

## **Revelation 1:1-20: A Revelation from Jesus Christ**

Why Revelation?

I taught a Sunday school class winter quarter 2019. Most of the people here were not there. I also wonder about the retention ability of those who attended the class. I taught the 4 main approaches or interpretations of Revelation. (Who remembers them?) This will be more preaching than teaching. I will provide some teaching notes with the sermons for those who desire to know more.

I feel compelled by the HS to give a warning. If I do not warn you about what is coming, then God may hold me accountable for your apostasy; that is, if you fall away from the faith when tribulation comes. (See Matthew 24:9-13; 1 Timothy 4:1-4.) Ezekiel was called to serve as Israel's watchman. Read Ezekiel 33:1-6. Pastors now function like Old Testament prophets as they declare the word of God.

Intro: Do you want to be blessed? Do you want God's favor in your life?

*"Blessed is the one who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things which are written in it; for the time is near."*

Then read (Greek: to discern), hear, and keep (Greek: to pay close attention) what is written in Revelation. Pay close attention to the prophecy and understand it.

This is the first of 7 beatitudes (blessings) in Revelation.

John: Prisoner on Patmos

*1:9: I, John, your brother and fellow participant in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*

Where is Patmos and why was John there? Patmos is a Greek island in the Aegean Sea. It was a Roman penal settlement to which the Romans sent offenders not guilty of a death penalty crime.

John's exile to Patmos may have been related to an incident in Ephesus when he rebuked "Artemis of the Ephesians" and the altar crumbled and part of the temple collapsed. That was a heavy blow to the Ephesian economy which depended on the fame of Artemis.

The other possibility for John's exile was a refusal to worship Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96) at his new Caesar-temple in Ephesus. All citizens were required to burn incense to his image and recite the oath, "By the genius of Emperor Domitian, lord and god."

John was an old man and was probably not required to do hard labor in the rock quarries of Patmos. He probably had his own private cave.

### Scroll of Prophecy to 7 Churches

1:1-3: It is a revelation from Jesus Christ, rather than a revelation about him. God and Jesus Christ originate the revelation. God gave the revelation to Jesus Christ to give to those who believe in Him (i.e., Christ's bondservants). Jesus Christ mediates the revelation by the Spirit through an angel. Father tells the Son, and the Son sends the HS and angels to John to write the words of this prophecy.

1:11: "Write what you see in a scroll..." (GR *biblion* = scroll). As a scroll of prophecy, it is both divine teaching and a prediction of future events. This scroll of prophecy is referred to as an "epistle" because it is written to churches. The Apostles wrote "epistles" to the churches. What makes Revelation unique is that it is an epistle from Jesus spoken directly to the 7 churches.

**Q: What if Jesus Christ spoke directly to FCBC about what pleases Him and what does not? I would want to read that letter!**

## Meaning of Phrases:

1:1-3: "What must soon take place and the time is near."

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, **the things which must soon take place**; and He sent and **made it known** by His angel to His bond-servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, everything that he saw. <sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things which are written in it; **for the time is near.***

John received this Revelation 1900 years ago, so what do these phrases mean? The phrase "the things that must soon take place" means "rapidity of execution." This means when it happens it will happen quickly. It may be delayed for a long time, but when it happens it will be stunningly swift. The phrase "for the time is near" means the events described in this revelation will happen at their appointed time. (GR "time" is *kairos* = season or occasion)

*Acts 1:6-8: So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The Father has fixed "times and seasons by his own authority" and Revelation is an unveiling of those "times and seasons."*

When Jesus revealed his second coming to his disciples, he told them, Matthew 24:38: "But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." The day and hour are unknown, but the "times and seasons" leading up to the "day and hour" of Jesus' second coming have been revealed by Jesus as the "signs of the end of the age" (Matthew 24) and by the Father in the prophecy of Revelation.

Analogy: If you drove from Memphis to Denver without a paper or Google map you would know you are getting closer when you see the Rocky Mountains. You drive across the flat plains of Kansas and eastern CO and see fields of golden grain and miles of wind turbines. You will also see signs along the way like "Welcome to Colorful Colorado" or "Denver 98 miles" so you can see your progress. Finally, you will see snow-capped mountains in the distance and then the Denver cityscape. So, it is with the signs and the "words of this prophecy" preceding Christ's second coming.

The GR for "made it known" means to indicate by signs. It is like communicating by "sign language." (Show "Jesus loves me" in sign language.) This means the prophecy was given to John by figurative representation. So Revelation may not be a literal presentation of future history, but a symbolic portrayal of what will happen in the years before Jesus returns and after.

1:10: "In the Spirit on the Lord's day." John experienced a Holy Spirit induced trance. Paul had "visions and revelations of the Lord" and went to heaven (2 Cor. 12:1-10). The "Lord's Day" refers to the first day of the week to remember the resurrection of Christ.

1:19: Three major sections: *Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.*

1. The things which you have seen (1:1-20). This is the vision of Jesus Christ.
2. The things which are (2:1-3:22). This is the message to the 7 churches of Asia Minor.
3. The things which will take place after these things (4:1-22:21). Therefore, most of Revelation is a prophecy about what will happen after the end of the first century.

## Description of the Triune God

Modalism is a false teaching, and it is creeping into some churches. Modalism teaches God is one Person, not three Persons, who has revealed himself in three modes. God is like a Transformer. God the Father transformed into God the Son, who then transformed into the Holy Spirit. "One God, three Persons" is correct theology.

Charles Spurgeon said discernment is not a matter of simply telling the difference between right and wrong; rather it is telling the difference between right and almost right. Discernment, in other words, is refined perception. We need the word of God and discernment to avoid apostasy.

*1:4-5: 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, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.*

GOD the Father, 1:4: "Grace to you and peace from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come."

The seven spirits before God's throne are the one Holy Spirit.

Jesus asserts his equality with God the Father: 1:8: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the LORD God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Jesus Christ: 1:4-8, 12-18.

- **The faithful witness:** Jesus came to testify to God the Father. Jesus bore witness to what he saw and heard in heaven (John 3:32). Jesus bore witness to who he was, the Son of God. Mark 14:62: *Then the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I AM. And you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven."* Then Jesus cited three more faithful witnesses to his identity: John the Baptizer (John 5:33-35),

God the Father and the works he gave Jesus to perform (John 5:36-38), and the Scriptures (John 5:39).

- Jesus told Pilate, "I came to bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). Would you be a faithful witness if it cost your job or your life? John was a faithful witness and existed to Patmos. There have been thousands of faithful witnesses who were tortured or executed for bearing witness to the truth. (Read the stories in *Jesus Freaks* by dc Talk and VOM.)
- It is intimidating to bear witness to the truth because Satan is a liar and the "father of lies." (It was frightening for people to bear witness to the 2020 election fraud. Many have received death threats and lost their jobs.)
- **The firstborn of the dead:** Jesus was the first person to rise from the dead. Colossians 1:17-18: *And Christ is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And Christ is the head of the body, the church. Christ is the beginning, **the firstborn from the dead**, that in everything he might be preeminent.* If you believe in Jesus Christ, then you will follow him out of the grave!
- **The ruler of the kings of the earth:** Jesus rules from the right hand of God the Father over all presidents. A president may think he has power and control, and nobody is above him, but Jesus rules over him and decides his fate. Scripture affirms God's authority over world leaders: Daniel 2:21: *God changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings.* Psalm 75:7: *It is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.* Jesus exercises his authority from the right hand of God the Father.

### Jesus' LOVE, 1:5-6

1:5-7: *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.*

Jesus Christ is love because God is love. What did Jesus' love accomplish?

- **Freed us from our sins by his blood.** The GR word “freed” means to untie, to unbind, to set at liberty. (It’s like you are tied up in ropes and a drop of Jesus’ blood falls on the ropes and they sizzle and snap and fall off.) Jesus has freed us from the penalty of our sins. What set us at liberty is the blood from Jesus’ substitutionary atonement. Then Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to free us from the power of sin. That’s sanctification.
- **Made us a kingdom of priests to his God and Father.** Jesus freed us from our sins for a purpose. We are chosen to be a “kingdom of priests” to Father God. What is a kingdom of priests? This was God’s original intention for Israel and why he redeemed them from slavery in Egypt. God said to Moses, Exodus 19:5-6: *Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.* Israel failed to obey and keep God’s covenant. God’s intention is to have the Church of Jesus Christ become his “kingdom of priests.” A kingdom of priests loves and serves God now and according to His future plan revealed in Revelation (5:10, 20:6).

**Application:** Jesus Christ is the ruler of the presidents of the world. This is important and comforting because right now the world is leaderless. America has a strong leadership role in the world. The US dollar is still the world’s reserve currency. That means that the President of the US is considered the leader of the world - at least the “free world.” The current president in the White House is not a leader – certainly not a leader for GOOD or what pleases GOD. Congress is divided between truth and lies. There is a void that needs to be filled. “Nature abhors a vacuum” means something or someone must fill the leadership void. The leaderless world needs a strong leader; that someone will someday be the Antichrist. Regardless, Jesus is still the ruler of the presidents of the world, even those who are in active or passive rebellion against him. See Psalm 2.

**Application:** We are “bond-servants.” The GR word is slave. It goes back to the OT. A slave could have freedom in the seventh year. Even when the seventh year came, the slave had a right to pledge himself, with an awl-pierced ear, to perpetual service for his master (Exodus 21:1-5). Ex 21:5-6: *But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.* (If his master gave him a wife who had children, then the slave could go free, but the wife and children would stay with his master.) A pierced ear probably meant obedience to the master's voice. We are not servants or slaves by force. We are servants who make a voluntary vow to be faithful to Jesus Christ because we love him.

**Q: Are you a bondservant of Jesus Christ or do you want to be free to live your own life without any commitment to or interference from God?**

The Future: Jesus Christ is coming with the clouds and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn on account of him.

Praise: To Jesus Christ be glory and dominion forever and ever.

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### **Notes: Introduction to Revelation**

Content: a Christian prophecy cast in apocalyptic style and imagery and finally put in letter form, dealing primarily with tribulation (suffering) and salvation for God’s people and God’s wrath (judgment) on the Roman Empire.

Author: the Apostle John, well known to the recipients of the letter.

Date: ca. AD 95 (according to Irenaeus, ca. AD 180).

Recipients: churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor, who show a mix of fidelity and internal weaknesses.



Occasion: the early Christians' refusal to participate in the cult of the emperor (who proclaimed himself *lord* and *savior*) was putting them on a collision course with the state; John saw prophetically that it would get worse before it got better and that the churches were poorly prepared for what was about to take place, so he wrote both to warn and encourage them and to announce God's judgments against Rome.

Emperor Domitian ruled from AD 81-96 and demanded emperor worship. The rejection of Caesar worship was considered a threat to the peace and prosperity of the empire.

Emphases: despite appearances to the contrary, God is in absolute control of history; although God's people are destined for suffering in the present, God's sure salvation belongs to them; God's judgment will come on those responsible for the church's suffering; in the end God will restore what was lost or distorted at the beginning (Genesis 1-3).

### How to Read Revelation

It is a prophecy that uses apocalyptic imagery. The imagery of apocalyptic is primarily that of *fantasy* (e.g. beasts with multiple heads). John interprets the most important images, which give us our essential clues to the rest; some of the images are well known and fixed (e.g. earthquakes represent divine judgment) while others are fluid and are used to evoke feelings as well as mental pictures

John connects this "revelation of Jesus Christ" with the great prophets of the Old Testament.

John, like the OT prophets, wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit (1:10; 2:7; etc.). The revelation from Jesus Christ was mediated by an angel.

John positions himself between recent past events and what is about to happen in the near future. (One of the most significant recent past events was the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in AD 70

and what will happen in the "near future" - about 300 years later - will be the fall of the Roman Empire.)

John sets all forms of earthly salvation and judgment against the backdrop of God's final end-time judgments; so that, the fall of Rome is to be seen not as the end itself but against the backdrop of the final events of the end (i.e. the fall of a future "Babylon the Great").

John sees everything in terms of the *fulfillment* of the OT prophets. He has over 250 specific echoes of or allusions to the OT so that every significant moment of this revelation is imaged almost exclusively in OT language.