

## 1. The Vision of the Son of Man

Revelation 1.

The Book of Revelation

YouTube Video link: <https://youtu.be/gerHVabloMY>

A survey was taken among church attendees as to what book of the Bible they would most like taught. The great majority of people chose the Book of Revelation, which prompted them to survey the pastors of churches as to what book of the Bible they avoided teaching the most; again, it was the Book of Revelation. There are a couple of main reasons, in my opinion, why this is true. One reason is that there are many different interpretations of the events described in this book. These differing opinions regarding the interpretation of Scripture have sparked much controversy. Another reason for avoiding the study of this book is the fact that the symbolic language used is unusual for us as modern readers. We are used to very straightforward chronological events being explained to us clearly. Instead, this book is full of imagery, analogies, types, and shadows and is not told in chronological order. Yet people in the ancient world would have been more accustomed to the complex nature of apocalyptic literature. I have waited forty-six years to teach passage by passage through this book of the Bible. One approaches this book with healthy respect because the Lord gives a warning to those who would teach the Book of Revelation:

**<sup>18</sup>I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, <sup>19</sup>and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book (Revelation 22:18-19).**

Of course, most teachers of the Book of Revelation have no intention of removing the book's words; they fear misinterpreting them. The reason that I feel compelled to speak on this book now is that the world needs hope. God's people need hope. Many have said, "Where is the promise of His coming?" John says at the end of this book; **"And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servant what must soon take place. And behold, I am coming soon" (Revelation. 22:6-7).** These words have caused a problem for some. They say, how long must we wait? Some doubt His literal return. One solution is to understand the word "shortly" as in suddenly, or without delay once the appointed time arrives. One thing we know, God is rich in mercy and is giving the world time to recognize and receive Him as Savior. Another thing we know is, that God is always on time!

As I have traveled, I have become aware of the lack of available free literature and teaching material on Bible topics in many countries. Therefore, my intent in writing is to reach out to those nations that cannot access many of the commentaries, books, and study guides prevalent in the West. I dedicate my work to them, praying that God's Word will bring much fruit. My hope is that these studies will cause all who read or hear them to be ready for His coming. Like the parable of the wise virgins who were ready and waiting for the voice of the Bridegroom, we are to be like guideposts and lighthouses to those who are seeking light in the darkness.

### Introduction

Most scholars believe that the author, John (v. 9), is the same John who wrote the Gospel of John and the three epistles or letters that bear his name in the New Testament. Some call this book the Book of Revelations, plural, but the Greek word *apokálypsis*, translated as Revelation (v. 1), means uncovering or unveiling. The name is not plural but singular and could be translated as The Book of the Unveiling. Perhaps we can liken it to Michelangelo's chipping away his statue of David under a veil to be revealed when he was ready; similarly, the Holy Spirit wants to pull away the covers and reveal the Lord Jesus as He really is and for His church to know God's plan and purpose for the earth.

Some people are hesitant to read this book because of some of the fearful things within its pages, but God wants His people to understand the prophecy so that when these things happen, we will know that He is in control and that things are unfolding just as He has told us. The angel talking with John said that the words should be brought to God's people, saying, **"Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near"** (Revelation 22:10). More than five hundred years before Christ, the prophet Daniel was told that one of his prophecies would not be understood until the end times: **"but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future"** (Daniel 8:26). In the days in which we live, most students of biblical prophecy agree that the end-times are upon us, and that God is unveiling His purpose for the earth. So what is being unveiled? It is this writer's opinion that there are at least two things that will be fully disclosed. First and foremost, God the Holy Spirit is revealing Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior of the World to all who will open their hearts and separate the lies from the Truth: **"And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come"** (Matthew 24:14). Secondly, what has been hidden is being revealed: **"For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light (Luke 8:17)**. For thousands of years, humanity has been under a cloud of darkness and deception, going back as far as Babylon, which is why the Book of Revelation gives us two whole chapters on the defeat of Spiritual Babylon (chapters 17-18). It is this writer's opinion that in the end times, a choice will be put before all humanity as to whether to serve a wicked world system set up by Satan and his "man" (the Anti-Christ), or to put total trust in the Lord Jesus and serve Him. Even now, most people sense that the world's stage is being set for some great world event. Even those who are not believers are becoming aware of the darkness coming upon this earth. The rise in false religions, cults, and New Age thinking is evidence that people are searching. Like being in a theatre before a performance and hearing the music build as the stage is set, there is an anticipation "in the air."

Let's look at the first three verses and then continue our introduction to the book.

**<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 (Revelation 1:1-3).**

The passage above points out that the purpose of this book is that God wants His servants, those who belong to Christ, to know the things that must soon take place (v. 1). He guarantees a blessing to all who read it aloud and puts into practice the words of this book (v. 3). It is an essential book for all believers to read because the Lord also stated a blessing at the end of the book: **"Look, I am**

coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll” (Revelation 22:7). I would encourage us, therefore, to obtain the blessing by finding time to read aloud (v. 3) the prophecy of this book.

This book takes the form of an extended letter. Although the specific letters in chapters 2 and 3 are directed to the seven churches in western Turkey, it is also a letter from John to all the churches, telling them what he has seen, and ultimately to the church at large, which includes us as believers today.

To understand the Book of Revelation, it is helpful to understand the Old Testament, as there are many allusions, intimations, or typologies to the Old Testament. For instance, what we read about at the beginning of Genesis ends in Revelation. The book of Genesis has the beginning of heaven and earth, and in Revelation, the realization or fulfillment of heaven and earth. In Genesis, we read of the entrance of sin and the curse; in Revelation, we have the end of sin and the curse (Revelation 22:3). In Genesis, we see God's enemy, Satan, disrupting God's people and the earth, and in Revelation we have the destruction of Satan (Revelation 20:2, 10). In Genesis, we see a departure from the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:23); in Revelation, the Tree of Life is regained (Revelation 22:2-3). In Genesis, death comes on the scene. In Revelation, there is no more death: “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, **and death shall be no more**, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4 emphasis added). In Genesis, sorrow and pain enter, and in Revelation, crying and pain are banished (Revelation 21:4). In Genesis, Paradise is lost, but in Revelation, Paradise is regained (Revelation 21:10). In Genesis, a Savior is promised (Genesis 3:15), in Revelation, that Savior, Jesus, will walk with us and, “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Revelation 22:4). The Book of Revelation is the climax of all the longings of humanity.

1) What comes to mind as you consider how all things will be restored? Which one of these restorations speaks to you the most? How does this give you hope?

## Outline

We have an outline that John himself gives us in the first chapter:

Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this (Revelation 1:19).

John the Apostle gives us a prologue (1:1-8), calling it: “the things that you have seen” (present perfect tense), which refers to the vision of the Lord Jesus in all His glory in chapter one, verses 9-18. The second part of the outline, “Those that are,” refers to the Lord's corrections and warnings for the seven churches in chapters 2-3. The third part of the outline refers to chapters 4-21, the events that are yet future: “those that are to take place after this,” i.e., the prophetic events that culminate in the return of Christ and the setting up of His kingdom, and God’s judgment of sin. Finally, there is an epilogue in chapter 22.

Other things that are helpful to know as we study this book are that the writer, John the Apostle, is commonly estimated to be ninety-two years old at the time of the writing of Revelation. He was one of a team of leaders at the church at Ephesus, i.e., one of the seven churches in the province

of Asia, which is now Southwest Turkey. Perhaps he had some oversight over the other six churches mentioned, being all in the same area. The place where John writes was the island of Patmos, an island thirty miles off the coastline of what is now Turkey. According to the historian Eusebius, John was banished there by the Roman emperor Domitian in A.D. 95 for refusing to worship Domitian as a god. The emperor Nerva released him eighteen months later after Domitian was assassinated. The time of writing is estimated to be A.D. 96 when the Romans persecuted many churches.

### Greetings to the Seven Churches

<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” (Revelation 1:4-8).

John pronounces a blessing on the seven churches from Him Who is, Who was, and Who is to come, the only One outside of time and existing in the past, present, and future (v. 4). He writes of Jesus as *the Alpha and Omega*, the Greek beginning and ending letters of the alphabet (v. 8). Christ was there at the beginning of creation, and “**without him nothing was made that has been made**” (John 1:1-3). He is the Bridegroom and the culmination of God's plans for humanity.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John then calls Jesus by three names: *the Faithful Witness*, the One Who always tells the truth about God and His purposes in calling out of a body of people, as well as the spiritual warfare going on in this world. Secondly, Jesus is called *the Firstborn of the Dead*, perhaps because He is the One who has made the way for all humanity to conquer death, being fully God and fully man at the same time. Probably, He is also called the firstborn because the firstborn of the clan of Abraham carried God's blessing down through each generation (Genesis 12:2-3). Jesus is the firstborn head of the Church, and we Gentiles are adopted and grafted into the branches of the Tree of Faith (Romans 11:17). Jesus has inherited everything from the Father and freely shares His inheritance with His Church, the called-out ones. Thirdly, Christ is also called *The Ruler of Kings* (v. 5). Every knee of presidents and kings will bow before Him, and all will be subject to Christ.

2) Verse 6 calls us a kingdom of priests to our God and Father. What is a priest, and what comes to mind when the Lord speaks of such things about His people?

All earth's inhabitants will see Christ coming with the clouds (v. 7), which could be a reference to the visible *Shekinah* presence of God that came upon Solomon's temple when it was dedicated (1 Kings 8:10-11), i.e., the cloud that withdrew from the temple of God in Jerusalem after their gross sin and idolatry (Ezekiel 10:18). When the Israelites came out of Egypt and wandered for forty years in the wilderness, God led them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night. Similarly, Jesus coming with the clouds could be referencing believers who are the “**great cloud of witnesses**” (Hebrews 12:1). This great cloud of believers is those who have died and are with

the Lord and who will accompany Jesus when He comes: “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we also believe that **God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him**” (1 Thessalonians 4:14, Emphasis added).

It could also be both that is happening, i.e., the *Shekinah* glory cloud on the returning Messiah and those coming in the clouds with Him. There will be those on earth who will see this glorious sight amid the darkness of that Day and will begin to mourn their rebellion and search for a cave to hide from His wrath (Revelation 6:16). Also, the people of Israel, they who pierced Him, will see a vision of Him over Jerusalem: “And 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” (Zechariah 12:10).

### **In the Spirit on the Lord’s Day**

<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” (Revelation 1:9-11).

John tells us that he had undergone the distress and tribulation of that day under the Roman emperor Domitian's persecution of believers (v. 9). Many people today think of tribulation as being a time of wrath in the end-times, but the Greek word, *thlipsis*, translated tribulation (KJV) or distress (NIV), means a heavy downward pressure, a term signifying affliction, trouble, and distress and a time of great difficulty for believers. Tradition tells us that John was boiled in oil, and when he didn't die from it, the Romans banished him to the island of Patmos. John reminded those he wrote to that he was also called to live out his life in patient endurance in suffering persecution.

What does John mean when he says he was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day? By the Lord’s Day, John probably meant the first day of the week (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2), i.e., the day of Jesus’ resurrection and the meeting and memorial day to the early believers of Christ’s victory over death. We cannot know for sure if the Apostle John was still in his physical body when he saw the vision of things in the heavenly realm or if his spirit left his body for a time. We know that Paul the Apostle had a similar experience when he stated he was caught up to a heavenly place:

<sup>2</sup>I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. <sup>3</sup>And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—**whether in the body or out of the body I do not know**, God knows— <sup>4</sup>and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

The evangelist, Philip, after he shared Christ with an Ethiopian eunuch, was lifted bodily and transported to Azotus, where he carried on his mission of preaching (Acts 8:39-40). Elijah was also lifted bodily to heaven (2 Kings 2:16).

Whatever his experience was, John heard a loud voice like a trumpet (v. 10), reminding the Israelites of the trumpet sound when God came down on Mount Sinai. They could not bear God's voice speaking to them and asked Moses to talk to God for them (Exodus 20:18-19). When John heard the trumpet sound, he turned and saw the Lord Jesus in all His glory and standing in the middle of seven lampstands:

### **The Vision of the Son of Man**

<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 amid 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 white wool, like 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 (Revelation 1:12-20).

3) What stands out to you about this appearance of Jesus, and what was John's physical reaction to the Lord Jesus in the heavenly realm?

When Jesus walked the earth in the veil of flesh, He seemed like an ordinary man, and so He was. He had to become fully human to take the place of humanity and pay the price of death for all men, but now John was seeing the Lord as He is today: the glorious King of Heaven and Earth. Verse thirteen describes Jesus as wearing the long robe and golden sash worn by priests in the Old Testament (Exodus 28:4), for Christ is our high priest representing us before the Father. Verse 14 reminds us of the prophet Daniel's vision of God: "As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire" (Daniel 7:9-10). The Lord is the same One whose face believers will one day see (Revelation 22:4). He is also called the first and the last (v. 17), identifying Him with the LORD spoken of in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12. The beautiful, comforting thought is that Jesus has the keys of Death and Hades. In those days, to have keys spoke of someone with high authority, and Jesus is the One who can close or open those doors. Nothing can happen to the believer outside the control of the Lord Jesus. He has conquered Death and Hades.

The seven lampstands represent the seven churches to whom John is to write (v. 20). Jesus is seen amid the seven churches. He is the light that emanates from the Church if each local body of believers is led by Him for, He said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Some churches are lifeless, and their light has been snuffed out (Revelation 2:5), due to the ongoing spiritual war raging against the Church worldwide.

The seven stars the Lord holds in his hands (v. 16) are the angels of the seven churches. In chapters two and three, John was told to write to each of the seven angels, but how can one write on a scroll to angels? The word *angel* is a translation of the Greek word that means *messengers*. We have two places in the Scriptures, Luke 9:52 and Matthew 11:7-10, where human messengers were spoken of using the Greek word *angelous*, the term usually translated into English as angels. It could be that John was told to write to what we now call pastors, the chief messengers of the churches, the ones who hold the primary responsibility for teaching and oversight in the church. It could also be that the stars in the Lord's hand refer to the corporate body of believers or community of faith in the seven localities in the province of Asia of which John had oversight. The number seven often speaks of perfection, maturity, and completeness. We cannot be dogmatic about it, but it is interesting that the prophet Daniel likens those who lead many to righteousness to the stars (Daniel 12:3). Each church throughout the Earth has a responsibility to shine like stars with God's glory upon us.

Wherever these words find you, it is encouraging that even though John was receiving this Revelation of the glory of Christ, he saw the Lord amid the candlesticks of the seven churches. He Himself said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matthew 18:20). He has not left His church without His presence but is working on each of us to shape and mold us into His likeness, and only when we get home will we see the result of His transforming power in us. Whatever darkness you are going through, the Lord has promised: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Just as angelic protection stood by Paul on the fourteenth day of the storm he went through (Acts 27:23), and just as the Lord was the unknown One who walked with the disciples on the Emmaus Road, He has not left us. He was the unseen One in the room listening to Thomas when he said, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20:25). The Lord showed up later and told Thomas to put his finger in His side and believe.

The Book of Revelation is the unveiling and revealing of the One who came to Earth to call you and me to Himself and to walk with us through every difficulty that we encounter on our way home to be with Him. Thank God for Jesus!

Prayer: Father, thank you for sending Jesus to be the Heavenly Substitute and pay the penalty for our sins. Lord, I want to walk through this life arm-in-arm with you. Forgive me for my sins. Today I ask you to come into my life and be my Lord. Amen!

Keith Thomas

Website: [www.groupbiblestudy.com](http://www.groupbiblestudy.com)

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@keiththomas7/videos>

Email: [keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com](mailto:keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com)