

# Of All The Books

The Great Revealing of Jesus Christ

**Revelation 1:1** The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,

<sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

<sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

<sup>4</sup> John 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,

<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. 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.

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

<sup>9</sup> I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

<sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet

<sup>11</sup> saying, "Write what you see in a book 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."

<sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,

<sup>13</sup> and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

<sup>14</sup> The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire,

<sup>15</sup> his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.

<sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

<sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last,

<sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

<sup>19</sup> Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

<sup>20</sup> As for the mystery of the seven stars that 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.

(Revelation 1:1-20)

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## Oh The Books

Solomon once said in his famous book, “My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh” (Ecc 12:12).

On the other hand, Erasmus said, “When I get a little money, I buy books; and if any is left, I buy food and clothes.”

In 1849, we discovered the 7<sup>th</sup> cent. BC library of Ashurbanipal. It yielded some 30,000 clay tablets or fragments. When the library of Alexandria was burnt (accidentally?) by Julius Caesar in 48 BC, some estimates put the number of volumes in that single library at 700,000 scrolls. Then there’s the Vatican library which some say has collected as many as 2,000,000 books. According to legends, books go all the way back to the days before the Flood which destroyed nearly all records of things that existed for who knows how long.

When Google began its massively ambitious plan to digitize every single book in the world, it needed to first figure out what constitutes a book? They decided their definition would include all printed material that comprises an “idealized bound volume.” Printed material, of course, takes us back only to the time of Gutenberg about 584 years ago. They concluded in 2010 they would need to digitize 129,864,800 books! An updated 2016 estimate put the number at 134,021,533!<sup>1</sup> If the numbers hold true, this

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<sup>1</sup> Roma Panganiban, “How Many Books Have Ever Been Published,” *Mental Floss* (Sept 9, 2016), <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/85305/how-many-books-have-ever-been-published>.

would mean there are probably something like **140 million books** in print since the printing press was invented.

Honestly, even the 30,000 number is so fantastic, it is difficult to comprehend. And that's the smallest of all these numbers, by far. To put it into perspective, **how many stars** can you see with the naked eye? According to the *Yale Catalogue of Bright Stars*, on the darkest, clearest night you can see a grand total of 9,095 stars with the naked eye. So there were 3x that many books in Ashurbanipal's library and 15.5 million times that of books printed since Gutenberg.

Into this, it should be obvious that **one person in world history** has more books written about him than any other. It's not even close. That is Jesus of Nazareth. I went looking for **estimates** and could find no one even attempting an exact number. The closest I could find was someone saying, "Tens of thousands." *Christian Book Distributors* has to be the largest Christian bookstore in the world, and I assume that most of its books are about Jesus (I won't make any theological comments about that though). A simple search reveals that they have 233,825 books on sale. I therefore must assume that there have to be millions of books that have been written about him, and that wouldn't include the sermons you could put into book format!

Now think about this. The last verse of John's Gospel says, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). Kind of sounds like a prophecy given what I've just said. I think this statement is summarized nicely by the following quotations. "The greatness of the revelation of God in the Logos-Son is vaster than the cosmos created through him."<sup>2</sup> And John "closes this wonderful Gospel, whose depths of wisdom and love will never be fathomed by the sons of earth."<sup>3</sup>

If all the books on earth could not plumb the depths of the glories that belong to Jesus Christ, what's the point of writing about him? There is a virtual parallel to this verse just a chapter earlier in John's Gospel that tells us. He says, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his Name" (John 20:30-31).

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<sup>2</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 416.

<sup>3</sup> Alvah Hovey, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, The Complete Commentary on the New Testament (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1885), 419.

John 20:30-31

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John 21:25

Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

If we were to combine these two ideas of writing a book so that you might have life in Christ forever and at the same time begin to see something of the infinite glory of Jesus, where might we go?

Of the millions of books that have been written about him, one stands out as a cut above all the others—the true Hope Diamond of both revelatory gems. Unfortunately, and perhaps because of the brightness of its glory, many people look away from both of those purposes when reading it and stray onto other paths. After John finished composing his Gospel masterpiece, the risen Lord Jesus came to him in a series of visions with a command. “Write what you see in

a book and send it to the seven churches” (Rev 1:11). This book is the book of Revelation or as the first three words put it, “The apocalypse/unveiling/revealing/revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1).

## The Literary Setting of Revelation 1

As you can see from vs. 11, putting these visions into a book was the means God would use to reveal the vast glories of Christ and the things to come to the seven churches. Stating that in terms of John’s Gospel, its purpose is that God’s people might see the Glory and come to a living, saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It’s the same idea in both books.

But Revelation is especially glorious at revealing the Glory in a way unsurpassed in world literature. It does this both in terms of propositions, from which we derive doctrine and theology, which is the normal means of revelation, but also in terms of the word choices, images, metaphors, symbols, and even the literary features like the structures it chooses to use. Let’s begin with the structure, as it is always good to get an overview of what we are looking at.

Typical outlines are linear, as that’s the way we have trained our scholars in the West. These can be very helpful at understanding the propositions. In this case, they usually

point out how the book **opens like a letter** and then, after the introductions, moves into a vision with John's response. Here are two examples:

- A. Introduction (1-3)
- B. Salutation and Adoration (4-6)
- C. Announcement of Christ's Second Coming (7)
- D. Christ's Self-Designation (8)
- E. John's Commission to Write the Apocalypse (9-11)
- F. The Vision of the Son of Man (12-16)
- G. The Effect of the Vision on John (17-20)<sup>4</sup>

## **I. Prologue (1-8)**

- A. Title (1-2)
- B. Beatitude (3)
- C. Epistolary Prescript (4-5c)
- D. Doxology (5d-6)
- E. Two Prophetic Oracles (7-8)

## **II. John's Vision of Christ and His Commission (9-3:22)**

- A. Vision of "One Like A Son of Man" (9-20)
  - 1. Setting of the Vision (9)
  - 2. Initial Revelatory Experiences (10-11)
  - 3. The Vision of the One Like A Son of Man (12-20)
    - a. Introduction (12a)
    - b. The Vision (12b-16)
    - c. John's Reaction (17a)
    - d. The Message of the Exalted Christ (17b-20)<sup>5</sup>
- B. ...

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<sup>4</sup> **William Hendriksen**, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1967), 51-57.

<sup>5</sup> **David E. Aune**, *Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1997), spread out over many chapters.



But as we saw in the Introduction last time, the **ancient Hebrew mind** often worked much more commonly **in circles or cycles**, which are easily expressed in the form of a **chiasm**. Revelation forms a huge, gigantic chiasm where virtually every idea in the book is repeated in a parallel later on. This is also true of the smaller units. In our case today, we have **two of them** that form Chapter One. Seeing them and comparing them will reveal something of the glory of Jesus Christ in a way that just going through an outline obscures.

These structures **divide the chapter in half at vs. 12**. The first half begins in **vs. 1** with God giving this revelation of Jesus “**to show to his servants**” the things that must soon take place. It ends in **vs. 11** with John being told to “**write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches**.” The **seven church** are **his servants**, which helps you understand what a church is supposed to be. It is not here as some kind of power-hungry, world-conquering empire. It is not here as some kind of corporation whose goals is to make as much money as possible. We are not people who come merely for our own pleasure and delight. We are **God’s servants** on earth, kept here to do his bidding. As it says in **vs. 3**, “**Blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it**.” This is what it means to be his servant.

Curiously, the second unit begins in **vs. 12** with John turning to see a voice speaking to him, but when he turned he saw “**seven golden lampstands.**” “**Seven**” connects this verse to the previous one. The unit ends in **vs. 20** with the seven golden lampstands again, but this time it tells us directly that “**the seven lampstands are the seven churches.**” Therefore, **both units begin and end with the church.** That’s very interesting to me, because it may in fact mean that the two units are themselves parallel to one another.

### Revelation 1’s Double Chiasm

- A. (1) The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show **to his servants** the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,
- B. (2) who bore witness to **the word of God** and to **the testimony of Jesus Christ**, even to all that he saw. (3) Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.
- C. (4) John 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,
- D. (5a) and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings **on earth**.
- E. (5b) **To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood** (6) **and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**
- D’. (7) 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.
- C’. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, **“who is and who was and who is to come,** the Almighty.”
- B’. (9) I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of **the word of God** and **the testimony of Jesus**.
- A’. (10) I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet (11) saying, “Write what you see in a book 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.”
- ↔ A. 12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw **seven golden lampstands**, (13a) and in the midst of **the lampstands**
- B. (13b) **one like a son of man**, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. (14) The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, (15) his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16a) In his **right hand**
- C. (16b) he held **seven stars**: from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.
- D. (17a) When **I saw him**, I fell at his feet as though dead.
- E. (17b) **But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, (18) and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.**
- D’. (19) Write therefore the things **that you have seen**, those that are and those that are to take place after this.
- C’. (20a) As for the mystery of the **seven stars** that you saw
- B’. (20b) in my **right hand**,
- ↔ A’. (20) and the **seven golden lampstands**, the seven stars are the angels of **the seven churches**, and the **seven lampstands are the seven churches**.

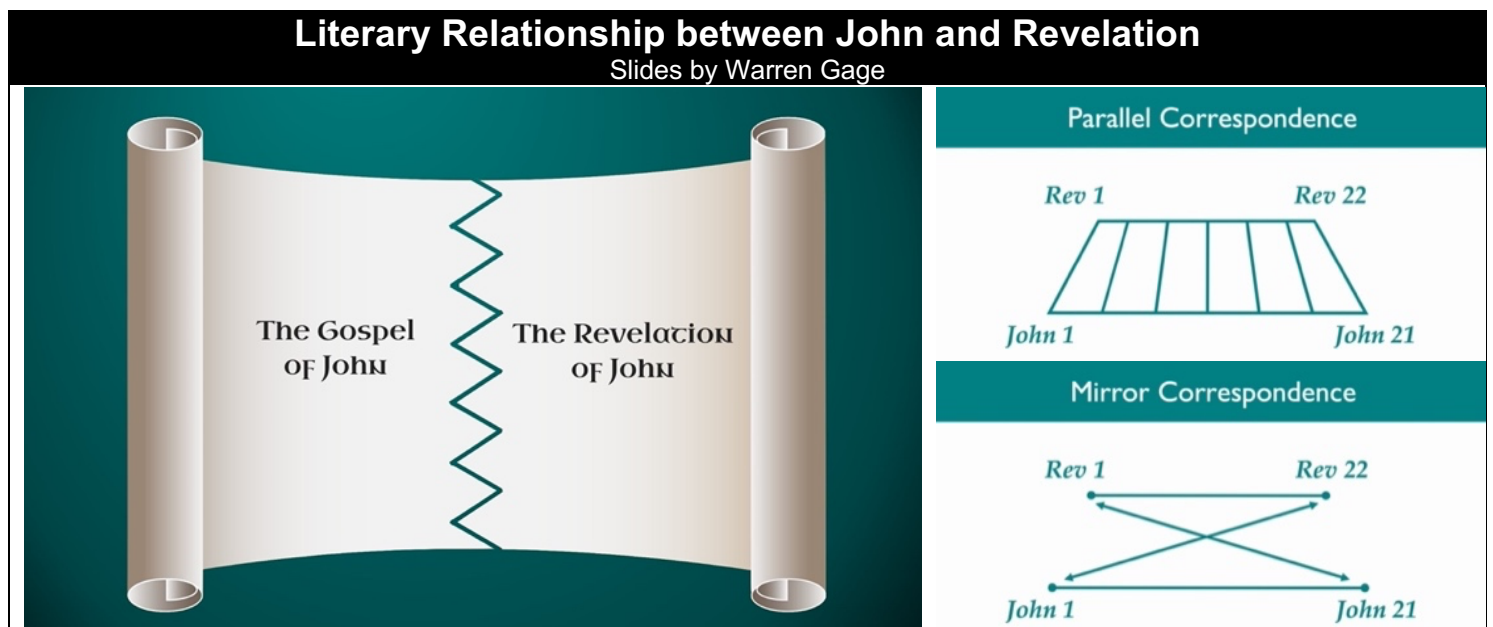
In fact, when we go to the center of the first chiasm, which we find in vv. 5-6, it tells us about “him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.” The center of the second, in vv. 17-18 says, “I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.” Jesus blood and his death parallel in the two passages, but so also do being freed and having keys. In other words, the two units are parallel and therefore mutually support one another like twin pillars guarding the entrance to a great cathedral.

What we see then is that though the church begins and ends each section, it is Jesus who is the center of them both. Not only is it Jesus, but it is something very specific about him—his death for his people which frees them from the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil. That is the heart of the doctrine of the first chapter. However, how it gets to this doctrine, the steps between the church and Christ’s death, is where the true glory of Christ is seen in unique ways.

We will begin to look at this in a moment. But one other structure will help us as we do this. This is the relationship that exist between John’s Gospel and Revelation. Both books, compiled by John at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are related in extremely intricate, perhaps infinite ways. Put together by a Mind that I can scarcely begin to

comprehend, we are going to look at the chapter not only on its own terms, but in terms of the parallels that it has both with the beginning and ending of John's Gospel.

To understand why, you need to see that John and Revelation were written to form a single tapestry (see left slide). They do this in two ways. First, there is a parallel correspondence (top slide on right) where chapter 1 of both books mirror each other. This goes all the way to the end in **Rev 22** and **John 21**. Second, there is an inverse parallel (bottom slide on right) where **Rev 1** matches **John 21** and **John 1** matches **Rev 22**. The fact that both of these could happen together is truly astonishing, yet they do. When analyzed and understood, they will help us make more sense of the Glory of Jesus Christ and why he is the center piece not only of this chapter, but of the entire book as we move along.



## “Soon to Take Place”

God gave the revelation of Jesus Christ to his servants that they might see the things that must **soon take place** (1). This refers **not just to a few things**, but to all of the things in the book. But how can that be? Even Preterists admit that the **Second Coming** is predicted in the book, yet Jesus has not returned in 2,000 years. It is because of the already-not yet.

The **already/not yet** is scholarly jargon for Christ having already done things which will themselves have a greater or final manifestation in the future. The **kingdom**, which is found in the center of the first structure (**Rev 1:5-6**) is a good example and seems in fact to be on John’s mind in the first verse, because he has used Daniel’s language from Daniel 2 and changed “**what must take place in the latter days**” to “**what must soon take place,**” and that referred to the coming of the kingdom of Christ which crushes all others into fine dust.

This kingdom is mentioned in **vs. 6** when it says that God has “**made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father...**” Harkening back to **Exodus 19:6** where **Israel** is called this, the language now applies to **eschatological Israel**: the church. Christians even today are still awaiting Jesus returning in power in his kingdom during a future

millennium. What many do not seem to understand is that we, his people, *are* his kingdom! This is precisely what Jesus himself told us. “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). Yes, Jesus will return bodily to rule in the new heavens and new earth at some point. But that does not mean his kingdom is not yet here in any sense. That’s the already/not yet.

In fact, both centers of the two halves of the first chapter explain why we can be Christ’s kingdom. Jesus has already freed us from our sins by his blood. Christians have been freed from the dominion of Satan and are therefore free to be called to another kingdom. Further, Christ has justified us, declared us not guilty in Christ. Justification is a *present* reality, just as our legal freedom from the dark kingdom of the devil is. It allows God’s kingdom to come upon his people now, because they are the holy temple stones that are being built up by the Holy Spirit.

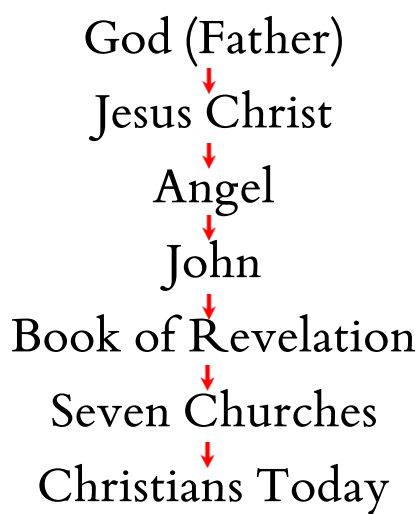
But again, there is a future reality here, something “not yet” seen. We still sin. We still often act like slaves of Satan. The seven churches will see this all too up close and personal soon enough. We await the fullness of what it means for us to be glorified like Christ is glorified. And this takes me back to this idea of glory in Revelation. We need to see a glimpse

of what that glory will be, so that it might help us as a means of grace to withstand the onslaughts of living in the present evil age. But we must see the glory, not by looking to the glory of the Father, though he is here in this chapter. We must look at the glory of Jesus Christ.

## The Glory Unveiled

### *Hidden Glory*

The glory comes to our minds in two ways in this chapter. **One is hidden.** The other is **unveiled.** God, he says, communicated to John through **an angel (1).** This is because **no man may see the Father's glory and live.** But as we will see, even this form of angelic revelation is life-threatening. When we add it all together, we get **seven lines of communication** to get the truth to us today:



God uses means to communicate his messages to his people. And he does it perfectly (seven), so that we might live. This is the hidden or veiled glory of God—hidden to us through word and Word. We’ve been talking about the book-word. What about the other Word?

John tells us that he “bore witness to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw” (Rev 1:2). We don’t get what he saw ... yet. That’s in the second half of the chapter. Here we see only that he testifies or bears witness that he saw it. This is the language of the courtroom. John is swearing an oath. If he is lying, may he be accursed.

This is also what he says in his Gospel. The first time is about a different John (The Baptist). He came as a witness, to bear witness about *the light* (John 1:7). And what is this light? The Word of God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1, 14). This incarnate Word of God, this God in human flesh, he says this is God’s glory. “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (14). Jesus in thus the flesh is thus God’s glory hidden and veiled. When you believe upon Jesus, that he is the Glory of God,



then you are blessed. “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it” (Rev 1:3). This has a parallel, not in the beginning of John, but near the end. “Jesus said to him [Thomas], ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’” (John 20:29).

A second parallel at the end is the last time John talks about a testimony in his Gospel. This time it doesn’t refer to John the Baptist, but to himself. “This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24). In this way, hearing and believing *the written word* is parallel to seeing and believing *the Incarnate Word* in the first century. Both are the hidden glory of God to us.

And it is not only his glory hidden in Christ. It is his glory hidden in the *mysterious, foolish (to man) works of Christ*—his incarnation, his ministry, his death—the center of the chapter. Moving forward past the introduction of the letter to the salutation and beyond takes us slowly towards this. “John 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” (4).

Here we have the two other members of the Trinity introduced. First is **the Father**. The Father is the one who “was/is/is-to-come” in this verse. This is the language of the God of the Exodus. God reveals himself to Moses as “**I AM Who I AM**” (**Ex 3:14**). Most people default this to the Father as the one who bears the title in both stories. But in Exodus, it is the Angel of the LORD who is the God who speaks these words. Similarly, we read in Isaiah about the LORD, “**I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he**” (**Isa 41:4; cf. 43:10; 44:6; 48:12**). In Rev 1:4, it is the Father, however in the parallel vs. 8, it is now Jesus! The two are one.

The seven spirits before the throne is a reference to **the Holy Spirit** who is likened to **seven torches** before the throne later in the book (**Rev 4:5**). The Spirit is the Fire of God! His seven-fold fire is what lights the lampstands which are the seven churches and keeps them blazing, even as it was tongues of fire from the Spirit that began the kindling at Pentecost. If the fire goes out or strange fire is brought in, the churches become profaned.

Here, the **seven-fold Spirit** seems to harken back to Isaiah 7 and a messianic prophecy. “**And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of**

knowledge and the fear of the LORD” (Isa 11:2). A seven-fold Spirit empowering the Messiah.

Hence, in Revelation 1:5, Jesus appears, completing the Triune opening. In it, Jesus is called “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth” (Rev 1:5). This and the next verse form the center of the first half of the chapter. John was a witness to Jesus; Jesus is the witness to the Father in heaven (the Father also witnesses about him). This language is coming from another Messianic prophecy—Psalm 89. “I will make him my *first-born*, higher than *the kings of the earth* ... and as the moon that is established for ever, and as the *faithful witness* in heaven” (Ps 89: 27, 37 LXX). Jesus, is the Great Davidic King, the one who covenants with us (that’s the language of witnessing in the heavens). He is King because he is the *firstborn*, a title we find of Jesus that means “beginning” or “chief.” In the second half of the verse, we learn that this Jesus loves us. God loves us!

This love is expressed in action, not sentiment. There are two of them. He “has freed us from our sins by his blood” (Rev 1:5). Jesus died for us to free us from death, which is what our sins deserve. His death becomes the first of two actions that are at the heart of this part of the chapter. The

second is that he “*has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father*” (1:6). If he is the King, he has to have a kingdom.

But we do not come into this kingdom as peasants or slaves. We are *priests* to his God and Father. Priests serve in the Holy Place—the temple. They offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving for the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus the Lamb. This is a holy and high calling. From service to death to service to life. The first act, worship, appropriately comes immediately after, “*To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*” John is acting as a priest, worshiping God! This language comes from *Daniel 7:14* where the Son of Man comes to the Ancient of Days and was given *dominion and glory*. John is saying (and will say it more and more) that this Son of Man is receiving his kingdom is now!

But there’s that word *glory* again. All this is still *a hidden glory*, hidden in the work of Christ, just as it was in *John 1:14*. But now it extends to this invisible calling of his church as priests in a heavenly temple that normal unregenerate men do not and will not see unless God opens their eyes. It is very important that you see and believe in this hidden glory of Christ, for by it you will be saved. It is the glory of God to reveal this very word to your heart to

save you. It is the chief way that God reveals his glory to us—clothed in humility, ordinary means, foolish work, common words that are the only life giving gospel. It takes faith to see it. May God grant it to you.

### *Revealed Glory*

But there is more to the glory. God **doesn't always cloak it**. Suddenly, this hidden glory of Jesus, hidden by his human flesh in the first coming, by his works, and in the mystery of his church has just a little light begin to shine on it. **“Behold, he is coming with the clouds”** (**Rev 1:7**). This, too, is Daniel 7 language, as the Son of Man came to the Ancient of Days **riding the clouds of heaven** (**Dan 7:13**). This time, he is returning to earth.

**“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”** (7). Those who pierced him comes from **Zechariah 12:10** which prophecies of the death of Christ by crucifixion. But John modifies the prophecy. **“The rejection of God's messenger and the consequent repentant mourning are not limited to Israelites but affirmed of all nations. Those who mourn are not those who literally crucified Jesus but**

those who are guilty of rejecting him.”<sup>6</sup> “The earth” here and its tribes is parallel with the “kings of the earth” in vs. 5, and certainly, they will not be excluded from this mourning if they reject the Son. For that is what Psalm 2 teaches us.

The one “who is and who was and who is to come” now returns in vs. 8. It is “the Lord God.” He says, “I,” meaning that it is the previous speaker who is talking. *Jesus* is the Lord God. Jesus is the one who was, is, and is to come. He is also called the Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet—he is A to Z, beginning and end, first and last ... “The Almighty,” *Pantokrator*, the Lord of Hosts. There is so much OT language going on here. If you see it, if you know it, then you will know that this Jesus Christ is none other than the God of the OT! What glory this is.

We saw last time that John identifies himself as the Apostle who was on the island of Patmos facing persecution and tribulation because of the kingdom and testimony of Jesus (Rev 1:9). This is part of his greeting in the formal part of Revelation. He gives us a little more of the setting.

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day...” (10). This refers to the First Day of the week, the day that Jesus rose from the

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<sup>6</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 197.

dead (**Didache 14:1; Magnesians 9:1**; etc.).<sup>7</sup> The Spirit had taken hold of John and he was having visions. “I heard a behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write what you see in a book 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’” (11).

Patmos is mentioned for more than just the setting. It is across the waters of the Aegean Sea off the coast of Asia Minor, the home of these churches. This ending of the first half of the chapter has a fascinating parallel in the Gospel of John. This one is in the last chapter of John. After the resurrection, “Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples *by the Sea...*” (**John 21:1**). “And he revealed himself in this way” (1b). “Simon Peter, Thomas (Called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee [James and John], and two others of his disciples were together...” (2). Did you see it? Jesus calls out to *seven* apostles from *across the sea* after his *resurrection*. Jesus calls out to the *seven churches*

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<sup>7</sup> “There is no reason for identifying ‘the Lord’s Day’ with ‘the Day of the Lord’. The Lord’s Day is the day which we observe in commemoration of the Lord’s resurrection; just as the Lord’s Supper, 1 Cor. 11:20, is the supper which we observe in remembrance of the Lord’s death on the cross. The term ‘the Day of the Lord’ is a translation of the Hebrew ‘the Day of Jehovah’ and has a completely different meaning. To identify these two terms in support of the notion that John in the Spirit was transported to the day of Christ’s second coming is quite without foundation.” **Hendriksen**, p. 55, n. 2

from *across the sea* on the day of the *resurrection*. This is the beginning of the mystical body of Christ in Revelation paralleling the physical life of Christ in John.

As glorious and stunning as this is, it also takes us to the heart of the glories of Christ that are revealed so uniquely in Revelation in the second half of this chapter. John tells us, “*Then I turned to see the voice...*” (12). *Seeing the voice* is seeing the Word. That’s very common OT imagery (*Gen 15:1*; etc.) and it hints that John is about to see his Savior whom he knew so well in the days of his flesh.

“*On turning I saw seven golden lampstands*” (12b). He doesn’t see Christ yet. This is because this is the first verse of the second half of the chapter needs to identify the seven churches as the seven lampstands (see vs. 20) in order to parallel the first half. *The church is still in mind*.

Before telling you what John saw, let me take you to vs. 17 in this regard. “*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.*” Whatever John saw, he fell as though dead after he turned to see the sight. This, too, has an *uncanny parallel* in the last chapter of John’s Gospel. After Jesus calls to his disciples from across the waters, we learn that, “*Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them.*” (*John 21:20*). He asked Jesus about this man. Jesus said, “*If it*



is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?” (22). Then it explains, “So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die” (23).<sup>8</sup> John turned and fell as though dead. Peter turned and saw this disciple and they started talking about death. This is just one more clue early on that the **life of the church is going to parallel the life of Christ** throughout this book. How glorious it is to think about such things.

This takes me to the revelation that John actually saw that made him fall as though dead. This is Jesus *glorified*. “In the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters” (Rev 1:13-15). This is the exact same way that both **Ezekiel (9:11, 2)** and **Daniel (10:5, 7:13)** describe the heavenly figure who can therefore only be the

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<sup>8</sup> As I argued in John, I believe we have good reason to think this person was Lazarus. He had already died once. That would cause such a strange question by Peter to become much more natural. However, we know from church tradition that the Apostle John was the last of the Apostles to die and there came a time in his old age where the same kind of rumor was being spread about him. Either way, whether John is making a mere verbal parallel or is linking himself directly, the point remains. There is a turning and it results in a comment about death.

preincarnate Christ, for this description belongs to no created being.

This is the glorious picture of Christ that is matched in the NT only by the **Transfiguration**. This is how Revelation begins to unveil that hidden glory. We get a sense of the kind of being that Jesus actually is, beyond our sight. His human flesh clothed his glory, veiled it from our eyes. Now, it is revealed—*apocalypse*, revelation!

Again, he is Daniel's son of man. He is **clothed in the garb of the priests of old**, for he is our great high priest. His person is described with a **seven-fold description**, making the perfect picture. (1) His **hairs are white** like snow, for he is sinless and spotless like the lamb of God. (2) **His eyes** are a flame of fire. They pierce and burn the consciences of any who look deeply enough into them. (3) **His feet** are burnished bronze. This is the shining metal of from which we get the OT word for a *seraphim*. They are refined in a furnace, a furnace of suffering for us. This causes them to glow even hotter and brighter. (4) **His voice** is the sound of a great waterfall (**Ezek 1:24**), drowning out all other noises. His voice alone can be heard. And it is a tumult. This is called "**the glory of God**" in **Ezek 43:2**.

The other-worldly imagery that teaches us about the glory of Christ continues. “In [5] his *right hand* he held seven stars, from [6] his *mouth* came a sharp two-edged sword, and [7] his *face* was like the sun shining in full strength” (Rev 1:17). Vs. 20 identifies these stars as “the angels of the seven churches.” What does this mean, the angels of the seven churches?

The ancient view that stars are somehow related to heavenly beings is probably on display. However, this imagery may also come from Daniel where the same figure above the waters holds the stars in his hand and those stars are the saints of God (Dan 12:3) who will one day judge angels (1Co 6:3). The word “angel” describes a function: messenger. In the Bible, both humans and heavenly beings can be called angels (though the term is used much more often for heavenly beings). Many commentators want to make the angels be *either* heavenly beings *or* human representatives of the churches, but we don't need to pick between them, because (as is also true in Daniel), angelic beings are corporately identified with Christians even in Revelation (8:3-4; 19:10, 22:9). Heavenly angels represent the saints and are connected to them, and these letters are to those churches. However that works, I believe it shows intimate

connection the invisible and visible realms will have throughout Revelation. The main purpose of the image is that Christ holds those representatives in his right hand, the **hand of power** and authority. He is the sovereign of heaven and earth. No one can snatch them out of his hand.

This is reinforced by the **sharp two-edged sword** coming out of his mouth. This is based on two more messianic prophecies. The first in **Isaiah 11:4**, “**But with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with *the rod of his mouth*, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.**” The second is about the Suffering Servant, “**He made my *mouth like a sharp sword*; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away**” (**Isa 49:2**). How fitting that the Word of God’s mouth is the sword that cuts the nations into pieces, humbling them and judging them.

Finally, his **face was like the sun** shining in full blazoned glory. This unveiled, terrifying sight of the furnace blasted bronze and the glowing, all-shining face of Christ has a **parallel** early on in John’s Gospel. Jesus is the light that shines out of the darkness. That light, the same which created the sun and light in Genesis 1, “**was the light of men**”

(John 1:4-5). Not only is Jesus the Judge, but he is also the Savior, the one who dispels the darkness of sin and gloom, evil and despair.

John's response to this unveiled glorious Savior, the one he knew so well on earth but whom he now saw in glory was to fall as though dead. He didn't even do that when he saw Jesus on Mt. Hermon being transfigured before his eyes. It was only once they heard the Father's voice that they were truly terrified. But now the greatest glory of all is revealed. "But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not...'" (Rev 1:17). So far, this is similar to what prophets like Daniel experienced when they saw Christ. But it was almost always the case that for them they had to have a mediating angel intercede, for the sight was too terrible. But not here. Not at this moment.

"Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." (17b-18). It is because Christ was humiliated in his incarnation, because he has now died for his sins, that Jesus can reach out to John, touch him, and tell him not to fear. More than that, it is because he is now alive. He has been raised. This is still the Lord's Day John is seeing

the vision on. Death does not have hold of him. For he has conquered it.

Curiously, the ESV capitalizes **Death and Hades**. You only do that if it is a proper name. In Greek mythology, **Hades** is the brother of Zeus and Poseidon. One rules the sky, one the sea, the other the underworld. The underworld is the realm of the dead. Death (**Thanatos**), was the son of Nyx (f: Night) and Erebus (m: Darkness), primordial gods that came from Chaos. It is easy to see how closely related Hades and Thanatos are.

Our minds do not think of gods but places and ideas. Ancients personified those; but it was more than a personification. To think only personification is to stay in the world of the non-supernatural. But there was almost a sacramental union if you want to call it that between the idea or the place and the supernatural in the way ancient people conceived of this.

When Christians proclaim that Christ “**descended into hell**” the idea is that Jesus **went to the realm of the dead** (all dead people went there) and conquered the powers of darkness: Satan himself. Psalm 24 sings of the gates, “**Lift up your heads, O gates, that the King of glory may come in.**” This is not the gates of heaven, but the **Gates of Hell**, which

Jesus tells Peter about. Lift up your head, O Gates! He is coming! He is coming to plunder the Strongman, the release the captives, and to take the keys so that Satan can no longer hold the elect eternally hostage in this place. This idea will come up again and again in Revelation, thereby showing forth the true power and glory of Jesus Christ.

To read the first chapter of Revelation is to get a glimpse into the glory of Jesus Christ, a glory that cannot be contained by **all the books** in the world. Yet, here is that glory **revealed to you in a book** written down by John that will tell you of marvels that will take place after this (19). That glory is revealed **to his churches**, the golden lampstands of his new covenant temple, to his priests who serve in his kingdom (20). It is a word **guarded by the angels** of the churches about the glorified, risen Savior who appeared to his friend and speaks to you across the water with a voice like thunder.

He bids you to **come to him**, to rest in him, to find solace and comfort from him, to dispel your own fears of things that are and will be, turning to him who has conquered Death itself. Pray to him now and he will hear you. Hear his voice and follow him to the end.

To hear this and respond with **deadness in your soul** will be to have the sharp sword of Jesus' mouth judge you. There are terrors in this book that will make that plain enough. But it should not be the terrors that bring you to become a disciple of Christ. How could anyone respond this way, knowing the one who appears to them here? What glory!

Yet, even his **unveiled glory** here is revealed, for a time—until his Second Coming—through the ordinary means of hearing these words, believing them by faith, and seeing the darkness of your soul and your sin be dispelled. I pray that each of you will do that as God opens your heart to believe this Revelation about the glorious Word of God, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and End, the Faithful and True, the only Lord who has died that we might live and lives that we might be brought to the Father to whom belongs all praise and glory.



## John/Revelation Parallels in Revelation 1

John		Revelation	
Recognizing the Risen Lord	20	1-3	Recognizing the Risen Lord
Jesus Calling Out to His Disciples Across Waters	21	1-3	Jesus Calling Out to His Disciples Across Waters
The Word and the Testimony	21	1	The Word and the Testimony
1:1 John writes about "the <b>Word of God</b> "			1:2 John witnesses to "the <b>Word of God</b> "
1:5 Jesus is "the Light (that) <b>shines</b> in darkness"			1:16 The face of Jesus " <b>shines</b> like the sun"
1:14 "We beheld His <b>glory</b> as the <i>only begotten</i> of the Father"			1:5-6 "Jesus Christ ... the <i>firstborn</i> from the dead ... to Him be <b>glory</b> "
1:23 John the Baptist introduces the earthly Jesus: "I am the <b>voice</b> of one crying, 'In the wilderness' "			1:10 John the Apostle "heard ... a loud <b>voice</b> , as of a trumpet," and sees the heavenly Jesus.
19:37 "they will see Him whom they pierced"			1:7 "they who pierced Him will see Him"
20:1 "And on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came ..."			1:10 "And I (John) was in the Spirit on the Lord's day ..."
20:6-7 "Simon Peter ... saw ... the face cloth, which had been on His head ..."			1:14 "His head and His hair were white like wool"
20:9 "For as yet they did not understand the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead."			1:18 "I (Jesus) was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore."
20:14 "she (Mary Magdalene) turned around, and behold, Jesus ..."			1:12-13 "I (John) turned to see ... and having turned I saw ... One like the Son of Man"

### Quotes/Allusions

- Rev 1:1      **Dan 2:29** ""As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen."
- Rev 1:4, 8    **ISA 41:4** Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD--with the first of them and with the last--I am he." (cf. **Ex 3:14**).
- Rev 1:4      **Zechariah 4:2, 6** He asked me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a solid *gold lampstand* with a bowl at the top and *seven* lights on it, with seven channels to the lights... So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my *Spirit*,' says the LORD Almighty.
- Rev 1:5      **PS 89:27** I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.  
**PS 130:8** He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.
- Rev 1:6      **Ex 19:6** 'You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' (cf **Isa 61:6**).
- Rev 1:7      **Dan 7:13** "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, *coming with the clouds of heaven*. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.  
**Mark 14:62** "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."  
**Zech 12:10** "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. (cf. **vs. 12, 14**)).  
**ZEP 1:15** That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.  
**Matt 24:30** "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

- Rev 1:13 **Dan 7:13** "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one *like a son of man*, coming with the clouds of heaven.
- Rev 1:14-15 **Dan 10:6** His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.
- Rev 1:14 **Dan 7:9** "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.
- Rev 1:15 **Ezek 1:24** "When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings."  
**Ezek 43:2** "And I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory."
- Rev 1:16 **ISA 49:2** He made my mouth like a sharpened sword. (Servant speaking)
- Rev 1:17 **ISA 44:6** "This is what the LORD says-- Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God."

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