

Revelation 1:1-8 Answers The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Introduction: Today we begin an epic journey into the unknown: the mysterious book of Revelation. It is a book that tells about a baby-eating seven-headed dragon, a beast that arises out of the sea and another coming up out of the earth, a harlot drunk—with blood, destroying angels, plagues, bowls of wrath, and Armageddon. As scary as these are, *the book is actually designed to be blessing!*

******How can we get a *blessing* from the book of Revelation (1:1-3)?** A blessing is promised to whoever reads Revelation aloud and to those who hear it read and keep what is written.

Application: Rather than being scared by the prophecies of Revelation, we should look forward to a blessing! In fact, this is one of seven blessings offered throughout the book.

The promised blessing does not come simply by *hearing* Revelation read aloud. According to 1:3, what requirement goes along with reading it or hearing it read? We must also “keep” what is written.

What does it mean to “keep” what is written (1:3)? “Keep” is from *téreo* (τηρέω) and primarily means “keep watch over, guard.” For example, the “keep” of a castle is its strongest part, designed as the last resort in case of a siege. However, when used with reference to teaching, τηρέω can mean to “keep” in the sense of observe or pay attention to:¹

ESV **John 14:15** If you love me, you will keep (τηρέω) my commandments.

What does the word “revelation” (1:1) mean? It is from *apokalupsis* (ἀποκάλυψις, basis for “apocalypse”) and means “disclosure,”² “uncovering ... unveiling ... laying bare.”³ The words revelation and reveal are obviously related. Imagine sitting in a theater waiting for a play to begin, and finally then the curtain is pulled back, revealing the set and actors on stage. The book of Revelation is a supernatural revealing of things that were future to John’s readers.

John wrote that this is the revelation “of” Jesus Christ (1:1). Based on the context, is this a revelation *from* Jesus, or a revelation *about* Jesus? Although John did see visions of the glorified Christ, the context clearly indicates it is a revelation *from* Jesus concerning “the things that must soon take place” (1:1) and that it is the “testimony of Jesus” (1:2). Jesus is the source of the revelation.

According to 1:1, who is this revelation for? It was for the servants of Jesus. Unbelievers who read Revelation are reading someone else’s mail!

¹ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon on the New Testament*, 2nd ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 814.

² Bauer, *Lexicon*, 92.

³ Thayer, *Lexicon*, #602, 62.

Based on 1:1, what was the purpose of this book? Its purpose was to “show ... the things that must soon take place.” This is clearly a book of prophecy.

What does the word “must” mean (1:1)? It is from *dei* (δεῖ), “it is binding, it is necessary.”⁴ The fulfillment of this prophecy is certain.

What does “soon” (1:1) mean? “Soon” is from *tachos* (τάχος, 5034, basis for “tachometer”), which Thayer defined as “quickly, shortly ... speedily, soon.”⁵ Bauer defined it as “speed, quickness, swiftness, haste ... quickly, at once, without delay ... soon, in a short time.”⁶

Two Options: Suppose someone planned to build a new building. If he said “quickly” in answer to the question of *when* it would be built, that means you won’t have to wait long. If he said “quickly” in answer to *how* it would be built, it might be a ten year wait before construction started, but once he broke ground, look out (!), it would be built “quickly.”

The Pressure: The opening section contains a prophecy, arguably about the second coming:

ESV Revelation 1:7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him ...

It’s been 2,000 years since John wrote this, and the second coming still hasn’t happened. That’s not “soon.” Thus, some understand *τάχος* in the sense that it may be a long time before Jesus comes, but when He does come, it will happen really *quickly*, in the blink of an eye.

When, Not How: In this context, *τάχος* in this context clearly has to do with *when* things will take place, not *how* things will take place:

ESV Revelation 1:3 ... the time is near [which tells the reader that the “soon” of 1:1 really does mean “soon” (in time) and not “quickly” (in method)].

Translation Survey: “Soon” (ESV, NIV, RSV); “shortly” (KJV, NAS, ASV).

According to 1:1-2, how did God make His revelation known? What was the transmission process? The revelation went from God the Father to Jesus, then to an angel, and finally to John, who wrote it down for the churches. (John also wrote the Gospel of John and the three epistles of 1, 2, 3 John).

In 1:3, John described the book of Revelation as “prophecy.” What is prophecy? Our word “prophecy” is transliterated from the Greek *propheteia* (προφητεία); *pro* = “before” and *phemi* = “to speak.” Thus, it is a foretelling of future events; a prediction.⁷ Actual translations of *propheteia* would be a forecast, a prediction or a foretelling.

⁴ Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 811.

⁵ Joseph Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon on the New Testament*, 4th ed., (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1977), #5034, 616.

⁶ Bauer, *Lexicon*, 807.

⁷ Thayer, *Lexicon*, #4394, 552.

In the first century, why would one person read Revelation “aloud” for others to “hear” (1:3)? This, of course, was in the days before the printing press, copy machines, emails or smart phones. Thus, in the first century, when an apostle wrote a letter to a church, it was read aloud to the congregation:

ESV **Colossians 4:16** ... when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

ESV **1 Thessalonians 5:27** ... have this letter **read** to all the brothers.

That’s why Paul instructed his fellow church planter Timothy to:

ESV **1 Timothy 4:13** ... devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture ...

Example: The church in China is growing so fast that many people do not have a copy of the Bible, especially in the countryside. There typically was only one Bible per church. At a meeting of Chinese church planters, I asked what such meetings were like. I was told that they sang and prayed, that various people would give testimony of God’s work in their lives, and that *the* person who had the Bible would read aloud from it.

- **“the time is near” (1:3):** This second time indicator has less obvious interpretive options. A normal reading of the text indicates that John’s predictions would be fulfilled close in time to when they were made. The problem with this lies in reconciling the near time indicator with such prophecies as the one given in **1:7**. To resolve this, some people tend to take the words that clothe the prophecies literally (“every eye will see Him”), but take the time statements (“soon, near”) figuratively. The alternative is to take the time statements literally (“soon, near”), but to interpret the words that clothe the prophecies more symbolically (“every eye will see Him”), to read them not quite so literally, but rather literarily.

Why should we be hesitant to explain away John’s statement that “the time is near” (1:3) by appealing to 2 Peter 3:8-9? It would be out of context, and special pleading. It is quite true that God experiences time in the way described by Peter. Humans, however, do not. For John to write a book to people using God’s perspective on time would be extremely misleading. We may as well have not been given any time frame indicators at all; it becomes meaningless.

ESV **2 Peter 3:8-9** ... with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness ...

******How did John creatively describe the Trinity in his greeting (1:4-5a)?** **1)** He described the Father as Him who is, was, and is to come. **2)** He described the Holy Spirit as seven spirits before the throne. **3)** He described Jesus as Christ, faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth. (More on this description, below).

To whom did John specifically address this letter (1:4)? It was written to seven churches in Asia.

There were already many churches in Asia. Why did John single out these seven? Since the number seven symbolizes completeness (seven days in a week, and seven notes in a Western musical scale), some feel these seven are representative of the church as a whole and that John is writing to all churches through these seven.⁸ It also might be because the fulfillment of the prophecies was literally near in time, and would strongly impact these seven churches.

Today we think of Asia as a vast area that includes China, but not so when John wrote.

What modern day country is “Asia” (1:4)? “Asia” is transliterated from *asia* (Ἀσία), the name of a Roman province that lies today in western of Turkey.

- **“Grace to you and peace” (1:4):** John’s blessing on the seven churches included grace and peace (1:4). If these prophecies were fulfilled during the lives of the people in these seven churches, they would need an extra special measure of God’s grace and peace.

Why might John have described God the Father as Him “who is and who was and who is to come” (1:4)? It is similar to how God identified Himself to Moses: “I am that I am” (KJV, **Exe 3:14**). It reminds us that God is ever-present. He’ll always be there for us; we can count on Him, an ever-present help in time of need.

Why might John have described the Holy Spirit as seven spirits before the throne (1:4)? 1) Maybe it has to do with the fact that the letter was written to seven churches; there is a measure of the Spirit for each church. **2)** Seven is a number common throughout the book of Revelation (seven churches, seven seals, seven bowls, and seven trumpets). Since many think seven represents completeness or perfection. Thus, this may be a reference to the fullness of the Holy Spirit, which the churches will need in light of what is coming.

How did John describe Jesus in 1:5a? He is **1)** Christ, **2)** the faithful witness, **3)** the firstborn of the dead, and **4)** the ruler of the kings on earth.

1) Jesus is the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah.

2) Why would John point out that Jesus is a faithful witness (1:5a)? It was a way to emphasize that John’s readers could trust Jesus’ witness. The revelation originated with the God the Father, who made it known to Jesus, who now faithfully got the message to the churches. The churches should believe what they are about to read.

3) Others had been resurrected before Jesus (such as Lazarus). What event made Jesus the firstborn of the dead (1:5a)?

- a) Jesus is the only one resurrected who never died again after being resurrected.
- b) The idea of being firstborn in a family carried the meaning of pre-eminence:

ESV **Colossians 1:15-17** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

⁸ Lane Dennis & Wayne Grudem, eds., *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 2463.

Application: Some of the people in those seven churches were likely going to be facing death due to persecution. Jesus Himself was vindicated by rising from the dead, as will those who soon to be martyred in the coming persecution.

4) Why would John want to remind his readers that Jesus was the ruler of the kings of the earth (1:5a)? a) They were about to face a time of persecution, and John wanted to remind them that Jesus had His hand on the thermostat. No matter how bad things got, Jesus was ultimately in control. Times like those described in Revelation are when it really takes faith.

ESV **John 19:11a** Jesus answered him (Pilate), "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above."

Psalm 89:27 was traditionally applied by the Jews to the coming Messiah,⁹ and fits well with John wrote:

ESV **Psalm 89:27** I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

b) This description of Jesus as ruler is appropriate at the beginning of a book revealing how Jesus will preside over the destiny of nations.¹⁰

*****What prediction did John include as part of his greeting (1:5b-8)?** He predicted the coming of Jesus, **1:7**.

John broke out into praise for Jesus in 1:5b-6, "to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever." According to 1:5b, what has Jesus done for us? Jesus **1)** loves us, **2)** has freed us from our sins by His blood, **3)** has made us a kingdom, made us priests to God.

1) Why would it be important to remind the readers that Jesus loves them (1:5)? A skeptical college student once asked, "If God is really for us, why does He allow all these bad things to happen to us?" John may have reminded his readers of Jesus' love, because during the coming persecution they might be tempted to doubt His love. However, Jesus proved His love:

NAS **John 15:13** "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

2) Jesus did not merely forgive our sins. According to 1:5b, He freed us from our sins. What's the difference? To be forgiven of sin and freed from sin are similar ideas. However, suppose you went to jail for crimes committed, and then were forgiven by the governor; you wouldn't stay in jail, you are also freed from jail. Jesus forgave our sins, but He did not leave us in slavery to them. The power of sin over us is broken:

ESV **Romans 6:18** ... having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

⁹ William Barclay, "The Revelation of John", Vol. 1, 2nd ed., *Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 41.

¹⁰ Rienecker, *Linguistic Key*, 812.

Why was the “blood” of Jesus needed to free us from our sins (1:5b)? The Hebrew Scriptures declare that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

ESV **Hebrews 9:22** ... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Example: The Acts 29 network of church planters has this in their statement of faith: “We are not embarrassed by the bloody death of Jesus Christ and do believe He died as a substitute for the sins of His people in selfless love.”

3) Jesus made us “a kingdom, priests to His God” (1:6), the same goals God had for ancient Israel. What is the significance of John taking this promise to Israel and applying it to the church? This suggests that the church is spiritual Israel, or at least is the fulfillment of what God started with ancient Israel.

ESV **Exodus 19:5-6** ... you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples ... you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

ESV **1 Peter 2:9** ... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession ...

Steve Gregg: “This one of the many New Testament verses that give to the church titles originally applied to Israel ... suggesting that God’s kingdom is now to be associated with the church rather than Israel.”¹¹

Since Jesus is Himself God, in what sense is the Father His God (1:6)? As the perfect man, Jesus related to God the Father as every man should. In that sense, Jesus the man had a God (the Father).

At the end of 1:6, John ascribed “dominion” to Jesus. What is that? Kings have dominion. From *kratos* (κράτος), it means power, strength, rule, sovereignty.¹² This seems parallel to the earlier statement that Jesus is “ruler of kings on earth” (1:5). A fuller extent of Jesus’ dominion will be realized when He comes, the subject of the next verse (1:7).

Why did John start 1:7 with “Behold”? As a literary device, it calls attention to what he is about to proclaim: *Jesus is coming*. In his mind’s eye, John could see Jesus coming already.

- **“coming” (1:7):** A statement in the New Testament about Jesus’ “coming” (*parousia*; παρουσία) could be a reference to the second coming, or it could be reference to a lesser coming, such as occurred on the Mount of Transfiguration, or the localized A.D. 70 judgment coming. Great debate exists over which coming John has reference to here.

¹¹ Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 56.

¹² Bauer, *Lexicon*, 449.

What is the prophetic significance of Jesus coming “with the clouds” (1:7a)? Why clouds?

See *Ezekiel 30:3, Joel 2:1-2, Zephaniah 1:15, Isaiah 19:1*. In the Old Testament, the imagery of clouds in prophecy often foretold doom and destruction (judgment). Don't picture lazy, puffy clouds in a blue sky. The imagery is of dark, angry, foreboding storm clouds. For example:

ESV **Ezekiel 30:3** ... the day is near, the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations.

ESV **Joel 2:1-2a** ... Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!

ESV **Zephaniah 1:15-16** A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness ...

John wrote that every eye will “see” Jesus (1:7). This sounds like a reference to the second coming, when He comes in person, bodily. What in Isaiah 19:1 indicates that Revelation 1:7 might not refer to the second coming? Isaiah predicted that the Egypt of his day would be defeated. The imagery he presented was that Jehovah would ride on a cloud and come in judgment against them. However, it was expressed in figurative language. No one in Egypt ever looked up and actually saw God riding on a cloud, like a cowboy riding a bucking bronco.

ESV **Isaiah 19:1** An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.

In particular, whose eyes would see Jesus (1:7)? The eyes of those in a very specific people group will see Jesus: *those who pierced him*.

Who did John mean by “those who pierced him” (1:7)? Although it was the Romans who pierced Jesus with a spear, it likely referred to those first-century Jewish leaders who plotted to have him killed by the Romans.

What hint as to the time frame for the fulfillment of the prophecies of Revelation might the statement about those who pieced Jesus seeing Him give (1:7)? It may mean that Jesus would come within the lifetimes of those who actually brought about His death. A futurist, of course, would interpret it to refer to those of the Jewish race living at the end of the church age.

•**“see” (1:7):** People could see Jesus with their literal eyes, or will mental eyes. Jesus Himself earlier predicted that Caiaphas would live to “see” His coming:

ESV **Matthew 26:57-64** Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest ... And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Exactly how would Caiaphas have been able to “see” Jesus seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds (Mt 26:64)? This clearly refers not to physical sight, but mental perception. Too late, Caiaphas would realize that Jesus really is the Christ.

Since the second coming didn’t happen within Caiaphas’ life, exactly how did he “see” Jesus coming on the clouds (Mt 26:64)? Jesus came in judgment against the temple in A.D. 70. Caiaphas saw Jesus on the clouds in the same way the ancient Egyptians saw Jehovah in the clouds (metaphorically). They realized mentally that they were under God’s hand of judgment for killing their own Messiah.

John made reference to “all the tribes of the earth” (1:7). What could “earth” mean besides the whole world (1:7)? Not used here was *kosmos* (κόσμος ; “world”) or *ethnos* (ἔθνος; “nations”). Instead, the Greek word here is *gé* (γῆ; as in geology), which can also legitimately be translated “ground” or “land.”¹³ It was specifically the Hebrews “tribe” of the Promised “Land” (i.e., the Jews, those who pierced Him) who would see (metaphysically) Jesus coming in judgment.

Based on 1:7, what impact will the coming of Jesus have on the tribes of the earth? They will wail.

Why will these tribes wail (1:7)? They will realize they were on the wrong side of history. In the Old Testament, cloud comings were always associated with judgment. Most commentators have concluded that they will wail because they will realize that their judgment is near for killing their own Messiah.¹⁴

On the other hand, some argue that they will wail in sorrow over having killed their own Messiah and will turn to Jesus in faith.

ESV Zechariah 12:10 ... I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

In 1:7, why did John add the words, “Even so. Amen”? This expressed John’s confident expectation of Jesus’ coming and that John was ready for it. It is like praying, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

*****What did the Lord God say about Himself in 1:8?** God said He is **1)** the Alpha and Omega, **2)** who is, was, and is to come, and **3)** the Almighty.

¹³ Bauer, *Lexicon*, 167.

¹⁴ Dennis, *ESV Study*, 2463.

- 1) **What is the significance of being the Alpha and the Omega (1:8)?** Since these are the first (α) and last (ω) letters of the Greek alphabet, it is a way of saying that He is the beginning and the end. God started things, and God is going to finish them.
- 2) For the second time, God declared Himself to be Him who is, was, and is to come. As such, it highlights God's eternity. He is eternally existent, an eternal, unchanging presence.
- 3) **What would God want to remind John's readers that He is the Almighty (1:8)?** "Almighty" is from *pantokrator* (παντοκράτωρ; 3841); *pan* = "all" and *krateo* = "to be strong." This may be used in contrast to the Roman Emperor's self designation as *autokrator*. It is another reminder that God is the one who is in control, despite troubling times.¹⁵

Deity of Christ: Jesus makes these same claims about Himself in **1:18**, showing that He is God:

ESV **Revelation 1:18** and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

God commissioned John to write to the seven churches. John was in the middle of a personal greeting, when all of a sudden he quoted God in the first person and inserted it into the greeting. From a literary perspective, why did John do that? Perhaps it was to give certainty to the promise that Jesus was coming with the clouds.

So What?

To whom was this book addressed? It was addressed to seven real, historical churches in modern Turkey (**1:4**).

What time frame are we given for the fulfillment of these prophecies? The readers were told it would "soon take place" for "the time is near" (**1:1, 3**).

What is the stated application given by John in this chapter? The saints in the seven churches were promised a blessing if they keep what is written in the letter (**1:3**). So far, there is not much for us to keep, other than living by the realization that God is in control of every aspect of what happens to us, and is ruler of kings of earth.

**** = Ask this question aloud before having someone read the text.

- You can hear this lesson being taught at SermonAudio.com/NTRF.

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¹⁵ Rienecker, *Linguistic Key*, 812.