

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

REVELATION 1:1-20

The Apostle John was an old man, doing hard time, on a rock island. As the last living disciple of Jesus, he was the only person left eligible to add to the sacred Scripture. Thus, before John closes his eyes for the last time, God communicates to him **a revelation**.

And it moves John emotionally, physically. He writes down what he sees, and then sends it to the churches.

God intends for his *Revelation* to be the last, lingering image burned into the collective psyche of His Church. God wants the Church to never take its eyes off this Revelation. **Its to shape our souls forever.**

The Greek word translated "*revelation*" is the term "*apocalypse*." In our culture it's become synonymous for *cataclysm, destruction, impending doom*. But to the Greeks it meant simply "**an unveiling or an uncovering.**"

Imagine walking into an art gallery and a sculpture by a famous artist lies under a canvas. At the appropriate moment the curator rips off the fabric revealing the beauty and genius of the sculptor's work.

This is "*The Revelation...*" Jesus Christ is alive and well, but we don't see His excellence for He's hidden behind a heavy canvass that separates the spiritual realm from the tangible world. Yet in this book, John rips away the veil. He reveals Jesus in all His splendor!

I like how Paul Mellow translates the opening words of verse 1, "**The Official Portrait of Jesus Christ...**"

When a US president leaves office a state-funded oil painting is commissioned. The tradition began in 1796. Several artists tried to paint George Washington, but it was Gilbert Stuart who painted the classic portrait...

And when it comes to Jesus' **Official Portrait** God got it right the first try. He called on John to be the artist.

Before we're done, John will fill in a whole array of provocative details... We'll talk about *falling stars, and beasts, and hailstones, and plagues, and marks, and the whore of Babylon* - **and we can get sidetracked!**

It's important to remember the theme of this book. It's "*the Revelation of Jesus Christ.*" This book is not about *Antichrist*, but *Jesus Christ*. One author writes, "The theme of the book isn't 6-6-6, it's "holy, holy, holy!"

The point of Revelation is not just the *unleashing of judgment* it's the *unveiling of Jesus!* This is what God wants to permanently burned into our perspective.

John begins, "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants - things which must shortly take place.*" In essence, "*here's what's next... Here's what's coming up on God's agenda...*"

Understand what John had already seen... John writes in his first letter, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life..."

John witnessed **the first revelation** of Jesus. The eternal Son of God - *as God and with God* before time began - took on flesh and blood. Jesus revealed the Almighty's humility. He came to us to serve and save.

John was Jesus' cousin - Mary's nephew. Jesus and John grew up together. He **was there** when Jesus began His ministry. He saw Him walk on water, multiply loaves and fish, heal the blind, even resurrect Lazarus.

John **was there** when the Roman executioners nailed Jesus to a piece of wood... He **was there** three days later when news came that the grave was empty..

For forty days, John **was there** and spent time with the risen Christ... And John **was there**, on the Mount of Olives, when Jesus, the victorious Lord, ascended to heaven, back to glory. Yes, John **was there** for it all!

And John did exactly what Jesus told him. He and his fellow disciples went into all the world to tell people what they'd seen and heard and touched and handled.

But now John is alone. The other disciples are dead. Jesus has been gone sixty years. And John wonders what's next. *What's next for him... and for Christianity?*

Jesus had come preaching, "*the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" John was there when Jesus launch His kingdom, but now it's running headlong into the kingdoms of man. Christians are being attacked by the empire of Rome. The Emperor has crucified Peter, and beheaded Paul, and others are now on the chopping block. *What is next for God's besieged kingdom?*

The Apostle needs a new revelation - a fresh vision. John knew Jesus was no longer a bloody corpse. His sacrificial work was finished. He'd risen and ascended. *But what's next?* And the answer is *this Revelation!*

“And (verse 1) He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.” God “*sent and signified*” this message to John. “*Signified*” means “to express by signs.” And this is the word that has led many Bible teachers to see this book as a message encoded with signs and symbols.

When John received this prophecy he was a prisoner of Rome. The Romans weren’t too fond of manifestos predicting the coming of kings and kingdoms that threatened to usurp Roman rule. Thus, to avoid censorship, John’s letter employed signs and symbols.

You could call this book a “*cryptogram - a coded message.*” Its symbolism enabled it to slip past Roman security, yet still be understood by Christian readers.

And what better code to use than **OT symbols**. This is why the key to cracking the code or interpreting Revelation is to familiarize yourself with Hebrew idioms and imagery. Of this book’s 404 verses, 70%, or 278 verses quote OT references. It has another 360 OT inferences. It’s been said, “*The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself.*” That’s especially true with the Revelation.

Verse 3 attaches a special promise to this book. “*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.*” Any attempt to read and obey this book will be met with a blessing.

Though parts of Revelation can be tough to interpret, God will reward a sincere effort. He wants *this book especially*, to be etched in our hearts. ***It’s what’s next!***

John continues his introduction, “*John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace...*” Here’s the common NT greeting, “*grace and peace.*”

But not only does John greet these churches, so does the Triune God who writes through him. For the Revelation is “*From Him who is and who was and who is to come...*” Notice, our Father God doesn’t just have lots of time, He dwells outside of time. He is eternal. God simultaneously occupies the past, the present, and the future. God sees the end from the beginning.

Think of it, God “*was*” - He is the God of history. History isn’t random, “*history*” is “*His Story...*” God also “*is*” - He’s ever in the moment. Psalm 46:1 calls Him “*a very present help in trouble...*” And God “*is to come*” - His presence, purpose, and power fills up our future...

A central theme of Revelation is the second *coming* of Christ, but God is always coming... *To a troubled marriage He comes... to a heart-broken teenager He comes... to a depressed housewife He comes... to an out-of-work dad He comes... to a believer*

struggling with doubt He comes... to the rebel on the run God comes... This is God's favorite posture, **He is coming!**

But John also brings greetings from God's Spirit. And **"From the seven Spirits who are before His throne..."**

Remember, we discussed this back at Christmas in Isaiah 11. Throughout Scripture there's only one Holy Spirit. He is an individual, not seven different Spirits.

Yet Isaiah predicted that in the life of Messiah the one Holy Spirit will have a seven-fold ministry. Isaiah 11:2 reads, **"The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him..."** He is the Spirit of the LORD. And He's **"the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD."** The Spirit rested on Jesus in seven marvelous ways and on His **Church** in the same ways.

And last, but not least, the readers of Revelation are greeted **"from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness..."** In all that Jesus did and said, He represented His Father faithfully. Jesus is the reliable witness, **the truth-teller.**

And He's also **"the firstborn from the dead."** Jesus' human body was first to undergo the metamorphosis of resurrection. It was Paul who described resurrection, **"this corruptible (body) must put on incorruption, and this mortal (body) must put on immortality..."** Jesus was first to escape decay. Now His resurrection is *our* hope!

Jesus is the *truth-teller*, the *grave-robber*, **and** the *ultimate ruler*... For John calls Him **"the ruler over the kings of the earth."** This was important to believers in ancient Asia. At the time Christianity was an oppressed minority. Yet this Revelation passed on to the churches was so convincing. Those who read it knew it was only a matter of time before the rulers of this world bowed before Jesus. He will ultimately reign over all the earth.

Jesus is the *truth-teller*, *grave-robber*, *ultimate ruler*. And He's also the *soul-lover* **and** the *sin-washer*...

For John writes in verses 5-6, **"To Him who loved us..."** He loved us then, and He loves us now... And so much so, He **"washed us from our sins in His own blood..."** Jesus didn't offer a proxy. It wasn't the blood of a lamb that was spilt for us, it was His own blood! The price Jesus paid for you and me was personal.

And He's **"made us kings and priests to His God and Father..."** Jesus is also the *glory-sharer* and *priest-maker*. Our destiny is to rule with Jesus. He'll end the long-running revolt of Satan. Once and for all Jesus will strip the devil of his authority, and then award it to us.

And He'll make us priests, as well as kings! There is a priestly caste in heaven. For all eternity believers in Jesus will enjoy unrivaled access and proximity to God.

It's interesting, like the Holy Spirit, Jesus also has a seven-fold ministry... He's the **truth-teller**, and **grave-robber**, and **ultimate-ruler**, and **soul-lover**, and **sin-washer**, and **glory-sharer**, and **priest maker**... And how should we respond to Him? John shouts it out, **"To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."**

Praise Him! Shout **"Amen."** **"Amen"** means **"I agree!"** John was moved by the truth of not just what Jesus did, *but of who He is today!* Let's also be motivated by His unveiling! For one truth is certain, **Jesus is not done moving!** Verse 7 forecasts the moment of truth, **"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him."** Jesus is coming back to the planet and to the people who crucified Him!

Technically, there are two second comings of Jesus.

In 1 Thessalonians 4 Jesus comes **"in the clouds"** for His Church. The lost world won't know what happened.

But here He comes **"with clouds, and every eye will see Him..."** This is an in-your-face encounter. Jesus will return to settle scores, exact justice, and judge evil.

We'll talk more about this later... but Jesus comes **"in the clouds"** at the rapture - He'll surprise the world and take His Church. Then He comes **"with clouds"** on the final day. He'll touch down on the Mount of Olives to end man's rebellion, and establish an earthly kingdom.

And notice the addendum to verse 7, **"every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him."** This sounds like Zechariah 12:10. It's a prophetic irony that in the end the Jews will realize their colossal mistake! *They crucified their own Savior - they wounded their Healer!*

And since Jesus has now ascended to heaven, He's sitting at God's right hand. He finished His work of salvation, and His Spirit is busy gathering His Church.

But once the Church is **caught up** - God's wrath will **come down**. A Christ-rejecting world will be punished.

People in today's modern, skeptical world, mock this idea, but in that day they won't escape! The ole Baptist preacher, Vance Havner, once wrote, **"Some of us get laughed at by the swivel-chair experts in eschatology, but when God splits the skies and the stars fall, and the moon turns to blood and men cry for rocks and mountains to fall on them, it's going to be pretty hard for some of us to keep from saying, "I told you so."**

Jesus came to Earth the first time to **pardon**, but He comes a second time to **punish**... The Lamb of God that was laid on the altar, is also the Lion who will roar!

It's a jungle out there! Because of man's rebellion, the world we live in is full of dangerous predators... But Jesus is **King of the Jungle!** He'll return to prove His superiority. And it'll be an *"I told you so"* kind of day."

Today, the world scoffs, *"If Jesus is alive, where is He?"* On that day *"every eye will see Him"*... *only then, it'll be too late.* This is why John writes, *"And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him."* They'll **mourn**, but they were **warned!** *And never took heed.*

For many people history will have an unhappy ending. John sighs himself, verse 7, *"Even so, Amen."*

And here Jesus interjects, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord..."*

"Alpha" and *"Omega"* are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. Jesus is saying *"I am the A to Z."* He's the beginning, and end, *and all that's in between.*

Then Jesus takes the title that was earlier attributed to the Father... He's the One *"who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."* Jesus is claiming to be God - equal to the Father. They have the same status.

Verse 9, *"I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."*

Around 90 AD a second wave of persecution targeted the Church. The Emperor Domitian followed in Nero's footsteps. He arrested and sentenced John to be boiled in hot oil. *Yet God intervened* and miraculously delivered John. And since Domitian couldn't kill him the emperor banished John to Patmos.

Patmos is an island in the Aegean Sea. It's 10 miles long, by 6 miles wide - 15 miles off the coast of Turkey. It's barren, rocky, and desolate. In the first century it held a penal colony where Roman prisoners were sent to do hard labor. Patmos was the first century Alcatraz.

And realize, John is now 90-plus years-old. He's frail, feeble, and scarred over most of his body, souvenirs he's picked up from his brush with death in the boiling oil. Now he's pounding a hammer in a rock quarry.

And John was not the only believer suffering under this Roman reign of terror. All across the empire Christians were being persecuted for *"the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."* *Surely it made John think.*

Remember to this point, all John had seen was *the first revelation* of Jesus. The Infinite became an infant. God's Son came to Earth through the lowest door. Jesus was God, but laid aside the perks of deity.

In fact, Jesus came as a servant. He could've thrown His weight around, and intimidated us into compliance. Instead, Jesus overwhelmed us with His grace. His mercy and tenderness disarmed us, and slipped past our defenses. Our hearts were won by His love. And to bear our punishment, Jesus made Himself defenseless. He laid bare His back to take our stripes.

But now John has some stripes of his own! *Ever seen a burn victim?* Imagine, John covered with scars.

He's thankful Jesus won His heart, *but who's going to win this war?* A battle was raging around John. Good and evil - God and Satan - were slugging it out.

It was a jungle out there... John believed in Jesus, but he needed more than a *Servant to model - or even a Savior to rely on.* For John to endure hardships he and his friends need the hope of a conquering King.

John and the persecuted Church needed a *second Revelation* - the unveiling of an exalted, glorified Christ. They need a Savior who's also a heavy-weight champ.

It reminds me of the middle-age woman with the incurable disease. She checked into the hospital, thinking her days were numbered. But that night she had a vision. An angel told her she'd live another thirty years. She was so excited. She thought, *"If I'm going to live for three more decades I should do so in style."*

So while she was in the hospital she had a face lift, liposuction, a tummy-tuck. After she left, she was crossing the street, and got hit by a truck... *And died!*

When she got to heaven, the lady saw the angel who had visited her. *"You told me I'd live thirty more years."* The angel replied, *"Yea, but I didn't recognize you!"*

I'm afraid this is most people's problem with Jesus. They're so confused about His first revelation, there's no way they would recognize the Lord as He is today!

Over the years artists have painted really pathetic portraits of Jesus! He's depicted weak and frail... or He glows in the dark... or He wears pearly-white robes, and takes a sissified posture... or He uses curlers in His hair, and looks suspiciously effeminate... It's tragic!

We've mistaken the guy who got angry at the Jewish hierarchy - Who made a whip with His own hands, overturned tables, and bounced the crooked priests from the Temple... *as a gentle Jesus meek and mild!*

The real Jesus was a Jewish carpenter. He was a man's man - a blue-collar guy. Jesus was no stranger to hard-work. He pounded nails before the days of power tools. Jesus was a carpenter who liked to fish.

Yet if Christians today are confused as to what Jesus was like when He lived among us, they have no clue as to what He's like today, and how He'll appear when the world sees Him again! This is why we need **a second revelation!** Jesus is still a man, but now a glorified man! He's the man all men were meant to be!

Jesus' humility was temporary. Now He's back on heaven's throne, with the authority He won on Earth.

Realize the Person we serve and follow no longer walks on water - *that's kid's stuff now*. Today, He rides on clouds. He rules in heaven, commands an army, and doles out justice, *as well as mercy*. This is the Revelation John received on Patmos and sends to the seven churches. **What's next?... It's a glorified Christ.**

And John remembers the day this revelation came to him. Verse 10, **"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day..."**

It was a Sunday! Already, the early church was living in the wake of Jesus' resurrection. The Jews gathered on the Sabbath, the last day of the week, but Christians met on the first day of the week - the day Jesus rose! *Sundays were treated like a mini-Easter!*

The first Church preached the cross, but didn't leave Jesus there - *Jesus rose to reign!* After this Revelation they all knew to live in the light of the Exalted Christ.

John says he was **"in the Spirit."** He was dialed in, logged on, worshipping and communing with God, when he **"heard behind (him) a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last..."** The kingdom Jesus launched began and still grows spiritually, but it'll end by coming to power tangibly and politically. Jesus is **first and last.**

And this shapes our duty as Christians... We're part of this spiritual kingdom that's still serving and saving, and we're called to help. But we'll endure persecution and resist temptation only **if we know what's next!**

Ultimately, all wrongs will be righted. Good will triumph. God's people win in the end! **The triumphant Christ is next - this is the theme of John's Revelation!**

Then Jesus said to John... **"What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."** This wasn't an exhaustive list of the

churches in first century Asia. There were more. But Jesus chose these seven churches for a reason... *that we'll talk about next time.*

And here the plot thickens, verse 12, "Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midsts of the seven lampstands One like the Son of man..." John describes Jesus, but before we read His description, note where He's at? "*in the midst of the lampstands.*"

Later we learn the seven lampstands, or the seven-branch Menorah, is a symbol for the seven churches.

In the OT Temple the priest was in charge of lighting and tending the Menorah. Likewise, the Church is the NT Temple, and Jesus is our Priest. Thus, He works among the churches to keep us filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit. This keeps our light shining brightly.

Hey, **what's next** is the glorified Christ, but where do we find Him? **Jesus is hanging out in His Church!**

This is why I'm always saying if you love Jesus you'll love His Church. *The Church is where the action is!* Where is Jesus working in the world today? *In His Church.* He doesn't promise you'll find Him at the Rotary Club, or Little League, or PTA, or a political action committee - or whatever else you're involved in.

Jesus prefers to work in and through His Church. He told His disciples, "**Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.**"

When John sees Jesus He's still a man. "*Son of man*" speaks of His humanity. But John sees Him as only "*like the Son of man.*" His visage was different.

This Revelation is not what John had heard, and seen, and His hands had handled. This is the *Warrior and Ruler* - not just God's *Servant and Sacrifice*. John is going to describe **the King of the Jungle!**

And he starts with what Jesus wears to work... He's "**clothed with a garment down to the feet.**" Commoners and peasants wore knee-length robes. Only a king's robe drug the ground. Jesus is now *King of all kings.*

He's "**girded about the chest with a golden band.**" The OT priests wore a golden breastplate. And Jesus is also priest. As priest He intercedes for His Church.

In the OT there was separation of church and state. The king was prohibited from being a priest. But today John sees Jesus ruling the nations from God's throne - **and** working in God's Temple, the Church!

And he sees... Verse 14, “His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.”

Years ago I had an album cover that tried to replicate this portrait of Jesus. The result was grotesque, *almost sacrilegious*. Don't try to envision this portrait literally. Remember Revelation was encoded with OT images...

For starters, Jesus' white hair isn't a bleach job - or gray-hair. It speaks of His moral and spiritual purity.

And His eyes aren't bloodshot. “Like a flame of fire...” speaks of their searing scrutiny and search-ability.

Jesus doesn't *look past you*, as if you don't matter. He cares about you deeply... He doesn't *look at you*, as if He's sizing you up to figure you out. He knows you perfectly... And He doesn't *look to you*, as if He needs anything from you. Jesus is sufficient in and of Himself. But Jesus does *looks through you!* His stare penetrates and uncovers the real you. You can't hide sin, or play the hypocrite under His searching gaze.

And Jesus' brass feet doesn't mean He has a lead foot. Brass is a mixture of iron and copper. Iron is strong, but it rusts. Copper keeps its shine, but bends. Brass is a mixture of strength *and* endurance. So when Jesus puts His foot down, He means it - it's emphatic.

And the voice of Jesus is like the “*sound of many waters*” - literally a waterfall. I'll never forget standing at the bottom of Niagara Falls. You can scream into the ear of the person next to you, and won't be heard.

Jesus had spoken to John while on Earth. Now for sixty years John had heard “*the still small voice*” - the quiet whispers of His Spirit - but now this is different!

The Lion roars... Jesus' voice is like a waterfall. It drowns out all other voices. Today we're surrounded by the competing opinions of political pundits, and social media, and other talking heads. But the voice of Jesus muffles all other influences. He gets our attention.

And in His right hand Jesus holds seven stars. Verse 20 explains... “*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*”

which you saw are the seven churches.” The “*lampstands*” are churches. Jesus said we are “the light of the world”...

And the “*stars*” are angels. It could be every church has a guardian angel. *If so, I’m sure we make our guy work overtime...* The Greek term here for “*angels*” means simply “*messenger*.” And it could also refer to “*pastors*.” Not to say your pastor is an angel - *not hardly* - but we are messengers of Jesus to His church.

Either way, whether “*stars*” are “*angels*” or “*pastors*” the point is they both are in the Lord’s “*right hand*.” This is the hand that speaks of His authority - which means any authority vested in the Church comes from Jesus... All pastors are accountable to that right hand!

Verse 16, “*Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword...*” The Scripture speaks of itself as a two-edged sword. It’s sharp and incisive. It *cuts coming and going*. It opens us up, and lays us bear, and fillets our pride. Today, Jesus works powerfully through His Word.

Finally, John describes Jesus’ overall countenance. It “*was like the sun shining in its strength*.” Eyeballing the glorified Christ would be like looking directly into the sun. **His glory blinds us to every other interest!**

John writes, “*And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead*.” On Earth, Jesus and John hung out. They were friendly. They went fishing. Now John sees Jesus and His knees wobble. He hits the deck. The glorified Christ takes His breath away. John is speechless.

During his time in office President Obama played basketball with his aides, I’m sure they had fun. But nobody hacked the president. If he had a break-away you let him have the basket. You didn’t risk injuring the Commander and Chief. You treat the President different than a pal. *And the same is true of Jesus!*

At His first coming we learned Jesus wants to be our friend, our Savior. But this Revelation teaches us He is more than a friend. Jesus is not your “*Homeboy*” or “*the Guy Upstairs*.” Jesus deserves and expects our respect. John collapsed at His feet and worshipped!

But notice Jesus’ reply to John. It’s beautiful. “*But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen."* Jesus comforts John. His clothes, hair, eyes, feet, mouth are different than at His first revelation. **But the one thing that hasn’t changed is Jesus’ heart...**

That's when He says, "And I have the keys of Hades and of Death." If you're concerned about heaven and hell, and what happens after you die, *Jesus is the go-to-guy!* No one else has a say in the matter. Jesus alone has the keys to *afterlife* and *end of life*. He has the final say on *when you die*, and *where you go*.

John closes the chapter with a helpful outline for the book of Revelation. The angel says to him, "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."

"The things which you have seen" is chapter 1. It's the vision John received of the risen, glorified Christ.

"The things which are" is chapters 2-3 - Jesus' seven letters to the seven churches. John was living in the Church-age. And it has lasted now some 2000 years.

But the rest of the book, "The things which will take place after this..." is chapters 4-22. And once the Church is *caught away* - then sweeping judgments will *pave the way* for the ultimate triumph of King Jesus!

So *what's next* in God's plan? **Jesus is next!** Jesus in all His glory is the next big deal in God's plan. He's the A to Z - the beginning and end. Let this revelation burn into your heart - sear it with the realization of the glorified Christ -and you'll find the keys to victory!