

Revelation 1:9-20

Introduction

Because of its nature, it is so easy to misunderstand and misinterpret Revelation. Many people interpret Revelation in a lot of different ways, and it can be the cause of great division in the church, and cause Christians to be in error when they try to read it. So, this is why we want to be very careful with how we handle Scripture in general, but specifically the book of Revelation with our current study.

By the time we finish chapter one, we will be able to have a clearer picture of how we should read and interpret Revelation. Chapter one serves to introduce some of the foundational themes and principles that we need to keep in mind as we go through the book of Revelation. So, by the end of chapter one, we will be better equipped to move into the rest of the book with an understanding of how we should read, interpret, and apply the book to our lives.

Revelation 1:9-20

9 I, John, your brother and partner in the affliction, kingdom, and endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. **10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard a loud voice behind me like a trumpet **11** saying, "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

12 Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me. When I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, **13** and among the lampstands was one like the Son of Man, dressed in a robe and with a golden sash wrapped around his chest. **14** The hair of his head was white as wool—white as snow—and his eyes like a fiery flame. **15** His feet were like fine bronze as it is fired in a furnace, and his voice like the sound of cascading waters. **16** He had seven stars in his right hand; a sharp double-edged sword came from his mouth, and his face was shining like the sun at full strength.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. He laid his right hand on me and said, "Don't be afraid. I am the First and the Last, **18** and the Living One. I was dead, but look—I am alive forever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and Hades. **19** Therefore write what you have seen, what is, and what will take place after this. **20** The mystery of the seven stars you saw in

my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

I. Introduction of Jesus (9-11)

- A. Why does John introduce himself again?
 - 1. Moving from introduction of the letter to introduction of the narrative
- B. Three things he is a partner in
 - 1. Affliction
 - 2. Kingdom
 - 3. Endurance
 - 4. The good and the bad
 - 5. John understands what the church is going through
- C. Doesn't go on about his persecution - points it Jesus
 - 1. Under emperor Domitian who demanded to be called "Lord and God"
- D. What does it mean that he was "in the Spirit"?
 - 1. Probably on Sunday
 - 2. "Spirit-guided and Spirit-empowered worship" - Craig Keener
 - 3. Ultimate point: what he is hearing is from the Spirit, not from himself
- E. Voice like a trumpet - scary!
- F. Was there actually a trumpet?
 - 1. Probably not, but the use of the word "trumpet" is significant in that it marks an eschatological moment
- G. 7 churches in Turkey - why these churches?
 - 1. Significant geographically
 - 2. Natural distribution centers

II. Description of Jesus (12-16)

- A. "First and the last" echoes "Alpha and Omega"
- B. Echoes of the transfiguration
 - 1. Mark 9:3

III. Instructions of Jesus (17-20)

- A. John falls down like he is dead
 - 1. Jesus always says don't be afraid - comforting to John
- B. Jesus makes claims of divinity - repeated
- C. Jesus gives a direct command to WRITE because of his authority (because he was dead, now he is alive, has the keys, etc.)
- D. Some things have already happened - not all of this is futuristic

1. What is already happening and what is going to happen
- E. What does “angels of the seven churches” mean?
 1. Might angels, guardian angels of the churches
 2. Could be the leaders of the seven churches
 3. Also might be a personification of the prevailing spirit of the church - Mounce

We can read this and get an idea of what is going on, but let’s dig a little deeper to help us continue to develop a foundation for interpreting the rest of Revelation. There are some elements that we see in this passage that, if we can begin to grasp, will really help us to move forward through the rest of the book. This is not an exhaustive list, but here are three elements of an interpretive rubric (or lens) for Revelation:

I. Context

A. Old Testament

1. Of the 405 verses, 278 contain allusions to the OT
2. How can we understand Revelation without understanding the OT?
3. We need to be able to explain the gospel from the OT
 - a) Example of Nicodemus
4. Examples in this passage:
 - a) Lampstands
 - (1) Lampstands were common in the OT, used in the temple in particular
 - (2) Zechariah 4:1-2 - continuation of the true Israel
 - (a) Zechariah is being given visions of this future with a coming king that would rule forever
 - (b) **1** The angel who was speaking with me then returned and roused me as one awakened out of sleep. **2** He asked me, “What do you see?” I replied, “I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top. The lampstand also has seven lamps at the top with seven spouts for each of the lamps.
 - (3) The OT priests tended to the lamp stands - so Jesus tends to us
 - (4) Jesus is *with* the church, faithful to his bride
 - b) Son of Man
 - (1) References to Daniel - Son of Man
 - (a) Daniel 10:5-6
 - i) **5** I looked up, and there was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. **6** His body was like beryl, his face like the brilliance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and

feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

(b) Daniel 7:9-10

- i) **9** “As I kept watching, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was white like snow, and the hair of his head like whitest wool. His throne was flaming fire; its wheels were blazing fire. **10** A river of fire was flowing, coming out from his presence. Thousands upon thousands served him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was convened, and the books were opened.

(c) Daniel 7:13-14

- i) **13** I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him. **14** He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.

- (d) The “son of man” is a messianic deliverer who appears like a man but is not truly, completely a man - testifies to Jesus’ humanity

B. New Testament

- 1. Acts 2 - we are in the end times
 - a) The book of Joel
- 2. This was written and intended to be spread among the early church
- 3. According to our doctrine of Scripture, it *had* to mean something to them, so if we interpret it in a way that only works in 2021, it’s the wrong interpretation
 - a) People who are ignorant and false teachers
 - b) We tend to look everywhere for the antichrist, mark of the beast, etc.

II. Symbolism

A. The symbols are not literal, but the reality to which they point are.

- 1. The meaning is IN the details, but the meaning is NOT the details.
- 2. Example: Jesus cut off hands and pluck out eyes

B. Example: Is the sharp double edge sword meant to be literal?

- 1. Probably not
- 2. References to Isaiah
- 3. Hebrews 4:12-13

- a) **12** For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **13** No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.
- 4. Authoritative, ultimately triumphant
- 5. Intended to be a picture of the proclamation of judgment
- C. Jesus' description - Grant Osborne
 - 1. "what we have here is not a literal description of a vision of a human person, but a composite symbolic picture, telling us key theological truths about the person of Jesus." - Ian Paul
 - 2. Not intended to be an exact picture of Jesus, a metaphorical image

III. Message

- A. The book of Revelation points to Jesus
- B. The entirety of Scripture points to Jesus
- C. Luke **24:25** He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! **26** Wasn't it necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into his glory?" **27** Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures.
- D. John **5:39** You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me. **40** But you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.
 - 1. Revelation is not different from the rest of Scripture
 - 2. Jesus is the hero of Revelation
- E. The danger of not being Christ-focused
 - 1. Revelation can become a hideout where we don't think Jesus is the main character
 - 2. Revelation can become a place where we can speculate and argue instead of magnify Jesus
 - 3. Revelation can be a place where we go when we are bored of the gospel or, God forbid, of Jesus
 - a) We get bored very easily
 - b) I worry about people who are obsessed with the end times because it almost always indicates a lack of focus on Jesus
 - 4. The gospel is not something that we just hear, respond to, and forget. We must be reminded of it daily. There is always more to learn about Jesus, more to dwell on and grow in belief

Conclusion

Let's look at a theological truth revealed that I know you would say that you believe, but I'm not sure that you really believe, or that I really believe. This is going to be a mind blowing statement for you, I'm sure:

I. Jesus is God

- A. "There is surely nowhere else in the New Testament such a comprehensive and exalted description of Jesus as one with the Father" - Ian Paul
- B. If you've been a Christian for any span of time I know that you believe this. Or you would say that you believe it, but do you actually?

II. Are you more comfortable with the idea of Jesus than the idea of God?

- A. Jesus seems nice, God seems mean
- B. The Chosen

III. There is no other God behind Jesus

- A. We can think of God as being full of wrath and angry at us all the time, and Jesus is the one that actually loves us

IV. Get-Back Coach

- A. Jesus is not God's get-back coach

V. Do you believe this?

- A. Jesus is God, God is Jesus.
- B. **John 14:8** "Lord," said Philip, "show us the Father, and that's enough for us." **9** Jesus said to him, "Have I been among you all this time and you do not know me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" **10** Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who lives in me does his works.
- C. **Hebrews 1:3** The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word.
- D. **Colossians 1:19** For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, **20** and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

John 8:2-11

2 At dawn he went to the temple again, and all the people were coming to him. He sat down and began to teach them. **3** Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, making her stand in the center. **4** "Teacher," they said to him, "this woman was caught in the act

of committing adultery. **5** In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" **6** They asked this to trap him, in order that they might have evidence to accuse him. Jesus stooped down and started writing on the ground with his finger. **7** When they persisted in questioning him, he stood up and said to them, "The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her." **8** Then he stooped down again and continued writing on the ground. **9** When they heard this, they left one by one, starting with the older men. Only he was left, with the woman in the center. **10** When Jesus stood up, he said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" **11** "No one, Lord," she answered. "Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."

Does this seem too good to be true? That the maker of the universe would get down his knees and wipe the tears from this woman's eyes, and say "I don't condemn you, go and don't sin anymore." Does this gentleness and grace shock you? Is this how you see God?

No wonder we call the gospel "good news." This is the best news, that the God of the universe came down and gave himself up for our sins, reconciling us to himself.

Do you see how one seemingly obvious point from the book of Revelation can be a stirring reminder to us? Do you see how it is so easy to forget the basics of our faith? Don't let Revelation become a place where we go because we are bored of Jesus. Let it magnify him along with the rest of Scripture for he is the Alpha and Omega the First and the Last, and the Living One. He was dead, but now he is alive forever and ever, and he holds the keys of death and Hades.