

## REVELATION: Revelation 1

### Getting Started:

Revelation 1 is an introduction containing much important information that will form the backbone of the book. Many readers often pay little attention to an introduction assuming that it has nothing significant to say. Quite the opposite, however, is true. The Revelation's introduction as we find it in Ch. 1 is an informational treasure trove that readers need to know. In our first study we noted that Revelation is written to churches struggling under Roman rule. The question is, what do these churches need in order to flourish and accomplish their task and reason for being in this context? John's introduction provides three critical answers, communication, affirmation, presence.

### The Core:

**1:1 Revelation** – This is not primarily a revelation of future events. This is a Revelation of Jesus Christ that involves the revealing of Jesus by Jesus as God unfolds human history both present and future in AD 95. God is unveiling Jesus Christ for all to see.

### 1:1-3 COMMUNICATION

#### a. v.1 *Line of communication*

God -> Jesus -> Angels -> John -> servants (Churches)

Letter isn't John's idea, it comes from the heart of the highest heavenly authority.

**b. v.1 Bondservants.** The term used here is "doulos" or servant (slave).

"A bondservant is a slave. In some Bibles the word *bondservant* is the translation of the Greek word *doulos*, which means "one who is subservient to, and entirely at the disposal of, his master; a slave." Other translations use the word *slave* or *servant*. In Roman times, the term *bondservant* or *slave* could refer to someone who voluntarily served others. But it usually referred to one who was held in a permanent position of servitude. Under Roman law, a bondservant was considered the owner's personal property. Slaves essentially had no rights and could even be killed with impunity by their owners.

The Hebrew word for "bondservant," *'ebed*, had a similar connotation. However, the Mosaic Law allowed an indentured servant to become a bondservant voluntarily: "If the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,' then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life" ([Exodus 21:5-6](#))." (Got Questions)

The intended audience are those who are the servants of Jesus. These are represented as the seven churches in Asia Minor. Bondservants sets out and identifies the relationship that exists between master and servant.

#### c. V.1, 2 *Certainty and proximity of events to take place*

The idea here is that what is written will certainly **take place** (doubt removed) and it will **be soon** (the churches are not abandoned). "Soon" suggests the idea of necessity over timing (Neufeld). "Soon" isn't meant as a time stamp so that we begin to watch our clocks. It's a note of urgency so we pay attention. Notice also the desire to "show" (V.1) the bond servants what will happen. Revelation is a very visual/verbal book.

#### **d. V.3 *The certainty of blessing***

Blessing is attached to the Reader and hearer as they engage (hear and obey) this letter's contents. It's designed as a call to God's servants to action. An ethical response is anticipated. We understand prophecy first and foremost as having a predictive function concerning the future. Biblically, however, the prophet's primary function was less about predicting the future as it was being God's spokesman in the present. In this sense Moses was a prophet (Deut 34:10). We most often think about Revelation in predictive terms. John is more concerned about how the churches are functioning in the present as each of the letters to the churches will attest. Eugene Peterson points out, **"There are, to be sure, references to the past and implications for the future, but the predominant emphasis of the prophetic word is on the now. There are predictive elements in some prophecy (and some in the Revelation), but they are always in the service of the present message."**

#### **1:4-8 AFFIRMATION of relationship between writer/audience/divine author**

##### **a. V.4 *writer/audience identified***

John's readers live in the Province of Asia Minor, governed by Rome. They are addressed as the 7 churches. They're the primary audience of John's writing.

This is also a place to consider the literal and symbolic nature of Revelation. Numbers in Revelation, as in the Bible as a whole, can serve both a symbolic and literal function i.e. 7 days of creation. The 7 churches can be literally identified, but 7 can also describe the church as a whole. If so, Revelation has a broader message than just to seven literal churches. It addresses the church of Jesus Christ as a whole.

##### **b. V.4, 5 *divine author***

John wishes upon them grace and peace from the Godhead Father/Spirit/Son.

These two elements are essential to the churches because of their circumstances.

John identifies each member of the Godhead. Note the extended description of the Son – Jesus. The amount of space Jesus is given is important.

Father - one who is, was, and is coming (eternal)

Spirit – (seven Spirits/sevenfold Spirit) reference to perfection of the Spirit.

Son - Faithful witness/ resurrected/ ruler of the kings of the earth.

Jesus is the preeminent one. These descriptions remind us of the life of Christ in the gospels. He came as a faithful witness/ died and was raised from the dead/ ruler of the kings of the earth ascended and exalted on high. The point is that there is an intimate relationship between the Father, the Spirit, and the Son. Note the special attention given to the Son's role by virtue of space dedicated to describing him. This secures his role as the ruler over all. Nothing is beyond him. He indeed rules over all the kings of the earth.

**Imagine how the Roman authorities would have evaluated and responded to this information?**

##### **c. V.5b, 6 *relationship of divine author to audience***

Here the work of Jesus is identified. This one who is the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth, is also the one who loves us, has released us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be **a kingdom of priests** to his God and Father. V. 6 expands the ministry of Jesus by focusing how this faithful witness, first born of the dead, ruler over the kings of the earth relates to his people. Jesus has an intimate, powerful and purposeful relationship with the church. The last line of V.6 is especially important because it identifies the churches role on earth in light of their being loved and redeemed. The church functions in a way similar to the OT priests in the Tabernacle and Temple. We offer God sacrifices and worship through Jesus as we follow him and listen to his instruction. We like the OT priests have been consecrated to service before God. As such we're not free to do whatever we wish. **We need to think seriously about what our relationship with God through Christ really means. V.6 helps us get deeper into that meaning, and defines our life and conduct.**

#### **d. V.7 Possible theme of letter**

V.7 combines two OT quotes Dan 7:14/Zech 12:10. This is indeed good news for God's servants. Their faith will be vindicated. Behold all will see him. As mentioned, sight is essential in Revelation. It's repeated over 50X in the letter.

God will display himself publically in a way no one can miss. The world missed him once, but not again. Those who pierced him will mourn. The return of the king puts everyone on notice, the churches and the world alike.

#### **e. V.8 Repetition of divine author's position**

This information repeated to emphasize complete and total authority.

### **1:9-20 PRESENCE John's story/vision/commission**

#### **a. V.9 John's fellowship with Jesus and his audience**

V. 9 is actually key to John's admonition to the churches. John brings to bear on his reader's life what he has just said to them about their relationship with Jesus (refer back to 1:5, 6).

John tells his readers that they and he share in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Koinonia = participating in the life of Christ. (Paul – Phil. 3:1-11 – fellowship of his suffering)

Participation entails suffering/kingdom/steadfastness. This all part of being in Jesus. Jesus went through the same things as they are now, so persevere.

Kingdom here connects with what has just been said in V.6.

G.K. Beale - **“This is the formula for kingship: faithful endurance through tribulation is the means by which one reigns in the present with Jesus. Believers are not mere subjects in Christ's kingdom. ‘Fellow partaker’ underscores the active involvement of saints not only in enduring tribulation, but also in reigning in the midst of it.” Just as Christ ruled in a veiled way through suffering, so do Christians now.**

Christians now reign and rule with Christ as they conquer sin and not compromise their faithful witness (Beale). Their endurance is part of their conquering (Beale). At his death

Jesus was exalted and raised. So too we also shall be exalted in Christ at the right time. (1 Peter 5:6, Eph. 2:6, 7, 8). John wants his readers to learn something from his Patmos exile experience.

**b. V.10, 11 the commission proper**

In the Spirit isn't an unusual way to introduce a vision in the apocalyptic style. John was worshiping when God brought the vision to him. Some think that a more proper rendering of V.10 is that the Spirit had John at the place of the Day of The Lord, that final day yet to come. The precise meaning is not clear. In the Spirit reminds us though that this was God speaking through John.

The seven churches are now named specifically. God knows each church by name. God doesn't deal with nameless masses, he knows personally who he is talking to. John reaffirms that his call comes from God.

**c. V.12-16 The content of the commission/The vision**

The strong visual images of the apocalyptic style here help the churches to actually see in sharp relief what many words could not accomplish with the same clarity.

The arrangement of the lampstands surrounding the son of man is central. He is among the churches. Visualize, draw a picture of what he is talking about. The arrangement takes away any sense of separation or distance that might have been felt by the churches.

The connection between Daniel and this vision is totally intentional. "Son of man" helps the readers, as Daniel, see him as connected with people, while glorified lifts this glorified one to a place of majesty and ultimate power.

The overwhelming nature of the vision of the "son of man" is meant to remind John's readers of what John has already said, Jesus is the one who rules over the rulers of the earth V.5. Dr. Ed Neufeld notes that this vision is intended to remind those who hear and see it that this is where the real power lies. By comparison, all the earthly rulers with whom the churches must deal are "really quite shabby."

Lampstands = Menorahs in the Holy place in the tabernacle. The churches are seen in the context of worship in a special place. This is how God views his church in all its constituent parts. They're lights in God's temple shining in the world.

By the description given here, the son of man has a priestly function as well in conjunction with him standing among the lampstands.

Thought - we will not progress spiritually beyond the image of Jesus we possess.

Patmos - an island close to the churches mentioned

**As God walked with his people in the OT by the pillar of fire and cloud, and through Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the NT, so here God visually reminds his people that they have not been abandoned. He is among them.**

#### **d. V.17, 18 John's response**

John is no mere observer of the vision, he's deeply affected by it. A hand reaches out to touch him. A very personal connection.

#### **e. V.19-20 John's commission reaffirmed**

Notice repetition of call to write.

Write the things seen, which are and will take place.

This phrase is probably best understood not as a threefold division but as a twofold division. One main clause write the things you have seen; i.e., the things which are and the things yet to take place. As such Revelation weaves back and forth between these two points of view reminding the churches of the future and the present as Peterson has pointed out.

The content of first chapter of Revelation reminds me of the benediction the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews blesses his readers with at the conclusion of his teaching, **“Now to the God of peace who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever Amen.”**

#### **Making it Real:**

Far from being hidden and mysterious, chapter one is intensely revealing and practical because, like John in exile on Patmos, his readers are living in difficult circumstances. When people journey through suffering they need at least three things, communication, affirmation, and a sense of presence. They desperately need a word from the Lord and the entire content of Ch 1 is designed to begin on a deeply personal and powerful note so as to establish a strong tone in the life of the seven churches to help them fulfill their ministry. In Ch 1 God through John does three important things in each of the paragraphs identified. Paragraph 1- 1:1-3, God affirms that he is speaking to his people with a desire to show them what must take place. And his desire is that by the readers participating in this letter by reading it and listening to it they will be blessed. Paragraph 2 - 1:4-8, God affirms his relationship to his people. He is their redeemer through Jesus, and in Jesus they're loved, freed and made to serve him. Paragraph 3 - 1:9-20, God is close to his people. He is present, in fact he is among them. The vision is meant to affirm this in the life of these churches.

When we lose sight of him, we are not in danger of losing our salvation, we are in danger of losing our effectiveness as the church which he has called to life in Christ. He is also sovereign and supreme. He has a plan which he will unfold that will ultimately vindicate his people in a clear and unmistakable way. This is good encouragement for us also because we stand in the same place as did the servants to who John wrote originally. We are called to persevere as we, like they wait for God's final plan to unfold.