Revelation Chapter 1

Introduction and Prologue

- To begin with, let's clarify the proper title of this book. Though many people refer to this book as **Revelations** . . . plural, it is actually **Revelation**. The title of the book is ***the Revelation of Jesus Christ* . . . a single Revelation.**

So, why study the book of Revelation?

- First of all, the book of Revelation is the only prophetic book in the New Testament. Yes, there are prophetic passages in other books in the New Testament, but Revelation is the only book that calls itself a book of prophecy.

- The primary focus of Revelation is the subject of eschatology, making it one of the most difficult and most controversial books in the Bible. And because it is controversial, many pastors and teachers are reluctant to undertake teaching it.

    - But in neglecting Revelation, two very important things happen. **First**, an opportunity to understand the events of the end times is missed, and **second**, an opportunity to receive a blessing is missed. After all, twice in Revelation . . . in 1:3 and 22:7 . . . we read that ***blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.***

- We rightly spend a lot of time and study in the book of Genesis. It is the story of the origin of God's kingdom here on earth. But the book of Revelation should spark even more interest because it reveals to us how, after having been spoiled by sin, God's kingdom is rid of sin and death and is fulfilled in the manner in which God originally intended it.

- The book of Revelation is a massive book. Massive, not so much because of it's size, although it is 22 chapters long, but is massive because of the subject it addresses . . . end times prophecy.

    - But, at the same time, no other book excites the imagination like the book of Revelation. After all, the book of Revelation reveals God's plan for the events of the end times. Revelation tells us the events that culminate in the Lord's Second Coming and His instituting of His Millennial Kingdom. Revelation describes the events that finally and fully result in Satan's defeat and removal from the earth.

But isn't Revelation controversial and divisive?

- It is true that understanding and interpreting Revelation is difficult and there is much disagreement regarding how the book is to be interpreted. But just because there is disagreement regarding the message of the book doesn't mean we should then ignore it for the sake of unity.

    - Yes, there is much disagreement regarding the many, many interpretive questions that emerge in this book. But God has given us this book and intends for us to study and understand it so that we can understand His plan for the future.

- As I said, there are hundreds of interpretive questions that emerge from interpreting Revelation. But let us at least make the attempt to answer them and try to understand what God want us to know about end times events.

<u>Authorship</u>—

- To begin with, let's identify the author of the book. While Jesus Christ is the One who **<u>gives</u> the Revelation**, the man who **<u>records</u>** the revelation for its inclusion in the canon of Scripture **identifies himself 4 times** in the book . . . three times in chapter 1 (v. 1, 4 & 9) and once in the final chapter (22:8).

    - The author identifies himself as ***John***.

- The early church unanimously (until the 3rd century) affirmed that John the son of Zebedee, one of the 12 apostles and author of the fourth gospel and the epistles of John, was the author.

- In the second half of the 3rd century, Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria, questioned whether "John" was the apostle versus another "John" known as "John the Elder."

    - Dionysius tried to claim that the reason for his disagreement regarding the apostle John's authorship was because of some claimed difference in style between the writings of John in Revelation compared to his other writings.

    - In fact, Dionysius' real reason for challenging the apostle John's authorship was because he wanted to discredit the book because he didn't like what was in it. His rationale was simple . . . discredit the author and you discredit the book.

    - When my wife and I were first saved, but had not yet left the catholic church, my wife attended what she thought was a study of Revelation presented by her parish priest. The priest opened the study with the statement that **the book of Revelation was written by some guy named John who obviously was high on something.** Again, if you can discredit the author, you can discredit the book. She got up and left . . .

Support for John's authorship

- But, contrary to the claims of Dionysius, an examination and comparison of John's writing in Revelation and his other writings reveals strong similarities in vocabulary, syntax, style and concepts.

    - There is no reason to doubt John's authorship based upon the style or construction of Revelation.

- **Bottom line:** The authorship of Revelation "rests solidly on the near-unanimous testimony of the early church and a significant body of internal data that likens it to John's other New Testament books."

Date—

- Regarding the date in which Revelation was written, there are two proposed dates for its writing:
  1. A.D. 68— the reign of Nero. This view is held by preterists because they view Revelation as a continuation of historical events. But the level of persecution of Christians under Nero was confined to Rome.

  2. A.D. 95-96— this date places the writing during the reign of Domitian, near the end of his reign.

  - The later date of the composition of Revelation is the most popular and widely held by the early church fathers.

  Argument in favor of the later date:

  1. Domitian was both consumed with the need to be worshipped as a god and was terrifyingly paranoid. And being a paranoid megalomanic, Domitian persecuted any whom he perceived as a threat or who refused to worship him. And since Christians refused to worship him, the Christian persecution under Domitian was empire-wide. No dissent was tolerated. At the time John recorded Revelation the church was undergoing severe persecution and, as part of that persecution, John was exiled to Patmos. As we will study in chapters 2-3, believers were being martyred (2:13), and they were warned that more persecution was on the horizon (2:10).

  2. Persecution under Domitian was more widespread throughout the Roman empire, while under Nero the persecution was generally confined to Rome.

  3. Also notice the condition of the 7 churches whom John addresses.

  - As evidenced in Ephesians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, those churches were healthy as of the mid-60s when Paul ministered in that region. But by the time Revelation was written, those churches suffered serious spiritual decline.

  4. The heretical sect, the Nicolaitans, rose in popularity and influence after the death of Paul and plagued the churches at Ephesus and Pergamum (2:6, 15), but Paul never mentions them in his writings.

  5. The city of Laodicea and the Laodicean church, who is addressed in chapter 3, were devastated by an earthquake in A.D. 60. But in Revelation 3:17 John described Laodicea as "***rich . . . wealthy and in need of nothing"*** . . . hardly the description of a church that had lost everything, but rather rebuilt during the rest of Nero's reign.

  6. The timing of John's arrival in Asia Minor. According to tradition, John did not leave Palestine for Asia Minor until the time of the Jewish revolt against Rome (A.D. 66-70). Placing the writing of Revelation during Nero's reign would not allow sufficient time for John's ministry to have reached a point where the Romans would have felt the need to exile him.

  Conclusion: The weight of evidence favors a writing in the mid-90s, near the end of Domitian's reign. This is certainly important because it eliminates the possibility that the prophecies in Revelation were fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

How should we view and interpret the events described in Revelation?

- By far, the most significant problem with reading and understanding the book of Revelation is the problem of understanding the fantastic and sometimes bizarre imagery contained in it. There has been much disagreement regarding how Revelation should be understood. As a result, there are wildly differing view regarding how we should interpret this book.

  - **The main reason for the differing interpretations of Revelation hinges on the manner in which the text is interpreted. And these interpretations are based on the answers to two questions:**

    - First, **is Revelation to be understood literally, symbolically or allegorically?**

    - Second, **are the events described in Revelation describing literal events that have already occurred or are yet future . . . or do they even take place at all?**

- It is the answer to those two questions that forms the foundation for how you interpret Revelation. And it is the answer to those two questions that have resulted in **4 predominant views** concerning how Revelation should be interpreted.

  1. Preterist View

  - First there is **the Preterist view**. The term **"preterism"** comes from the Latin word, *praetor*, meaning "past." The Preterist view of Revelation views the book as **an historical record of events in the first century Roman empire**.

  - Within the Preterist view there are two paths of interpretation . . . **full preterism and partial preterism.**

    - **Full Preterism** adopts the view that <u>all</u> of the events in Revelation were fulfilled in the first century, including the Second Coming of Christ. This is an extreme view of preterism that is held by very few.

    - **Partial Preterism** is the more popular preterist view. Partial preterism sees **<u>most</u>** of Revelation having been fulfilled in the first century, except for the second coming, the judgment, and the new heavens and the new earth, which are still future. This was the view of R.C. Sproul and of others who hold to Covenant Theology.

  - But in viewing the majority of Revelation as historical, Preterism ignores the book's own claim to be prophetic (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19) and the fact that <u>nothing</u> in the first century fits the horrific descriptions depicted in chapters 6-19 and seems to rule out Revelation as recording events that have already happened.

    Revelation 1:3— Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

    Revelation 22:7—"And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."

Revelation 22:10— And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

Revelation 22:18-19— 18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

- Because there is no direct, literal correlation between the events described in Revelation and any historical first century events, those who hold to a Preterist view believe the events described in Revelation should be interpreted figuratively and symbolically, not literally.

2. Historicist View

- Second is **the Historicist view**. The Historicist view of Revelation sees the book as a "sweep" or summary of church history from the time of the apostles to the present. Historicists often resort to allegorizing the text to fit various historical events that occur (i.e., the fall of Rome to the barbarians, the rise of the Roman Catholic Church, the advent of Islam, and even the French Revolution!). The problem with the Historicist view is that it is **subjective, arbitrary and whimsical and its insistence that a literal interpretation of Revelation is wrong.** But, like the Preterist view, it ignores the fact that Revelation declares that it is prophetic.

3. Idealist View

- Third is **the Idealist view.** The Idealist view sees the book as **a morality play** . . . an allegorical story of the timeless struggle between good and evil that is played out in every age. The idealist view sees Revelation from an allegorical and idealist viewpoint . . . **that Revelation is <u>neither</u> historical <u>nor</u> prophetic.** But, like the preterist and historicist views, the idealist view ignores the book's own prophetic claim.

4. Futurist View

- Fourthly, the Futurist view sees the book of Revelation, from chapters 4-22, as **predictive prophecy** of people and events yet future. **Only this approach allows Revelation to be interpreted following the same literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutical method by which non-prophetic portions of Scripture are interpreted.**

- "The futurist approach to the book is the only one that grants sufficient recognition to the prophetic style of the book and a normal hermeneutical pattern of interpretation based on that style. It views the book as focusing on the last period of world history and outlining the various events and their relationships to one another. This is the view that best accords with the principle of interpretation."

- The literal interpretation of Revelation is the one generally associated with the **premillennial** return of Christ.

How these 4 views of Revelation are formed by our interpretation of the text—

- As I just explained, the 4 views regarding how the events of Revelation should be understood . . . Preterist, Historicist, Idealist & Futurist . . . are formed based upon how one interprets the text of the book. **Ultimately, how you interpret Revelation is dependent upon how your hermeneutic . . . your method of interpreting the text.**

- We believe that Revelation, like every other book in the Bible, should be interpreted according to the **literal-grammatical-historical method of interpretation**.

  - After all, why should be interpret the first 65 books of the Bible literally, but then interpret the final book of the Bible differently? Do we interpret Revelation differently because the prophetic descriptions are too fantastic and bizarre to be understood using the traditional method of interpretation?

  - Admittedly, there are fantastic and difficult descriptions of events in Revelation. But where they can be interpreted literally, they should be. And where the text should be interpreted figuratively, we should seek help from other passages of Scripture to help us understand.

    - For example, in Revelation chapter 12 John refers in v. 3 to ***a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems.*** How are we to interpret this? Is John describing a literal ***red dragon***? For the answer we need to read further in chapter 12 and we see in v. 9 that John describes how ***the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan*** . . .

    - So, we see by letting Scripture interpret Scripture that John is using figurative language to describe a literal creature . . . Satan.

  - The problem for the reader and interpreter of Revelation is trying to find other passages of Scripture that help us understand when John uses figurative and symbolic language.

    - **The fact that Revelation uses figurative and symbolic language to describe literal events and literal people is a problem. But that problem is for <u>us</u> to discover and learn. It is not a problem for the legitimacy of this book that is given to us by God.**

    - **Though John does not quote any Old Testament passages, of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 verses allude to concepts and terms found in the Old Testament . . . more than any other book in the Bible.**

  - Though there may be difficulty in discerning the meaning of a passage in Revelation, it is possible. Our job is to discover John's intended meaning . . . because God intends for us to discern the meaning of the text.

<u>Prologue</u> (v. 1-3)

Revelation 1:1— The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,

- The word ***Revelation*** (Greek: *apokalypsis*) means "an uncovering or laying bare." It is a disclosure of what has previously been kept secret. Like the word ***mystery*** (Gr. *musterion*), a ***revelation*** is an aspect of God's **secret will** . . . it is a divine secret that can only be known if God chooses to reveal it.

- The phrase ***the revelation of Jesus Christ*** presents us with an immediate interpretive question: **is *the revelation of Jesus Christ*** a subjective or objective genitive?

  - If this is a **subjective genitive**, then the meaning of the phrase is that Jesus Christ is **the source of the revelation . . . the revelation that <u>comes from</u> Jesus Christ.**

  - If this is an **objective genitive**, then **the revelation is <u>about</u> Jesus Christ . . . He is the thing being revealed**.

  - So which is it? Is Jesus Christ the "revealer" or "the thing being revealed" in this book?

    - We might be tempted to answer **"both." After all, Jesus Christ is the One revealing these things, but He is also revealing Himself and His future work through His revelation to John.**

    - But the primary emphasis in Revelation is what Jesus Christ reveals to John.

    - As the "Revealer," Jesus Christ reveals His message to the 7 churches in Asia in chapters 2-3.

    - It is Jesus who reveals the contents of the 7-sealed scroll in Revelation 5:5, 7 and it is Jesus who discloses the contents of the scroll in Revelation 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1, thus providing ample evidence supporting the view that the revelation is to taken as a subjective genitive and not an objective genitive.

- **In v. 1 we are also told the source and method of communication** of this revelation . . .

  - The phrase, ***which God gave him***, indicates that **God the Father is the source** of the message, which He gives to God the Son to deliver to John.

  - The phrase ***and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John*** indicates that God the Son's communication of the message to John is **through the agency of *His angel***.

- **Having told the readers who the letter is from and to whom it is addressed, we are then told the central theme of this book . . . *the things which must shortly take place***.

  - ***The things*** spoken of here are the detailed accounts of events that <u>must</u> transpire according to the sovereign outworking of God program regarding that kingdom which will replace other earthly, temporary kingdoms.

- **The time of the fulfillment of these events** is described in v. 1 as being ***shortly*** and ***soon***. The Greek word *tachos* can signify either "something that is about to happen" or "something that is going to happen suddenly and rapidly."

- The term ***shortly*** or ***soon*** speaks of the nearness of time, meaning that these **imminent** events are to come **"speedily and quickly."**

  - For the first time, the events predicted by Daniel and foreseen in Christ stand in readiness to be fulfilled. Therefore, John can speak of them as imminent.

- The term ***communicated*** (Gr: *sēmainō*) is "symbolic of divine communication with men."

  - While we know that the message is delivered by an angel, the identity of the angel is not given or known.

- **Revelation 1:1 closes with the identification of the recipient of the Revelation** . . . ***to His bond-servant John***. As previously discussed, there is no doubt that this is the apostle John, the last surviving apostle.

v. 2— who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.

- Then in v. 2 John continues by stating the prophetic process. Referring to himself in the third person as the person who received the prophetic message (v. 1), John then ***testified to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw***.

  - Not only does John here ***testify to the word of God*** which is contained in Revelation, but John previously **testified to the word of God** in the fourth gospel and in his three epistles. The phrase ***the word of God*** is a title of Jesus Christ that John uses.

    John 1:1— In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

v. 3— Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

- This verse states one of the primary functions of this revelation . . . to pronounce a **blessing upon those who *read, hear and heed the things which are written in it.***

  - It is significant to understand that this is the only book in Scripture that pronounces a **blessing** upon the person who **reads or hears *the words of the prophecy* and *heeds* . . . or obeys them.**

  - The reference to **hearing** is to a practice in the first century in which letters of this importance were read aloud to the congregation.

  - While **reading and hearing** were an important part of the blessing contained in v. 3, the requirement to ***heed the things written in it*** are equally important. After all, it does no good to **read and hear** if there is no obedience to what has been received.

- To receive the blessing promised here, obedience was a requirement. And the only way this prophecy can be obeyed is if the reader or hearer <u>understands</u>. In other words, God intends for us to understand what is being revealed in this book!

- In the final phrase John gives the reason for the blessing . . . ***for the time is near***. With this statement John speaks of the urgency of the message, along with the imminence of the Lord's return.

Question: In v. 3 John pronounces a **blessing** upon those who **read and hear *the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.*** At the end of this book, Revelation 22:7, the Lord, Himself also pronounces the same blessing . . . ***And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.*** What do these two blessings teach us about the importance of this book?

Question: Many people choose not to study the book of Revelation, claiming that it is too confusing and too difficult to interpret. What do you hope to learn and take away from this study?

<u>Salutation</u>

v. 4-5a— 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,
5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

- In the prologue of this book . . . v. 1-3 . . . John tells us that the book of Revelation is from God the Father, given to Jesus Christ, and communicated to John through the agency of an angel.

  - Also in v. 1, John reveals the **purpose and theme of Revelation** . . . ***the things which must soon take place.*** As I explained, the term ***soon*** can refer to both **the nearness of time** or **the speed at which the events can occur**.

- John closes the prologue section in v. 3 with the pronouncement of a blessing from the Lord Jesus . . . ***Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.***

  - Again, the use of the phrases ***the things which must soon take place*** in v. 1 and ***the time is near*** in v. 3 convey the importance and urgency of this book.

- Now, beginning in v. 4 John uses the salutation formula commonly used in the New Testament epistles.

  - John first identifies himself as the sender of the letter, then the recipients of the letter, followed by a blessing.

- In v. 4 John identifies **the recipients** of his letter as ***the seven churches that are in Asia***, which is western Asia . . . modern-day Turkey.

- **The question that immediately emerges is, "why these seven churches?"** What was significant about these 7 churches? To this question, two reasons seem most plausible.

  1. First, these may have been the 7 most significant churches in the region of Asia at that time.

  2. Second, these 7 churches **represented** a range of spirituality that existed in the Christian church at the time the letter was written, from disobedient and unfaithful to abundantly faithful and obedient. **In other words,** these 7 churches represented churches along the full spectrum of spirituality and faithfulness to the Lord.

  - **The second view seems more likely.**

- John then pronounces what appears to be, at first glance, a standard epistolary greeting to his readers and hearers: ***grace to you and peace***.

  - This pronunciation of ***grace***, followed by ***peace*** is a formula found throughout the New Testament.

  - ***Grace*** always precedes ***peace*** in these epistolary greetings because **the grace of God <u>must</u> be received first before peace with God is possible**.

- But while this appears to be a common epistolary greeting, it is actually quite unique because the greeting is given on behalf of all three members of the Godhead, spoken of individually. Notice . . . ***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, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.***

- Of all the epistles in the New Testament, this is the only one that mentions all three members of the Godhead in the salutation. And it mentions each member of the Godhead in a unique way.

  1. First, the reference to ***Him who is and who was and who is to come*** is a reference to God the Father's self-revelation of Himself to Moses first found in Exodus 3:13-15 . . .

  Exodus 3:13-15— 13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.

  - As John Gill states of God's name . . . I AM WHO I AM . . . the name "denotes his eternity and immutability, and his constancy and faithfulness in fulfilling his promises, for it includes all time, past, present, and to come; and the sense is, not only I am what I am at present, but I am what I have been, and I am what I shall be, and shall be what I am."

2. Second, John's reference to ***the seven Spirits who are before His throne*** is a phrase that traces its origin to Zechariah 4:1-10.

- Zechariah 4:2 and 10 speak of the **seven lamps** (Rev. 4:5) that are ***the eyes of the Lord, which range to and fro throughout the earth.*** Because Revelation chapters 4 & 5 carry the same symbolism as Zechariah 4, the teaching of this Old Testament passage is a likely solution to the significance of the 7 lamps.

Zechariah 4:1-10— 1 Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, as a man who is awakened from his sleep. 2 He said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; 3 also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side." 4 Then I said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, "What are these, my lord?" 5 So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." 6 Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. 7 'What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"'" 8 Also the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 9 "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. 10 "For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel—these are the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth."

- The prominence of the Holy Spirit's activity on the earth in Zechariah 4:2-10 is established by the words ***not by my might or power, but by My Spirit, say the Lord of Hosts*** (Zech. 4:6). John identifies the ***seven eyes*** of Zechariah with the seven spirits that belong to the Lord. The 7 lamps of Zechariah 4:2 are also synonymous with the 7 spirits in Revelation 4:5. ***The Seven Spirits*** is a reference to **God the Holy Spirit**.

3. Third, John reveals the third party of this blessing . . . **God the Son** . . . ***Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.***

- As I mentioned, 278 of Revelation's 404 verses find references in the Old and New Testament. Here we have an example in the three-fold description of ***Jesus Christ*** as ***the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.***

- We find these three descriptions in Psalm 89 and Colossians 1:18 . . .

Psalm 89:37— "It shall be established forever like the moon, And the witness in the sky is faithful."

- **First**, He is called ***the faithful witness***. This description of the Lord is also later found in Revelation 3:14 and is an allusion to Psalm 89:37, where regarding the throne of David, it is written, ***it shall be establish forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful.***

Colossians 1:18— He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead . . .

- **Second**, Jesus is called ***the firstborn of the dead***. This description is identical to the description of the Lord found in Colossians 1:18 and signifies Jesus Christ as the first fruits of the resurrection.

  - The term ***firstborn*** (Gr. *prōtotokos*) means "pre-eminent; having first in importance." Jesus Christ was not only the first person to be resurrected to eternal life, but He is also the most important.

Psalm 89:27— "I also shall make him My firstborn, The highest of the kings of the earth.

- **Third**, Jesus is called ***the ruler of the kings of the earth***. Again drawing from Psalm 89 where the psalmist notes God's promise to make David seed ***the highest of thing of the earth***. This is a clear foreshadowing of the Lord's future role as ***King of kings and Lord of lords.***

- All three expressions are used in Psalm 89 and point to the fulfillment of God's promises made to David and recited in Psalm 89 regarding an eternal kingdom stated in 2 Samuel 7.

- Then, in v. 5-6 John closes his opening salutation with a doxology . . .

Revelation 1:5c-6— 5 . . . To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- The first statement in the doxology cites the Lord's atoning work on the cross . . . ***Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood.***

- In the next phrase . . . ***and He has made us to be a kingdom*** . . . the word ***kingdom*** (Greek: *basileia*) is a collective designation for all believers. It points to a future share of the saints in Christ's earthly rule, seen in Revelation 20:4 along with 5:10; 11:15.

- The next phrase . . . ***[He has made us] priests to His God and Father*** signifies further evidence of Christ's on-going love for believers in His appointment of us, individually, as ***priests***.

  - Here in this verse the Lord refers to all believers, corporately, as a ***kingdom***, while at the same time referring to each of us, individually, as ***priests*** within that ***kingdom***.

- **And who are we *a kingdom and priests* to?** The next phrase gives us the answer . . . ***a kingdom and priests to His God and Father***. **God the Father is the object of our priestly service**.

- Then, John closes the doxology with the statement of praise and glory . . . ***to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen***.

  - As Robert Thomas observes, John uses the dative case in this phrase. Grammatically, using the dative case makes Jesus Christ <u>the object</u> of John's expression. In other words, ***to Jesus Christ be glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.***

- The phrase ***forever and ever*** refers to the fact that the ***glory and dominion*** is attributed to Jesus Christ. This phrase, ***forever and ever***, is a strengthened expression for **eternity**.

- The English phrase, ***forever and ever***, is the translation of a Hebrew idiom literally means ***"to the ages of the ages."***

  - An idiom is a group of words or a phrase whose meaning is not deducible from those of the individual words. In other words, the words or phrase have a societal context indiscernible from the words themselves. Examples of English idioms are the phrases, **"it's raining cats and dogs" or "barking up the wrong tree" or "get cold feet" or "hit the sack."** All are examples of phrases whose meaning cannot be discerned by the meaning of the words or phrase.

  - For this reason, the Hebrew idiom, ***to the ages of the ages***, is translated into an English phrase we <u>can</u> understand . . . ***forever and ever***.

- John then closes this opening doxology with the word ***Amen***. Interestingly, both the Hebrew word **âmên** and the Greek word **amēn** both mean "truly" or "so be it," referring to the trustworthiness of the statement.

  - John's use of a doxology and ***amen*** to open the letter is his own assent and agreement to the truthfulness of all that is contained in this letter and his personal affirmation of the Lord Jesus Christ as the source.

- Obviously, John would have been concerned that the truthfulness of such a fantastic revelation would be accepted by the readers. For this reason, John uses the word ***amen*** **6 other times** in this book (1:7; 5:14; 7:12 (twice); 19:4 22:20).

<u>The Theme of the Book (v. 7-8)</u>

v. 7— Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

- We then come to v. 7-8. I like the way Robert Thomas puts it . . . **"Without warning"** John immediately follows the salutation and doxology with an oracle of the first prophecy of the book. And not only is this the first prophecy of the book, but it is **the most significant prophecy** of the book . . . ***behold! He is coming!***

  - If we learn nothing else in this study, we should remember this prophecy . . . **Jesus Christ is coming! This is the theme of the book of Revelation . . . Jesus Christ is returning**. The remainder of the book then goes on to reveal the details of events that precede and accompany His Second Coming.

- A moment ago I said that John follows the salutation and doxology with an oracle of the first prophecy of the book. **What is an oracle?**

  - **An oracle is a person through whom God speaks.** In this instance, God uses John as His oracle to deliver and reveal the prophecy of Jesus Christ's return.

- John begins his oracle with the emphatic exclamation, ***behold***, the Greek word *idou*. The word ***behold*** is used to indicates a special, divine intervention is being given.

- So, while John is the speaker in v. 7, the words of the oracle are given to him by God the Father. The only other oracle in this book is found when God speaks in Revelation 21:5-8.

- As I said, verse 7 contains the **theme** of the whole book: **the coming of Jesus Christ**. In this revelation two Old Testament passages are cited: Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10.

- In the phrase, ***He is coming with the clouds***, John is referring to the heavenly origin of Jesus' return. This is made clearer later, in Revelation 19:11, 14.

v. 7 . . . and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him

- The remainder of the verse alludes to Zechariah 12:10, 12, 14 with the context of Zechariah 12 being the future repentance of the tribes of Israel in the day the Lord restores Jerusalem and the nation to a place of supremacy.

  Zechariah 12:10, 12, 14— 10 "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. 12 "The land will mourn, every family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves; 14 all the families that remain, every family by itself and their wives by themselves.

- In adapting the passage to the book, John emphasizes a universality of intent in the 2nd Coming of Christ. The words ***every eye will see Him*** signifies that the entirety of the human race will witness this momentous event.

  - Within the class of ***every eye*** are ***even those who pierced Him***, which include both the Jews and the Romans of John 19:37 (also see John 19:31).

- In the statement, ***and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him***, the phrase ***all the tribes of the earth*** is universal in scope.

  - It is **<u>all</u>** ***those who dwell on the earth*** and contextually it would be a reference to the unbelievers who will mourn with remorse (but not repentance) because of the severity of punishment inflicted upon them in conjunction with His return. The statement provides a grim preview of what lies ahead for the world. The return of Christ is anything but a comfort to those who continue in their rebellion against Him.

- John's use of the word ***mourn*** (Gr. *koptō*), means "to cut." This word is associated with mourning due to the pagan practice of cutting or gashing themselves when in extreme grief or despair.

- Note that while the ***mourning*** of the unbelievers will be for themselves and their extreme despair, **there will be no repentance**. However, **Israel's mourning**, which we see taking place in Zechariah 12:10, in the end time, **will be** that of genuine repentance before God.

- Verse 7 ends with a **double affirmation**, ***even so, Amen***. In the Greek the double affirmative is *nai amen*.

    - The word *nai* means "truly" or "assuredly." By itself, *nai* is a strong word of affirmation. But followed by ***amen***, it is strengthened to signifiy the **certainty** of the prophecy that God is giving.

    - **In other words**, **God the Father is stating that it is absolutely fixed that Christ's coming will happen as prophesied and will bring forth the resultant effects stated in the prophecy.**

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

- To being with, there is some debate and disagreement as to when v. 8 is a statement by God the Father or God the Son. The best evidence comes down slightly in favor of this being a reference to God the Father, who refers to Himself as ***I Am*** (Exodus 3:14; also see Isaiah 48:12).

- Following God's declaration of the certainty of the fulfillment of the prophecy of v. 7, in v. 8 God the Father identifies Himself in three ways, stating . . . ***"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."***

- First, regarding the identification of Himself as ***I am the Alpha and the Omega***, the Greek letter ***Alpha*** is the first letter in the Greek alphabet and the letter ***Omega*** is the last. The phrase ***I am the Alpha and the Omega*** is equivalent to the Hebrew phrase, ***I am the first and I am the last*** found in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12. Both phrases refer to the eternal existence of God.

    - While the phrase, ***I am the Alpha and the Omega*** is a phrase that is also used by Jesus in Revelation 21:6 and 22:13, the phrase, itself, is a reference to the eternality of God. But its appearance in conjunction with the next two descriptive identifiers give strong evidence that this is God the Father speaking.

- The second phrase in v. 8 used to identify God is, ***who is and who was and who is to come***. This is now the second use of this phrase in Revelation, the first having occurred in v. 4 to identify God the Father. This, therefore, adds strength to the view that v. 8 is from God the Father.

- Revelation 1:8 then closes with a third term describing God the Father . . . ***the Almighty***.

    - This term, ***the Almighty***, is used **8 other times** in this book (4:8; 11:17; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22).

    - Not only is it a title for God, ***the Almighty*** is also descriptive of who God is, focusing on God's sovereignty and power to accomplish all that He wills to do.

- Being ***the Almighty*** . . . infinite in power and wisdom . . . God's declaration in v. 8 is a reminder to the readers of this book of prophecy that God will accomplish all that He has decreed to do and there is none who can stop or even alter His eternal plan.

- As I said, there is much debate regarding whether v. 8 is a statement from God the Father or God the Son. Arguments for both views have much evidence in their favor, but I favor the view that this is God the Father speaking and authenticating the prophecy of the book of Revelation concerning God the Son.

John's Commission to Write Revelation

- In the passage before us today we will begin examining the body of John's letter. The main body of the letter begins in v. 9-11 with **the setting** . . . **John's circumstances at the time he received the revelation.**

- In v. 9 John tells us the setting for the vision he is about to describe . . .

  Revelation 1:9— I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

- Here in v. 9 John, for the third time, identifies himself as the author. For the reasons I outlined in the opening of this study, there is no doubt who ***John*** is. Everyone knew this was the **apostle whom Jesus loved**.

  - So, instead of identifying his authority, John identifies himself by his common condition with all other Christians . . . ***your brother and fellow partaker . . .*** Though he was an apostle, John considers the most important part of his identity as a Christian is his being like us . . . ***your brother and fellow partaker***. Not superior, not inferior . . . he identifies himself as an equal.

- And in identifying himself as a ***fellow partaker***, John indicates that he is a ***fellow partaker*** in suffering with other Christians who are also suffering for the sake of their faith.

- Then, in the next phrase, John specifically tells his readers what they are ***partakers*** of . . . ***partakers in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance.*** These three terms, ***tribulation, kingdom and perseverance***, form a figure of speech called a **hendiadys**. A hendiadys is a figure of speech in which all three words are used to convey a single idea or meaning.

  - In this instance the single idea or meaning John intends is that of **affliction**.

    - The words ***kingdom and perseverance*** characterize the **goal** of our ***tribulation*** . . . as <u>not</u> being what the world experiences, but what is particularly connected with the ***kingdom*** and one that requires endurance or patient ***perseverance*** until the ***kingdom*** of Jesus Christ is revealed.

- The phrase ***which are in Jesus*** is a critical phrase in this verse. As Matt has reminded us many times recently, and as John explicitly states here . . . **only those who are *in Jesus* will *persevere in tribulation* and receive the *kingdom***.

    - As Philippians 3:14 teaches us, only those who are ***in Christ*** will receive the ***prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***

- Next, John identifies the location in which he receives this revelation . . . ***on the island of Patmos***.

    - ***Patmos*** is an island off the coast of Asia Minor in the Icarian Sea. It is an island of only 13 square miles, located 40 miles west of the coastal city of Miletus.

    - ***Patmos*** is shapes like a crescent with its horns facing eastward, making it a safe refuge for sea vessels to anchor during storms and was, therefore, important to navigators. It was the last stopping place when traveling from Rome to Ephesus and first stopping place on the return trip to Rome.

    - ***Patmos*** was rocky and barren and was chosen as a penal colony by the Romans, as were other islands in the group. Early Christian tradition says John was sent there during Domitian's reign over Rome (A.D. 81-96) and was forced to work in the mines. Another tradition adds that when Domitian died, John was permitted to return to Ephesus.

- The reason John gives for his exile on ***Patmos*** was ***because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus***.

    - In this phrase we learn that John was exiled for preaching the Word in Ephesus (where he served as pastor) and throughout Asia.

    - In my introduction to Revelation I explained that the Roman Emperor, Domitian, was a cruel, vindictive paranoid megalomanic who insisted that he be worshipped as god and punished any who refused. This brought Christians to his attention and he instituted the official state persecution of Christians everywhere because they refused to worship him. Church leaders, such as John, were singled out for particularly severe persecution, as a warning to their followers.

    - Though his ministry is not as well known as Paul's, we do know that John was the pastor at the church at Ephesus and was a very significant figure in the early church in Asia.

v. 10— I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,

- Next, in v. 10, John describes how the revelation came to him.

    - The phrase ***I was in the Spirit*** denotes "a state in which the ordinary faculties of the flesh are suspended and the inward senses are opened." In such a state, God brings a man's spirit into direct contact with the invisible spiritual world and with the things of God's own mind, yet in ways that accommodate our finite human perception.

- John's experience here is the same as Paul's in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, in which he is ***caught up to the third heaven*** and allowed to see heaven . . .

  2 Corinthians 12:2-4— 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows— 4 was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

- Luke calls it "ecstasy" or "a trance" (Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17) because the spirit is taken, temporarily, from the ordinary range of contact to one that is wholly new and superior. This was not a revelation through a dream because, unlike Peter in Acts 10:10 and Paul in Acts 22:17, John was not asleep during his spiritual interaction.

- John's reference to this event occurring ***on the Lord's day*** poses an interpretive question.

  - Is John's reference to ***the Lord's day*** a reference to **the eschatological "day of the Lord"** or a reference to the traditional Christian reference to **Sunday**?

  - The favored view is that even though John was carried away in an ecstatic state, he was <u>not</u> carried away to a future time. To be "<u>in</u> the spirit" is not the same as being transported "<u>by</u> the Spirit" into "the day of the Lord."

    - It is most likely that this is a reference to it being Sunday. If true, this is the first use of this reference to Sunday being ***the Lord's day*** in Christian history. As a result, this reference may have begun what became a habit picked up by other Christian writers shortly after John's time.

- John then reveals his first supernatural interaction in this book . . . ***and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet***.

  - In this phrase, and the description to follow, John's experience is reminiscent of Ezekiel's in Ezekiel 3:12 . . .

    Ezekiel 3:12— Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a great rumbling sound behind me, "Blessed be the glory of the LORD in His place."

  - Whereas John heard ***a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet***, throughout the book of Revelation the loud sound or voice clearly indicates the importance and solemnity of what is about to be spoken.

  - The sound in the voice that John hears behind him was as loud and clear as a trumpet blast, signaling the necessity to submit to whatever it commanded. Such significance contrasts to trumpet blasts later in the book that relate more to the battlefield as signals to action in conflict (e.g. 8:2, 6, 13; 9:14).

v. 11— saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.

- The command to ***write*** is instruction for John to record what he sees. This is **<u>one</u>** of the **12 times** John receives this command in this book (also in 1:19; 2:18, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5).

    - The emphasis on John's commission to ***write*** aligns with his claim of canonical authority for this work.

- The place and subject John is commanded to ***write*** is ***in a book what you see***.

    - The phrase, ***what you see***, refers to the actions of the entire encounter John was about to have.

    - The word ***book*** (Greek: *biblion*) literally means "a scroll."

        - The word describes a scroll made of papyrus material, the less expensive material was made from animal skins (parchment). The book would have been a single scroll, the length of which may have been about 15 feet.

- The second part of the command to John is to ***send it to the seven churches . . . .***

    - The ***seven churches*** are then explicitly identified. The ***seven cities*** in which these churches were located were centers of **seven** districts in western Asia Minor, which made them suitable for publicizing the message once it was received.

    - The order of the name of the **seven cities** indicate the route that the messenger would follow in delivering the message of Revelation.

> ***to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.***

- Starting from ***Ephesus*** and moving clockwise, the message would have proceeded northward about 40 miles to ***Smyrna*** and then another 40 miles to ***Pergamum***. From Pergamum the messenger would then have moved in a southeasterly direction about 45 miles to ***Thyatira***, then about 30 miles south to ***Sardis***, then about 30 miles east-southeast to ***Philadelphia***. Finally, the messenger would go 40 miles southeast to ***Laodicea***.



    - A messenger from each city would present the scroll to his own church, read it, and then probably made a copy before the messenger took the scroll and moved on to the next city.

v. 12— Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;

- After turning around to see the One who was speaking to him, John's eyes first see ***seven golden lampstands.***

- ***Lampstands*** (Greek: *lychnias*) were common and used for portable oil lamps. But, as we learn in 1:20, here they represent the churches in each of the **seven cities.**

- The ***lampstands*** were *7* in number and made of gold. This imagery ties them closely to Zechariah's one golden lampstand with seven lamps, each fed by a pipe from a common reservoir (Zech. 4:2) and to the **7-branched golden lampstand** that stood inside the first and outside the second veil of the tabernacle of Israel (Exodus 25:31-40). These too, were symbolic of the witness that God's people were to bear to surrounding Gentile peoples.

The Son of Man Described

- In v. 13-16 John then describes the appearance of ***one like a son of man*** who is speaking to him.

v. 13— and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.

- As John begins his description, he first describes the setting . . . ***in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man.***

  - The description of being ***in the middle of the lampstands*** indicates that the person John sees is standing among the ***seven lampstands***.

  - And, as we learn further down in v. 20, ***the seven lampstands are the seven churches***. The person John is about to describe is seen **in the middle of the seven churches.**

- John then describes the person standing ***in the middle of the lampstands*** . . . He is ***one like a son of man***.

  - The title, ***son of man***, is very familiar. Jesus uses it 83 times in the gospels in referring to Himself.

  - This title is also familiar to those who have studied the book of Daniel. In Daniel 7:13 the phrase, ***one like a son of man*** is used by Daniel to describe the man he sees in his vision. with the Daniel would have been familiar with from Daniel 7:13-14 . . .

    Daniel 7:13-14— 13 "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14 And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."

  - As you can see, Daniel 7:13 describes Jesus Christ, even before Jesus' incarnation . . . a Christophany.

  - Daniel 7:13 is the origin of Jesus' use of ***son of man*** to describe Himself.

- **So, we can interpret this *one like a son of man* to be the glorified Lord Jesus Christ.**

- Then, having given us His identity, John describes what the Lord Jesus is doing. This is done by understanding His appearance as He stands among ***the golden lampstands.***

- John begins by describing the Lord's clothing. And from his description several observations and interpretations can be made.

  - First, the length of His ***robe***, ***reaching to the feet*** describes the type of robes that were worn in the Old Testament by three classes of men . . . **royalty**, as we can see in 1 Samuel 18 . . . **prophets**, as we see in 1 Samuel 28 . . . and the **high priest**.

    - In fact, six of the seven times the Greek word for ***robe reaching to the feet*** is used in Septuagint, it is used to the **robes of the high priest.**

  - Second, we are also told that that the ***one like a son of man*** is also ***girded across His chest with a golden sash***.

    - While the high priest's sash was **embroidered** with gold thread, in Revelation 1:13 we are told that the entire sash is ***golden***.

- So, the obvious question is, **"what is John's purpose in describing this clothing?"**

  - Because this clothing is so similar to the description of the clothing of the Jewish High Priest, we are reminded that Jesus is <u>our</u> High Priest who lives forever to make intercession for us.

  - We are reminded of Jesus' role as our Intercessor and High Priest in Hebrews 10:11-12 . . .

    Hebrews 10:11-12— 11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God,

- Then, having described his clothing in v. 13, in v. 14-16 John moves from the clothing to his description of the Lord's **glorified appearance**.

  - Pastor Tom Pennington makes the point that there are seven qualities in this description of Christ that John cites. Each quality highlights an attribute of Christ that pertain to His present ministry to the church. This fact is borne out by the fact that these attributes are repeated in chapters 2-3 in Jesus' message to the churches.

    - For example, in Revelation 2:18, in His message to the church in Thyatira, we read . . .

      Revelation 2:8— "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this . . .

- But then, the question emerges, **"what do each of these 7 qualities or attributes emphasize?" Let's find out . . .**

v. 14— His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire.

- **First**, in v. 14 there is great similarity to the man described in Daniel 7:9. In the Old Testament such a description would have been of God the Father. But here it is descriptive of God the Son.

  Daniel 7:9— I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire.

  - In both Daniel 7:9 and Revelation 1:14 we have a description of the Lord's ***head and hair were like white wool, like snow***.

  - The symbolism of the description pictures the ***white wool, like snow*** **underscores His deity**. It is also being symbolic of **holy purity**, **eternality** and the **pre-existence** of Christ . . . "**the ancient of days."**

- **Second**, in v. 14 John describes that ***His eyes were like a flame of fire***.

  - Once again John's use of ***like*** indicates that he is using a simile to describe His **majesty** and His **fierceness**. It also conveys the notion of penetrating vision and the associated attribute of divine **Omniscience** as well as the ***fire*** of **judgment**.

v. 15— His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

- **Third**, in v. 15 John observes that ***His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace.***

  - The description is not merely of **brilliant *bronze***, but **brilliant *bronze*** that is still in its **molten form**. And what is it that characterizes molten metal? Like a furnace, molten metal purifies everything it touches. Whatever is impure is dissolved and destroyed.

  - In the New Testament the ***feet*** were symbolic of movement (Luke 1:79; Acts 5:9; Romans 3:15, 10:15; Hebrews 12:13). If this is true here, then it is symbolic of Christ's movement among the 7 lampstands, and therefore among the 7 churches.

  - The description of the Lord's ***feet*** being ***like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace*** signifies the purifying work of Christ in moving among the churches.

- **Fourth**, in v. 15 John describes Lord's ***voice being like the sound of many waters***.

  - The symbolic meaning of His ***voice*** points to His authoritative word over and in directing His churches. And being ***like the sound of many waters*** . . . in other words, loud and powerful . . . signifies the power of the ***voice***. This description is reminiscent of Psalm 93:4 . . .

    Psalm 93:4— More than the sounds of many waters, Than the mighty breakers of the sea, The LORD on high is mighty.

v. 16— In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.

- **Fifth**, in v. 15 John describes what the Lord is doing . . . ***in His right hand He held seven stars***.

    - Since the right hand is the place of honor and authority, the fact that the Lord holds ***in His right hand the seven stars***, signifies that the Lord has the power and authority to hold the 7 churches under His control.

- But what do these ***seven stars*** represent? After all, we've discerned that the ***seven lampstands*** represent the ***seven churches***. But what do the ***seven stars*** represent?

    - Fortunately we have Scripture to give us the answer. Further down in Revelation 1:20 we read . . .

      Revelation 1:20— "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

- But who are these ***angels of the seven churches***?

    - The Greek word *agellos* literally means "messenger." The word ***angel*** most often refers to a supernatural being, but literally meaning "messanger," an angel can be used to signify a supernatural angelic messenger or it can refer to a human messenger.

- So which is it, supernatural or natural being?

    - Most likely this is a reference to **human messengers**. In fact, **it is most likely that the Lord's messages to the seven churches was carried to them by seven human leaders, one from each church.**

- There are several reasons for this being human messengers and <u>not</u> angelic messengers.

    - First, supernatural messengers never represent human churches.

    - Second, since holy angels never sin, there is no need for them to repent of sin, as they are commanded to do in the Lord's messages to the churches in chapters 2-3.

    - Third, it makes no sense for the Lord to deliver a message to His human messenger, John, to deliver to supernatural messengers. If the messengers were angelic, the Lord would communicate to them directly.

- **Sixth,** in v. 16 John next describes how ***out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword***.

    - This description is of the Lord's **justice and judgment against the enemies of His churches.** We see this same description of a ***two-edged sword*** in Hebrews 4:12 and Revelation 19:15 . . .

Hebrews 4:12— For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Revelation 19:15— From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

- **Seventh**, in v. 16 John describes the Lord's ***face was like the sun shining in its strength.***
    - This description is an attempt to explain what the glory of God looks like in the face of Christ. This description is almost the same as the one we find in Matthew 17:2, which John witnessed more than 60 years earlier, when he witnessed the Lord's transfiguration.

      Matthew 17:2— And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

- In examining this description of the Lord in v. 12-16, John's description highlights several attributes of God.
    - The radiance of the Lord's face conveys His holiness.
    - The purity of His head and hair convey His eternality.
    - The fire in his eyes conveys His judgment and omniscience.
    - The brilliance of His feet conveys His omnipresence.
    - The fact that He holds the churches in His right hand conveys His sovereignty.
    - The two-edged sword that comes from His mouth conveys His judgment and omnipotence.

John's Commission Restated and Amplified (v. 17-20)

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

- Following John's description of the Lord Jesus' appearance in His glorified state, we next see John's reaction to seeing the Lord in His glorified state . . . ***when I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man.***
    - Despite the fact that John had witnessed the Lord's transfiguration 65 years prior, His reaction is exactly the same as the first time he saw the glorified Lord . . . **he literally fainted from fear and from the overwhelming glory of the Lord's presence.** We see John's reaction to witnessing the first transfiguration in Matthew 17:6-7 . . .

Matthew 17:6-7— 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid."

Question: What is the source of John's fear?

- John's response is the natural physiological response when a finite creature is in the presence of the glorious, holy and infinite God.
- It is the same response that Isaiah has in Isaiah 6:5, ***Woe is me!*** . . . it is the same response as Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1:28 and 3:23 . . . it is the same as Daniel in Daniel 10:9-10 . . . it is the same response as Saul in Acts 9:4.
- John's response is the same as every other man who encounters the glorious appearance of supernatural beings . . . he ***fell at His feet like a dead man***.
- The falling at the feet of the Lord is <u>both</u> a voluntary and involuntary response.
  - Voluntarily in that it is the natural, and proper, reaction to fall to our knees when we are in the presence of God.
  - But the involuntary "fainting" at the sight of such a glorious being is also natural. We would all faint away if we were to see what John saw.

- Then, just as He did in Matthew 17:7, in Revelation 1:17 the glorified Lord Jesus reassures John . . . ***He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid."***

  Matthew 17:6-7—6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid."

  - The touch of the Lord is for the purpose of reassurance and **for giving strength**, as we see in Daniel 10:10, 12, 18.

Revelation 1:17b-18— 17 . . . "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

- After the words of assurance and comfort, the Lord continues with words of **self-identification**.
- The phrase, ***I am the first and the last*** is a statement declaring **the eternality of Christ.** This statement has the same meaning as the phrase in v. 8 . . . ***"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."***
- The next self-identifying phrase is, ***the living One***. This is a statement that was commonly used of God in the Old Testament (Joshua 3:10; Psalm 42:2; 84:2; Hosea 1:10; etc.).
  - This statement stands in contrast to all other "dead" gods. **Only Yahweh is the living God**

- The next phrase, ***I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore***, signifies **the importance and reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus**. The fact that Jesus will never again die is affirmed when He says, ***I am alive forevermore.***

- And the final phrase is, ***and I have the keys of death and of Hades***. This phrase points to the **sovereignty and power of God over death**.

    - The reference to having ***the keys*** is a reference to the fact that, as the sovereign God, He not only has the power and authority over death and Hades, but He has the keys . . . the ability . . . to free us from the penalty of death.

    - ***Death*** signifies "the grave," when the body awaits resurrection, while ***Hades*** is the place where the soul awaits judgment.

v. 19— "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.

- Then, for the second time, the Lord commands John to ***write***. But with this repeated command, John is specifically told what **three things** he is to record.

    - **First**, he is commanded to ***write the things which you have seen***. The aorist tense form of ***things which you have seen*** is a reference to this very conversation and interaction. Thus, this encounter is in the first chapter.

    - **Second**, ***the things which are*** is a reference to the message to the seven churches in chapters 2-3. Those churches existed at the time in which John lived and would have immediately been delivered to them following John's recording of the events in writing.

    - **Third**, ***the things which will take place after these things*** refers to the remainder of this book… the events that would take place in the future . . . in chapters 4-22 . . . when the revelation is fulfilled.

- **Conclusion**. Here in v. 17-19 we learn that John is commissioned by the Lord to record a 3-part work, which John accomplishes and which we now read.

- Then, having repeated his commission for John to ***write*** this book, in v. 20 the Lord does us a great service by explaining the symbolism He previously used in referring to ***seven golden lampstands*** in Revelation 1:12-13 and ***seven stars*** in v. 16.

  v. 20— "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

    - In doing so, the Lord Jesus makes the important point that the symbolism of the ***lampstands*** and ***stars*** represent actual churches and church representatives. It has been suggested that the ***seven stars*** . . . the seven messengers from the seven churches, may have been present, in person, to receive the message to their respective churches from John. This is not stated, so we have no way to confirm this.