearing the announcement of a Lion he turns to see something entirely different and unexpected – he sees a lamb – a lamb that has been slain. This Lamb takes the scroll and opens the seals. So, in the eyes of John, the first step of this transmission has been accomplished. God had given the message to the Lamb who, in turn, opened the seals.

Chapter six describes the opening of the seals.

In chapter 10, John describes the next portion of the transmission as he watches an angel descend with an open scroll in his hand. John is given the scroll and commanded to eat it. Upon eating it, his stomach is made bitter and he is commanded to prophesy.

Revelation 10:1-2 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. <sup>2</sup> He had a little scroll open in his hand.

Revelation 10:8-11 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." <sup>9</sup> So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." <sup>10</sup> And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. <sup>11</sup> And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

It seems, then, that the central message that the churches are to hear is unpacked in chapters 12-22. Everything that precedes chapter 12 is preliminary to the central drama – the church is in the midst of a cosmic conflict with the dragon, the beasts and the harlot.

Go back to chapter 1. There John completes the cycle of transmission as he writes to the seven churches and faithfully gives witness to all that he saw. Do you hear that? All that he saw!

Revelation 1:9-11 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup> saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

Let's end by looking at verse 3: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near."

There are two promises here, two blessings: (1) Blessed is he who reads aloud; (2) Blessed is he who hears and heeds what is written.

In the first place you need to remember that this was written in a day when no one had their own personal copy of the Scriptures. The only place you could hear the Scriptures read and explained was in the context of the church gathered. In the second place, as church historian, Michael Haykin, informs us, there was no such thing as personal, private, internal reading until late in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Everyone read out loud when they read anything. This is very helpful because it explains certain

word choices that the writers made when they knew there would be a certain sound and cadence to their words being read out loud.

Could it be that the blessing being pronounced upon those who hear the word read aloud is being pronounced upon those who have attached themselves to the public and formal gathering of the church? To be a first century Christian simply assumed the primacy of the public gathering of the church. There was no private Bible study, radio broadcast, TV broadcasts, and internet libraries. Your church-gathered was the very life-source of your faith.

Not only does he pronounce a blessing upon the one who reads the scripture aloud but upon those who hear and heed. I am careful to word this two-fold condition the way I have because in the Greek they are joined together. You do not receive the blessing if you simply hear audibly but do not heed obediently. In the mind of John and the rest of the NT writers, there is no distinction between hearing and obeying. They are one and the same.

This is precisely what Jesus says over and over, seven times, in his letters to the churches: “If you hear and heed my words, you will be blessed.” Listen for the promises given and the exhortations to hear.

- Ephesus – Revelation 2:7 (ESV)  
<sup>7</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’
- Smyrna – Revelation 2:11 (ESV)  
<sup>11</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’
- Pergamum – Revelation 2:17 (ESV)  
<sup>17</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’
- Thyatira – Revelation 2:26-29 (ESV)  
<sup>26</sup> The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, <sup>27</sup> and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. <sup>28</sup> And I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’
- Sardis – Revelation 3:5-6 (ESV)  
<sup>5</sup> The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. <sup>6</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’
- Philadelphia – Revelation 3:12-13 (ESV)  
<sup>12</sup> The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. <sup>13</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’
- Laodicea – Revelation 3:21-22 (ESV)  
<sup>21</sup> The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

Promises:

- I will grant to eat of the tree of life
- will not be hurt by the second death
- I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone
- I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron
- I will never blot his name out of the book of life
- I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God
- I will grant him to sit with me on my throne

Fulfilled: