

PART 2: THE COMING KING

(Chapter 1)



MAIN IDEA

This chapter prepares the readers and hearers for the following symbolic visions which uncover (reveal) previously hidden things. Of primary importance is the revealing of the coming of King Jesus.

SUMMARY

Chapter 1 opens with the revelation of Jesus Christ, given to the Apostle John for the seven churches in Asia (Turkey), announcing the second coming of Jesus Christ in his magnificent glory. John is instructed to write down the things which he has seen (past), those that are (John's present), and those that are to take place (future).

COMMENTS



PROLOGUE (1:1-3)

The word "revelation" (Grk. *apocalypse*) means "to uncover, or to reveal." This book reveals/uncovers how God will intervene in history to bring evil to an end

through the glorified Christ.¹

(1:1) “Soon take place” is the ancient Greek phrase *en tachei*, which means ‘quickly or suddenly coming to pass’ indicating rapidity of execution after the event begins. The idea is not that the event may occur soon, but that when it does, it will be sudden.²

(1:3) “Blessed.” The Book of Revelation offers a particular and unique blessing to those who read and keep the message of this book.³ This is the first of seven blessings of Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14).

- Rev. 1:3. Those who read and keep the message of the book (believe it, live by it)
- Rev. 14:13. Those who die in the Lord will rest from their labor
- Rev. 16:15. Those who are ready for the Lord’s return
- Rev. 19:9. Those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb
- Rev. 20:6. Those who die once and won’t face the 2nd death
- Rev. 22:7. Those who keep the words of this book
- Rev. 22:14. Those who washed their robes (those who cleansed by God’s forgiveness)

GREETINGS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES (1:4-6)

(1:4) *To the seven churches that are in Asia.* This letter is written to the seven churches in the province of Asia (modern Turkey). The meaning of the phrase “*the seven spirits*” may be a reference to Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the sevenfold ministry of the Holy Spirit ministry (Isa.11:2).

(1:5) *“Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”*

- *The faithful witness:* Jesus was faithful in all things God gave him to do.
- *The firstborn⁴ from the dead:* Jesus was first to die and be raised from the dead, never to die again.
- *The ruler of the kings of the earth:* This is his position in the world. World rulers do not yet realize that Jesus is in charge, but he is. The day will come when he will physically reign over every power on earth.

¹ The Navigators. *A Life-changing encounter with God's Word from the book of Revelation*. Ed. Karen Hinckley. Colorado Springs: NavPress Publications, 1989.

² Guzik, David. “*Study Guide of Revelation 1.*” 2001. Blue Letter Bible. BLB Producer. 3 May 2018. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide_Rev/Rev_1.cfm>

³ *He who reads* is in the singular. It speaks of one person who reads. *Those who hear* is in the plural. It speaks of many people hearing. The idea is probably from custom of the early church, where attention was given to the public reading of Scripture, which would often be explained (Guzik).

⁴ “Firstborn from the dead” does not mean Jesus was a created being. The Hebrew term (prototokos) means he was the first to die without ever dieing again (BibleWorks, LLC, Version 10).

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE COMING KING (1:7-8)

(1:7) "*Look, he is coming with the clouds.*" Sometimes the term "cloud" refers to a natural phenomenon in the sky but interestingly it is used most often with the glory of Jesus, having eschatological (future related) overtones.

- Believers will be caught up to meet Jesus in the clouds (1 Thess. 4:17).
- "Clouds" is a term not referring to ordinary clouds but most likely to clouds of glory.⁵
- A voice from the cloud at Jesus' transfiguration (Matt. 17:5).

THE VISION OF THE GLORIFIED CHRIST (1:9-18).

This incredible vision of Jesus Christ is matched only by that in 19:11-16. These passages are some of the most significant ones in the book of Revelation. The reader is encouraged to dwell on them, being careful not to read through them too quickly without seeing their vital contribution to the overall purpose of the book.

(1:9) John's confinement on Patmos, as a political prisoner, for preaching the gospel shows that he is a partner with the church's tribulation and patient endurance.

(1:10) This verse indicates that this vision was not a dream. John was miraculously transported out of the material world to an experience beyond normal senses by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

(1:11) "*To the seven churches in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.*" The sequence of the church locations lays out a clockwise path from Ephesus to Laodicea possibly because this was a circulated letter.

(1:12) The seven golden lampstands represent the seven churches (see 1:20).



(1:13-16) John now sees Jesus Christ being clothed in a robe reaching down to his feet (cf. Isa. 6:1). This kind of robe was typically worn by royalty (judges and prophets). In the Greek Septuagint, the word "robe" was usually used to describe the robe worn by the high priest. While Jesus Christ is presented as prophet and king, the robe in these verses displays Jesus in his function as the Great High Priest of his people. See Hebrews 4:16-17.

(1:16) In the right hand of Jesus. This is a place of

⁵ (MacArthur, The MacArthur Bible Commentary p. 1993).

safety and strength (Psa. 17:7; 63:8).

(1:17) John was so overcome by Jesus Christ's glorified presence that he fell at his feet as though dead.

Symbol (1:14-16)	Depicting Christ's
Head and hair like white wool (v. 14).	Holiness
Eyes like blazing fire (v. 14).	All-knowingness
Feet like bronze (v.15).	Stability and permanence
A voice like rushing waters (v. 15).	Authority
Right hand holding seven stars (v. 16)	Protection of his church
Sharp double-edged sword (v. 16)	Judgment on the church's enemies
Face like brilliant sunlight (v. 16)	Glory

JOHN IS TOLD TO WRITE IT DOWN (1:19-20)

Jesus' command to write gives the main divisions of the book of Revelation.

- Past: The things which you have seen (Revelation Chapter 1)
- Present (John's) The things which are (Revelation Chapters 2 and 3)
- Future: The things which will take place after this (Revelation Chapters 4 through 22)

(1:20) The angels of the seven churches. It should be noted that each church had its angel, and Jesus held these angels in his hand.

Who are these "angels"?

- Possibly pastors: Some believe these angels are the pastors of these seven churches. This idea is based on a literal understanding of the ancient Greek word (*aggelos*) translated angel. That word means "messenger," and certainly pastors are "messengers" to churches. "Angel of the church" could also be the officer of the synagogue among the Jews called...*the messenger of the church*, whose function it was to read, pray, and teach in the synagogue."⁶

⁶ Adam Clarke Commentary, Revelation 1 <<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/revelation-1.html>>. Accessed December 30, 2020.

- Possibly guardian angels: Others think the angels might be “guardian angels” over each congregation.
- Possibly a personification of each church’s characteristics: This seems to be the prevailing view.⁷

There are strengths and weaknesses to each of these interpretations, but we do know that in some way, these angels are representatives of each congregation.

However, it is more important to notice where the angels are: in the right hand of Jesus. This is a place of safety and strength. Even the problem churches that will be described in the next chapters are in the right hand of Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the conditions for receiving the blessing in verse 3?
2. Jesus is called the “firstborn” (1:5). Does this mean that he was a created being? Explain your answer.
3. Verse 17 says, “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.” Does this imply that Christians must be afraid of Jesus? Why or why not?
4. How can the description of Jesus Christ in this chapter affect the way you worship?
5. List three things in this chapter that stand out most to you

⁷ (ESV Crossway Bibles 2464, note on 1:20)