

Revelation 1 • It's All About Christ

Introduction

What began in the book of Genesis and has been building for 65 books culminates in Revelation, is an explanation that everything is about Christ. Creation came through Him, re-creation by means of the cross came through Him, and ultimately new creation at the end of time will come through Him. Many people miss the point of Revelation because they treat this book differently than other books of Scripture, when in fact as believers we're supposed to handle it exactly the same way: as a guide for our personal relationship with Christ. This book isn't a test of knowledge, but faith.

¹The 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 communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, ²who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: Is the book of Revelation for anyone and everyone?

A: No, it is specifically addressed to "His bond-servants".

Q: What is a "bond-servant"?

A: It's someone who gives their self up to another's will, usually in the fulfillment of a contract to pay back a debt. In the Christian's case, it expresses the reciprocal work of the cross to bring us into willing service, used by Christ to extend and advance His work among men. It's a servant who pursues no interests other than their master's.

Point: The book of Revelation was not given as a general reference to the End Times for all of mankind; it is given specifically for believers.

Q: What are the three conditions of the blessing for believers where Revelation is concerned?

1. "...he who reads..."
2. "...those who hear..."
3. "...those who...heed the things which are written in it..."

Application: As with all biblical prophecy, it is not a test of knowledge or intellect but a test of faith. The overriding purpose of God's Word is always that it must be put into practice, not merely studied.

⁴John 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, ⁵and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— ⁶and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. ⁷BEHOLD, HE 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 over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

[Read v.4-8]

Q: What is unique about John's references to the Godhead in this passage?

A: John references all of the individual members of the Trinity in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Q: How is God the Father referenced?

A: "Him who is and who was and who is to come". (v.4 & 8). This is reiterated in Rev. 4:8 at the great scene in heaven.

Point: God stands above history; He is not limited by time.

Q: How is the Spirit referenced?

A: "Seven" is the number of completeness in the Bible and stands for the fullness of the Spirit. In Revelation the seven-fold Spirit is symbolized by seven lamps (Rev. 4:5) and by seven eyes. (Rev. 5:6) In the letter to the church at Sardis Jesus specifically mentions that He has the seven-fold Spirit. (Rev. 3:1)

Point: The Spirit points to Christ.

⁸"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Q: How is the Son referenced?

A: Christ is presented in His three-fold Person as Prophet, Priest, and King.

1. Prophet – “the faithful witness” (v.5)
2. Priest – “the firstborn of the dead” (v.5) That is, highest of those raised from the dead.
3. King – “the ruler of the kings of the earth”. (v.5)

Q: How does John refer to the work the three-fold work Christ accomplished on the cross?

1. He “loves us”. (v.5)
2. He “released us from our sins by His blood”. (v.5)
3. “He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father”. (v.6)

Q: How might these things refer all the way back to the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis?

A: They’re the restoration of everything lost in Adam, now obtained in Christ.

Q: Is the return of Christ referenced in v.7 referring to the rapture?

A: No, the rapture is something which occurs in secret. (1 Th. 4:13; Mt. 24:40-41) This is the public return of Christ which is referenced seven times in Revelation alone. (Rev. 1:7; 2:25; 3:3; 3:11; 22:7, 22:12, 22:29) At this public return the nations (Gentiles) will mourn because of Him and the Jews will see Him whom they pierced. (Zech. 12:10-12; Mt. 24:27-30)

Point: John begins by writing about the Christ whom he knew, providing a kind of summary of God’s plan that all things point to and consist in God’s Son, both in heaven and on earth.

⁹I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, ¹¹saying, “Write in a book what you see, 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.”

[Read v.9-11]

Q: What might be significant about John hearing Christ’s voice as a trumpet?

1. In the Old Testament Jews used trumpets to gather everyone together into an assembly, to announce war, or to proclaim special days.
2. In the New Testament it’s God’s trumpet which will call the church home (1 Th. 4:16), gather Israel (Mt. 24:31), and announce war on the world. (Rev. 8:2)
3. In Revelation it’s a trumpet which calls John up to heaven (4:1) and seven trumpets which signal the wrath of God to be poured out on the world. (8:2)

Point: Trumpets were rarely used to summon non-believers, only God’s own people. The trumpet is the primary tool employed by God’s watchman to warn God’s people and to call them together on His behalf. Christ’s voice as a trumpet symbolically reinforces the message that all that is revealed to believers through John in the book of Revelation is something to be taken seriously by believers and must be immediately acted upon in order to avoid the trouble on the horizon being warned about.

Point: John lets us know that He is writing about the Christ he heard.

¹²Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; ¹³and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. ¹⁴His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. ¹⁵His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

¹⁷When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

[Read v.12-18]

Q: Whereas John first wrote about the Christ he knew and then the Christ he heard, what is he now writing about?

A: The Christ he saw.

Q: What might be significant about the fact that the churches are represented as seven individual lampstands instead of a single, combined light?

A: Christ alone is the head of the church and no single apostle or denomination is set over it. Each works independently yet in concert with Christ alone as the head. This is significant in later chapters as we learn of Satan's attempts to form a one-world religious system.

Q: If we were to look up these attributes in other Scripture, what greater meaning might we assign them?

1. "...clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, girded across His chest with a golden sash." (v.13) These are the garments of a Priest-King.
2. "His head and His hair were while like white wool, like snow..." (v.14) It speaks of His eternalness. (Dan. 7:9)
3. "...His eyes were like a flame of fire." (v.14) In the midst of the churches, Christ sees what is going on and judges.
4. "His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace..." (v.15) Feet of brass speak of judgment; the brazen altar as the place where sin was judged.
5. "...His voice was like the sound of many waters." (v.15) This suggests both the power of His Word likened to the sea, and the "streams" of divine revelation converging in Christ. (Ps. 29; Ez. 43:2)
6. "In His right hand He held seven stars..." (v.16) These are the messengers (or pastors) of the seven churches. Christ holds His servants in His hands. (Dan. 12:3)
7. "...out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword..." (v.16) This is His Word which judges. (Is. 11:4; 49:2; Rev. 2:12; 2:15; 19:19-21; Heb. 4:12)
8. "...His face was like the sun shining in its strength." (v.16) This speaks of Christ's glory. (Mal. 4:2; Rev. 22:16)

Point: These are all attributes of the divinity of the resurrected Christ operating at the right hand of God.

Q: Which of these attributes does Christ remind the church of Ephesus in 2:1-7?

A: "The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven gold lampstands." (2:1) They are reminded that unless they repent and return to their first love, "I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand". (2:5)

Q: Which of these attributes does Christ remind the church of Smyrna in 2:8-11?

A: "The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life". (2:8) The fact that Christ Himself overcame persecution and death is the very same promise to Smyrna that they will likewise persevere unto eternal life.

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Q: Which of these attributes does Christ remind the church of Pergamum in 2:12-17?

A: “The One who has the sharp-two-edged sword”. (2:12) He warns that they must repent and return to His Word in order to overcome idolatry and spiritual immorality infiltrating their church.

Q: Which of these attributes does Christ remind the church of Thyatira in 2:18-29?

A: “The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze”. (2:18) Jesus is coming to judge the deep things of Satan which have penetrated the ranks of the church.

Q: Which of these attributes does Christ remind the church of Sardis in 3:1-6?

A: “He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars”. (3:1) They have a reputation of being alive but spiritually they’re actually dead. They’re warned to repent and become Spirit-filled Christians while there’s still time.

Q: Which of these attributes does Christ remind the church of Philadelphia in 3:7-13?

A: “He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens”. (3:7) Because this church has kept their witness to His Word, a door of opportunity to spread the Gospel has been opened which no one can shut.

Q: Which of these attributes does Christ remind the church of Laodicea in 3:14-22?

A: “The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God”. (3:14) They are reminded that just as everything began in Christ, so everything is about to conclude in Christ regardless of the degree to which they’ve allowed themselves to be deceived.

Point: *These attributes were at work in various churches during John’s time, they’ve been at work in churches at various times throughout history, and they are at work in churches present during the Last Days leading into the Great Tribulation.*

¹⁹Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. ²⁰As for the mystery of the seven stars which 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.

[Read v.19-20]

Q: What is the purpose given to John for writing Revelation?

A: It’s three-fold: “the things which you have seen”, “the things which are”, “the things which will take place after these things”.

Point: *We’re given the precise approach we’re to take in order to not just understand but properly apply the Word of God provided in Revelation.*

Q: Although much of Revelation details God’s final judgments on the earth, what is the greater warning to the church?

A: The danger to the churches should Christ remove their testimony. (Rev. 2:5) He stands in their midst and examines their spiritual condition. He’d rather have **NO** testimony than a **BAD** testimony.

Point: *The repeated biblical pattern which is once again affirmed in the opening 3 chapters of Revelation is that judgment begins with the house of God first. He first warns believers to repent and live according to His Word and ways before He holds the rest of the world accountable.*

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Overall Application

Revelation isn't some kind of "get out of jail free card" for Christians, but is actually a warning that they are first and foremost held accountable to living according to God's Word more than anyone else. We're supposed to appreciate even more the free gift of salvation which will deflect the wrath of God we deserve and desire even more to be His "bond-servants".