

Revelation 1:9-20 Answers The Terrifying Christ

Review:

What is the book of Revelation about? Read 1:1a, 3b. It is about things that were soon to take place. The time was near.

According to 1:3, how can we get a blessing from this book? A blessing is promised to all who hear and *keep* what is written.

******To whom was the book of Revelation originally written (1:9-11)?** It was written to seven churches in what is today western Turkey. Whatever relevance Revelation contains was primarily for them, and only secondarily for us.

- **“partner” (1:9):** John described himself as their partner (*sugkoinonos, συγκαινωνός*) in **1)** the tribulation, **2)** the kingdom, and **3)** the patient endurance that are in Jesus.

1) What was John himself going through that made him a partner with them in tribulation (1:9)? John was no armchair spectator. His readers were having a rough time of it because of their faith, and so was John. He was vacationing (not!) in the Aegean Sea on the isle of Patmos. It is a nearly waterless, rocky island, with scrub trees, ten by six miles in size, about 40 miles off the coast of Turkey. The text states that he was there “on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” The Romans used Patmos as a place to send political offenders, who were free to roam the island. Other criminals were forced to work in the quarries.¹ Tradition says that he was imprisoned there by the Romans due to his church work. John’s statement that he was a partner with them in tribulation confirms that John was on Patmos not to do ministry, but in forced exile.

Application: This tells us what we can expect from the world (tribulation).

ESV **John 16:33b** In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

ESV **Acts 14:22** ... through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

2) What did John mean by “the kingdom” (1:9)? This may be a reference to the time in the future when Jesus returns to the earth in final judgment, as seen in the prayer: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

3) “patient endurance” (1:9): In the present we face tribulation, in the future we’ll enjoy the benefits of the kingdom, and in the meantime what God expects from us is patient endurance in Jesus:

ESV **1 Corinthians 4:12b** ... when persecuted, we endure

¹ Barclay, *Daily Study*, 51-52.

- **“in the Spirit” (1:10):** John was in a sort of trance, experiencing supernatural dreams or visions. Other examples:

ESV **Acts 10:9-11** ... Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And ... he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened ...

ESV **Acts 22:17-18** When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me ...

On what day of the week did John receive this revelation (1:10)? John got his revelation on the “Lord’s Day,” which is not the same as the Day of the Lord (the Greek wording behind the two is distinctly different).

What is the difference between the Lord’s Day (1:10) and the Day of the Lord (such as found in 2 Peter 3:10)? The Day of the Lord is an Old Testament eschatological phrase referring to a time of judgment from God. The Lord’s Day is Sunday, the day Jesus rose from the dead. The earliest Christian writings refer to Sunday as the “Lord’s Day.”² That John was able to refer to Sunday as the Lord’s Day without any further explanation shows that the early church had already developed a tradition of referring to the day after the Saturday Sabbath as the Lord’s Day. His readers already knew all about it.

Example: The practice of baptism was developed during the inter-testament period and appeared in the New Testament without explanation because none was necessary. The same is true of the synagogue system, which also developed during the inter-testament period.

The “Lord’s Day” is from a unique phrase in the Greek, *kuriakon hemeran*, which literally reads, “the day belonging to the Lord.” The words “belonging to the Lord” are from *kuriakos*, which occurs in the New Testament only here and in **1 Corinthians 11:20**, where Paul uses it to refer to the “Lord’s Supper” or the “Supper belonging to the Lord” (*kuriakon deipnon*). The connection between these two uses must not be missed! Since the purpose of the weekly church meeting is to observe the Lord’s Supper, it only makes sense that this *supper* belonging to the Lord would be eaten on the *day* belonging to the Lord (the first day of the week).

John heard a voice that sounded like a trumpet (1:10). What would be true of a voice that sounded like a trumpet (1:10)? A blaring trumpet is loud, heralding, and attention-getting, and impossible to ignore.

Illustration: My fellow seminarians would sometimes say that they thought the Lord was *trying* to tell them something. A wise professor commented that if God wanted them to know something, they would know it; there would be no “trying” to it.

According to 1:11, what was unmistakably John told to do? John was told to write down what he was about to see, and send it to seven specific churches (already referred to in **1:4**).

² Barclay, *Daily Study*, 54.

- **“seven churches” (1:11):** If you trace the order that these churches are listed, they are laid out in a circular, clock-wise fashion. Each is in order along the mail route that a courier would have taken to carry the scroll from John. Ephesus was the closest on the coast to Patmos, and is the first listed. Scripture records that Paul planted the church in Ephesus. The origin of the others is unknown. It is likely that they were started out of Ephesus by either Paul or other workers such as Epaphroditus. There were other churches near these seven (such as Colossae, near Laodicea). As discussed last lesson, these seven might have been singled out because: **1)** The number seven appears repeatedly in the book of Revelation. It is generally considered to be a number representing completion (seven days in a week, seven musical notes in a scale, etc.). Thus these seven churches could have been chosen to represent of all first-century churches. **2)** They were the churches that happened to be closest to Patmos. **3)** They were strategically located to influence the other churches in Asia.
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******When John turned to see the voice, what did he see (1:12-16)?** He saw a terrifying, surreal man standing among seven lampstands:

- 1) Like a son of man, 1:13a.
- 2) Long robe with golden sash, 1:13b.
- 3) Hair white like wool/snow, 1:14a.
- 4) Eyes like fire, 1:14b.
- 5) Blazing bronze feet, 1:15a.
- 6) Voice like the roar of water (notice that it changed from trumpet to water), 1:15b.
- 7) Seven stars in right hand, 1:16a.
- 8) Sword for a tongue, 1:16b.
- 9) Face shone like the sun shining in full strength, 1:16c.

Literary Link: In the letters to the seven churches (**Re 2-3**), various details of this vision of Jesus were revisited.

Insight: John was Jewish, and knew the Hebrew Scriptures well. A correct understanding of the book of Revelation is impossible without knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures.

John described the man’s appearance in detail, but did not explain their meaning. It has been said that to pick apart the meaning of each feature is “to unweave the rainbow.”³ So, rather than play a guessing game, what is the *over-all* impression created (1:12-16)? The impression of this supernatural being is truly *awesome* if He is your savior, and truly *awful* if He is your judge. The supernatural beings’ appearance is very similar to the supernatural figure who appeared to the prophet Daniel (pre-incarnate Jesus?):

ESV **Daniel 10:5-6** I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold ... around his waist ... his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

³ Mounce, “Revelation”, 78.

Parallels: Clothed in linen with belt of gold (#2), face like lightning (#9), eyes like flames (#4), burnished bronze (arms and legs rather than feet, but close enough! #5), and a booming voice (#6).

- **“seven golden lampstands” (1:12):** A lampstand (from *luchnia* λυχνία, 3087) is simply a stand on which a lamp is placed. A first-century oil lamp was like a small tea pot with an opening in the top to pour in oil, a spout for the wick, and a handle on the side to carry it (sort of an Aladdin’s lamp). The menorah in the temple was a single gold lampstand with seven lamps on it. However, John saw seven separate gold lampstands.

1) In general, what does it mean for something seen in a vision to look “like a son of man” (1:13)? Compare *Daniel 7:9*. The least it means is that the speaker had the basic appearance of a man (as opposed, for instance, of a lion or lamb). More specifically and significantly, it is a Messianic title drawn from the writings of Daniel:

ESV **Daniel 7:13** I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

3) “hairs ... like white wool” (1:14): Perhaps white hair was a sign of eternity and of infinite wisdom. This is similar to how the prophet Daniel described God the Father’s hair:

ESV **Daniel 7:9** 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 ...

Deity: We see a close connection between the appearance of the Ancient of Days on the throne and the one like a son of man, suggesting deity with distinction (Jesus is God, but He is distinct from the Father).

5) “burnished bronze, refined in a furnace” (1:15): The Greek word behind “bronze” is unknown. It was probably some type of alloy of gold or fine brass; the idea of it glowing would best indicate that the metal is aglow as if still in the crucible.⁴ This is similar to the vision Daniel saw of God the Father:

ESV **Daniel 7:9** As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days took his seat ...his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.

Deity: Yet again we see a close connection between the appearance of the Ancient of Days on the throne and the one like a son of man.

⁴ Rienecker, *Linguistic Key*, 814.

6) “voice” (1:15): Previously, John described the voice as trumpet-like (1:10). This time he said the voice was like the roar of many waters (1:16). My family and I once stood at the bottom of Niagara Falls. The roar of the falls was so deafening that to talk was nearly impossible. The Lord’s voice cannot be ignored:

ESV **Psalms 29:3-4** The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

Deity: This feature is also a reference to deity.

8) This heavenly personage had a sword in his mouth (1:16) which must have made it difficult to talk! What’s a sword used for? See *Revelation 2:16, 19:15*. The primary purpose of a sword is to kill people (though it could be used to show rank or to intimidate). This casts Jesus in the role of a conquering military figure. Jesus can speak destruction in the same way that He originally spoke creation (**Ge 1:3**). John himself later told us that it symbolizes the irresistible power of divine judgment.⁵

ESV **Revelation 19:15** From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

“He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword ...”⁶

9) What did his face look like (1:16b)? It looked like sun shining in full strength. This is similar to the way Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus:

ESV **Acts 26:13** At midday... I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun

Summary: This supernatural speaker’s overall appearance is clearly linked to heavenly visions that the prophet Daniel saw. It’s not that John read Daniel and copied it; it is that God purposely revealed Himself to John in the same way He appeared to Daniel.

******What is the identity of the surreal man that John saw (1:17-20)?** Based on his self description, the one like a son of man was none other than Jesus.

What was John’s initial reaction upon seeing the man (1:17)? John fell at his feet in fear, as though dead. John certainly responded to Jesus differently here than he responded when he knew Jesus on earth. This is not gentle Jesus, meek and mild.

⁵ Rienecker, *Linguistic Key*, 814.

⁶ Julia Ward Howe, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”, en.wikipedia.org. Accessed November 22, 2020.

What is the first thing Jesus said to John in 1:17? Jesus reassured John, telling him not to be afraid. Though His appearance was fearful, it should terrify only those opposed to Jesus. Jesus has control over unbelieving Judaism, over pagan Caesar, and over the danger and death that threatened the churches.⁷

1) In 1:17, Jesus said that He is “the first and the last.” Back in 1:8, the “Lord God” described Himself as the Alpha and the Omega. What is the difference? There seems not to be much difference; both are claiming the same thing, which suggests the deity of Jesus. Jesus is the Lord God. So too the image of Jesus that John saw was not far different from the image of God that Daniel saw (**Da 7:9**). Furthermore:

ESV **Isaiah 44:6** Thus says ... the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.”

Deity: Jesus is the LORD (Jehovah God).

2) Jesus next said that He is the living one who died, and who now lives forevermore (1:18). Back in 1:8, “the Lord God” described Himself as someone “who is and who was and who is to come.” What does that tell us about Jesus’ true identity? Jesus is the Lord God Almighty (yet He is distinct from the Father and the Spirit).

ESV **John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

3) What is the significance of having the keys of Death and Hades (1:18)? Having a key to a lock represents the power and authority to open or close. Hades is not hell, it is the realm of the dead (sinners and saints). The seven churches were already in a time of tribulation, and were headed into even more serious persecution. Some of those reading Revelation would soon be martyred. Those who are on the side of Him who has conquered death and who controls death have nothing to fear.

Steve Gregg: “Since Jesus holds the keys to the gates of Hades and Death, He can unlock and open those gates to resurrect the saints in the last day.”⁸

What did Jesus direct John to do in 1:19? As in 1:11, Jesus commissioned John to record the revelation. This verse serves as a suitable outline of the book:

Chapter 1-3—“things ... that are” (Epistles to the Seven Churches)*

Chapters 4–22—“things ... that are to take place after this” (Prophecy)

Three Main Ways to Interpret the Prophecy of Revelation: Trace elements of all three main ways to interpret Revelation can be seen in early Christian writings. However, it was not until the time of the Protestant Reformation that attempts were made at systematic interpretations:

⁷ Dennis, *ESV Study*, 2464.

⁸ Gregg, *Four Views*, 60.

Historicism: Revelation is like is a church history book written in advance. Revelation 4-22 is understood to be a chronological prediction of the entire church age. Each chapter of Revelation has been sequentially, steadily, fulfilled over the past 2,000 years. For example, it identifies the rise of Islam, identifies the office of the papacy as antichrist, and the Catholic Church as the whore of Babylon. This was the view held by nearly all Protestants between the 1550s and the 1850s. Advocates included Wycliffe, Knox, Tyndale, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Whitefield, Spurgeon, and Matthew Henry. It has been quipped that historicists interpret Revelation according Edward Gibbon's book, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Preterism: Revelation is understood to have mostly already been fulfilled—in the events leading up to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70. It is John's version of the Olivet Discourse. This view was popularized by the Roman Catholic Church as part of the counter-reformation in order to deflect criticism by historicists that the office of papacy is antichrist (if Revelation was all fulfilled in A.D. 70, then the Pope could not be antichrist). It has been quipped that preterists interpret Revelation according to Flavius Josephus' first-century history book, *The Jewish War*.

Futurism: Revelation is thought to be about far distant, yet-future events that won't be occur until the very end of time as we know it. This view was also popularized by the Roman Catholic Church as part of the counter-reformation (if antichrist is a future figure who will not appear until the very end of time, it cannot be the office of the papacy). This view has grown in popularity with Protestants since the 1850s, gradually replacing historicism. This is the view reflected in the *Left Behind* series. It has been quipped that futurists interpret Revelation according to the morning newspaper.

There is a forth view, relatively new and not very popular, called **Idealism**. This view sees Revelation as having timeless fulfillments. It is seen as poetic prophecy about the spiritual battle that always rages between the forces of light and darkness. According to Idealism, no specific historical events at all are predicted in Revelation. Rather, it contains timeless spiritual principles. The new kid on the block, it was developed in the 1800s.

The only aspect of the vision that is explained lies in 1:20. According to 1:20, what is meaning of the mystery of the lampstands and seven stars (Hint: they aren't ninja stars!)? The seven lampstands represented the seven churches to whom the book was addressed, and the seven stars represented the seven "angels" of the churches (whatever that means!).

In what sense do churches have angels (1:20)?

- 1) Perhaps each of the seven churches had its own guardian angel watching over it. However, the Scriptures do not teach this elsewhere.
- 2) Some have speculated that this refers to the seven human messengers sent with John's letter to each of the seven churches. The word "angel" is transliterated letter for letter directly from the Greek *angellos* (ἄγγελος). It is, technically, an untranslated word! If translated it would be with a word like "messenger." Thus, the word can refer to a supernatural messenger from God (an angel), or simply a human messenger.
- 3) Others have guessed that this was a way of referring to each church's pastor (not likely since Ephesus, for example, had more than one pastor, and since in the New Testament there is no such thing as "the" pastor of a church).

4) Others have suggested that the angel was simply a metaphorical personification of each church's identity (characteristics).

So What?

What message did Jesus want to send John and his readers by appearing to John the form that He did in 1:9-20? "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild" this is not! The impression would have been that Jesus is the exalted Lord who rules in divine glory. Jesus knows what He is talking about in the predictions He is about to give, and is in control of everything. This appearance of Jesus was designed to set the scene for the royal edicts that were about to be communicated to the seven churches.⁹ Images from this first chapter are referred to over and over in the messages to the seven churches (Re 2-3).

Application: In this world, we can expect tribulation. God expects that we respond with patient endurance in Jesus (**1:9**). As regards the future, ours is the kingdom. We need fear (**1:17**), because Jesus has the key of Death and Hades (**1:18**).

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

Note: These lessons are designed for a 45 minute teaching slot and are based on the ESV.

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⁹ Dennis, *ESV Study*, 2464.