

The Book of Revelation

Just an introductory note; I'm not going to get caught up with going into the translation of specific words unless it serves to better demonstrate a concept. The book has been copied too many times for any specific words to be valid anymore.

In those cases where I have gone into detail, the words use in other places serves to demonstrate what concept the writer is trying to develop and not to serve as a theological structure around which to build an argument.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,

2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.

- The word 'Revelation' is also translated 'Apocalypse'. To say something is an 'Apocalypse' is to say that it exposes or reveals information to the person viewing it.
- The word 'angel' can also be translated 'messenger' but I don't think that's as important as others do.
- John the Revelator is a bit of a historic mystery. While this John was certainly living on the Island of Patmos (Vs 9) when he wrote the apocalypse, more information than that is somewhat limited. There are some clear facts about him and his book:
 - The book was written after Paul's establishment of the 7 Churches, most likely dating it to after Paul's death around 66AD
 - The book's overwhelmingly negative atmosphere and invocation of extremely dark events would be expected shortly after the fall of Jerusalem and Masada. The Jewish Revolt ended in 73/4AD. After this time Christian persecution arose which impacted both the author and the Disciple John.
 - Common dating to the book is around 95 AD owing to references made amongst the 7 Churches. Some of the practises that are condemned or commended were not widely known or did not develop until around 93 AD so an earlier date is difficult to accept.
 - Almost all the possible 'John' individuals who could be the author of the Revelation died in 100 AD, so it must be written before that.
- Tradition says that this John was the same John who wrote the gospel – the 'disciple whom Jesus loved'. From a literary perspective there are several connections in language and there is certainly a correlation in concepts where the Gospel presents Jesus as God while the Revelation presents him as a divine war-leader.

- Considering the dating of the Revelation, John the Gospel Writer is still a valid candidate as he was known to have been the youngest disciple.
- After Jesus' ascension, John adopted Mary as his own mother and looked after her until her eventual death.
 - While unproven, some apocryphal accounts state that at the time of her betrothal to Joseph, Mary was 12–14 years old. According to ancient Jewish custom, Mary could have been betrothed at about 12. Hyppolitus of Thebes says that Mary lived for 11 years after the death of her son Jesus, dying in 41 AD.
 - The earliest extant biographical writing on Mary is Life of the Virgin attributed to the 7th century saint Maximus the Confessor, which makes the majority of Church dogma about Mary extremely late for it to be entirely valid.
- John – along with Peter – became central to the development of the Christian movement and lead the Apostolic Councils in Jerusalem. He spent time in Prison with Peter and James and is generally invoked with James as the '2nd tier' of leaders in the Church – the first tier being Peter and Paul.
- After the Jerusalem Revolt, records amongst Christian leaders become more complicated. Tradition teaches that John spent a lot of time in Ephesus so probably knew the 7 Churches in Asia well. His letters to them are, therefore, coming from a known and trusted entity.
- During Emperor Domitian's reign and persecution of Christians, he was arrested and imprisoned along with many others, but specific details are somewhat confused as there were several people called 'John' important in the church at that time.
- According to Tertullian (in The Prescription of Heretics) John was banished (presumably to Patmos) after being plunged into boiling oil in Rome and suffering nothing from it. His survival made him feared by the Romans who therefor exiled him rather than have a pseudo-divine character spreading his myths around their world.
- Scholars generally agree that he was the only one of the disciples to die of natural causes.
- Identifying 'John' is very important as the opening verses clearly state that he will certify that the message is authentic.
- The Authority of the Revelation is from Jesus Christ:

“The Revelation **of** Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place.”

 - In this case, the word 'of' has a double meaning. It serves as both the letters subject and authority;
 - This book is **from** Jesus Christ
 - This book is **about** Jesus Christ
- John must have some kind of connection with Jesus Christ in order to act as both the certifier and sealer of the authority of this book:

“And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.”

- One key connection between the Apostle John and the Revelator John is the use of this identification of Jesus as the “word of God”. This mirrors the Gospel of John 1:1:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. “

Revealed in vs 14 to be Jesus:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

- The identification of John the Disciple as the Revelator is therefore important, but frankly, not essential. There were a great many Christians who knew Jesus and had close association with him that could have acted as his messenger in this way. Regardless as to who ‘John’ is, a couple of factors are very important to accept:
 - The author was known to and had a relationship with the 7 Churches. That the testimony was given to John for dissemination by God indicates that he is already known to those people. Otherwise his rather harsh condemnations would not be readily acceptable.
 - The author was some kind of leader in the Church and was recognised as such. He was a known and trusted quantity.
 - The events that are described as being visions by John were shown to him by Jesus.
- It is my belief that John the Disciple wrote the Revelation, mostly because I cannot see John the ‘Disciple’ (aka the disciple whom Jesus loved), the ‘Elder’ and the ‘Revelator’ being 3 different people. The more research I do the more similar their stories become. It is my belief that these 3 are all the same person. I’m yet to see a valid argument that these are actually separate people.
- The only other, noteworthy, element of these 2 verses is the statement that these things have not happened. That means, from 95AD, almost everything must be future. We cannot, therefore, consider that any explanations predate that time unless explicitly stated.

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

- A double-edged blessing is offered here;
 - First, reading and understanding the prophecy is important but

- Keeping the commandments included is also very important because ‘the time is near’. This language is constant throughout the book and gives it the oft associated sinister overtones.

4 John, to the seven churches which 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 from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

John now gives his more formal greeting both from himself and from the authority from which he writes. First he addresses them from God the Father and in addressing them he gives a lot of information about who these entities are:

- Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come,
 - Grace and Peace were the standard greetings amongst Christians at this time
 - In using the 3 timeframes, John is describing the Father as eternal. This unites with his introduction about the prophetic aspect of what he is to discuss.
 - The God that John is referencing here is one for whom time means nothing. He can exist before John’s time, exists now, and will exist in the future. He exists in such a way that time means nothing to him; something we cannot fathom.
- and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,
 - 7 is a divine or holy number and also a perfect number
 - Who or what these spirits are is open for interpretation and are not tremendously important. They have been interpreted to represent:
 - The 7 capital virtues one is supposed to embody if they properly follow Jesus: fidelity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humility.
 - The 7 graces: insight (prophecy), helpfulness, instruction, encouragement, generosity, guidance, compassion.
 - Both these interpretations are supported by the reference to them in Revelation 3: 1 as qualities of that particular messenger “These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God,” however, the difference between the person having the 7 Spirits of God and having 7 Spirits before the throne makes this open to interpretation.
 - The 7 holy messengers/archangels: Jophiel, Gabriel, Selaphiel, Michael, Uriel, Raphael, and Barachiel
(Only 2 of these are mentioned in the bible – Gabriel and Michael)

- It could also be much less important, representing the 7 Churches in Asia; John promoting them by saying that they are represented directly before his throne.
- In reality, this is not an important point, and any interpretation is really valid.

Then he addresses them from Jesus, to whom he gives some rather interesting qualities:

- 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness,
 - The word 'witness' (μάρτυς – martyrs – in Greek) can also be translated as 'record' or 'testimony'. An analogous English would be 'evidence'.
 - Jesus is held up as a demonstration, of God's plan being certain considering he was the very centre of it. As we discussed in Daniel, the entire prophetic dating structure centred around Jesus' death and resurrection, and his participation in that makes him and his experience a faithful example of God's plan being certain.
- the firstborn from the dead,
 - While Jesus was not the first person raised from the dead chronologically, without his death and resurrection, nobody could be raised from the dead.
 - His resurrection is as important as his death. Jesus death and sacrifice permitted or secured our salvation, but his resurrection certified both his divinity and the validity of the sacrifice. If he had sinned or if something had gone wrong, Jesus would not have been able to be resurrected. Therefore, his establishment as 'firstborn of the dead' is an extremely important title.
- and the ruler over the kings of the earth.
 - Jesus' death is also the moment he secured authority over this earth away from Satan. Prior to his resurrection, this world was a fallen plane under the authority of the Devil, but with the ransom paid, Jesus again took overlordship of the planet.
 - See the debate between Michael and Satan over Moses' body in Jude as evidence.
 -

Finally he identifies the qualities in those he is addressing;

- To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,
 - The language here is extremely common and references the Jewish Temple Services. The penitent transmitted his sin to the lamb sacrifice who was then slaughtered in their place. This transferral 'washed' the penitent clean of their sin in the lamb's blood.
 - Jesus' sacrifice was the animal sacrifice made real. While animals could only serve as symbols, Jesus' sacrifice was the price of sin paid.
- 6 and has made us kings
 - In paying the sacrifice, Jesus has elevated us to the status of Kings both amongst men and amongst heaven.

- Creatures on other worlds do not know what it means to experience sin, let alone salvation. When it comes to the crunch, we are leaders in a country they do not know about.
- In addition, it is our role to bring others to this message, to proselytise the values and virtues of discarding sin and instead putting our faith in Him.
- **and priests to His God and Father**
 - The use of language here is interesting. While Jesus was on earth, he supplicated himself under his father, so the use of the references to “His” God is apt. God the Father was Jesus’ god as he is ours, however now we have Jesus himself to pray to.
 - What this literally means is that we have been made priests of God the Father by praying to Jesus. God the Father acts as the divine arbitrator of justice amongst the world and Jesus is our advocate. We are called to be priests to approach Jesus ourselves, without an intercessor between us and Him.
 - We are instructed in this statement that we can approach Christ on his throne boldly, being made Priests through his blood and sacrifice. He, in turn, intercedes with the Father on our behalf.
 - This defeats the Roman and other Churches use of Priests as intercessors between Man and Jesus. No man stands between me and Jesus except my own ego.

This is then ended with the ‘**amen**’ which has become the concluding word for all Christian prayers and encyclicals world wide, as well as in most Jewish and Islamic traditions. The word ‘amen’ literally means ‘so be it’ but can be easily translated as ‘this is certain’, ‘surety’, ‘fixed’, and can be used as a verb to mean ‘to be reliable’ and ‘to be trusted’. Including it here, John is stipulating that all these facts about both God and the Christians he is writing to is something that he does not need to question. It is simply a fact of faith that he trusts is certain.

This also constitutes the first of 7 ‘Beatitudes’ or blessings recorded in Revelation. The number 7 is a constant theme throughout as it is a divine number, as stated above.

7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

This is a pretty standard invocation of the Second Coming but includes an interesting note. “**even those who pierced him.**” Jesus told Caiaphas and the other members of the Sanhedrin that they would see him coming in great Glory, and John is here reinforcing this idea. Mark 14:62: “**... you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.**” This becomes another recurring concept – that those who did the worst to Jesus and his people will be resurrected shortly before the second coming, but that will become more apparent and develop as we read on.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

The message from Jesus starts here, with an overwhelming and sans context statement. Jesus begins with a repetition of his establishment of all things; Alpha and Omega being the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet.

By involving Greek letters here, he is similarly invoking Greek history and philosophy overall, not any one specific philosophy. When one considers that these 7 Churches are in Turkey but would be easily classified as ‘ethnically’ Greek, it is easy for them to realise that Jesus is claiming himself as responsible for their history. Jesus stipulates that he is the author or creator of all things and the concluder or ender of all things, but also links himself with the Father in Vs 4. There we see the Father being referenced as eternal and both pre-existent, existent and post-existent but here those same qualities are claimed by Jesus, along with the final quality – the Almighty.

This gives a scope of Jesus’ power where he claims the authority of all things; heaven and earth, to work to and for his will. Almighty has no boundaries. It is all encompassing.

Putting these together, Jesus is here claiming that He is;

- The author of all History
- The ender of all history
- Eternal inasmuch as he:
 - always was,
 - is,
 - and always will be
- And has power over everything, without limits and without restrictions.

9 I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

John, who again references that he knows these people, addresses his readers and gives them context for what he is seeing. As established, he was on Patmos specifically because he had been imprisoned and he states that is why he was on Patmos. He is there “for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ”. This is a twofold statement. He is there both because he has preached about “the word of God” – as stated, a reference to Jesus through John the Gospel Writer’s language; which references his imprisonment, but also to testify for or express what Jesus wished to testify to his people about. John stipulates that he is not only here to express what Jesus is a witness too; what he has seen.

The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ or the Revelations about Jesus are the revealing of things of and from Jesus about his work, sacrifice and experiences both divine and human. John is presenting himself here as being a messenger for Jesus on Patmos.

Why on Patmos? Because persecution gives rise to authority. We rarely persecute people who don't have a point to make. We persecute criminals because they have done wrong; we persecute enemy soldiers because they are opposition. John is here stating that the Romans recognised what he is teaching is true, and because of that they have given him the dignity of imprisonment. Think Nelson Mandela or Gandhi.

10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet,

John presents himself as being taken in Vision on the Lord's Day. We have to remember that the Christian sect is still a Jewish group at this time, so the 'Lord's Day' is obviously Saturday Sabbath. John includes this because, similar to modern church practise of having a Saturday Sermon, the Jews met in synagogues and other places to discuss the Lord's work on the Lord's day.

That this day is Saturday is undeniable. It would not be for another 200 years when, on March 7, 321AD, that Constantine would decree that Sunday was the day of worship, but we must also not fall into the trap of making this an argument for Saturday in later aspects of the book which will become apparent. John is here simply giving context for his writing to explain that he was doing the Lord's work on the Lord's day.

What is interesting is the way that he references the voice – stipulating it as “a loud voice, as of a trumpet,” which indicates both a commanding and introductory tone.

11 saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,” and, “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”

Again, Jesus claims the authorship of all things to give John the reinforced authority of what he is to write. This heavy reinforcement of this concept is highly demanding for the reader; you either accept Jesus as Creator God or you reject this message. This repetition, again, owes credibility to the idea of the Author being the same John 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' who wrote the gospel, considering the first chapter of that book having a similarly pedantic encouragement to the idea of Jesus as both Creator and God.

John is told to write what he sees to the 7 Churches which, at that time, constituted the majority of Christians in the world. These are also referenced heavily by Paul who visited most of them too in his letters that expanded the Church. The specifics of each Church will be addressed in the next 2 Chapters when specific messages are given to them individually.

Also, just to reinforce, 'Asia' is the Roman Province of Asia – modern-day Turkey.

12 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands,

13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.

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

15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;

16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

Some of these symbols here we can quickly dispense with thanks to Verse 20. Jesus stipulates there that the 7 Candlesticks are the 7 Churches, and a character is walking amongst them. Obviously, this is not literal; he is indicating that this person's message is going around those Churches, which reinforces the idea that this is Jesus as those Churches are devoted to Jesus' teachings.

As with Daniel 10, the individual here is not, directly, called 'Jesus' but rather, "[One like the Son of Man](#)". This character has several different qualities to that Daniel 10 Character;

Daniel 10		Rev 1
His body was like topaz,		
his face like lightning,		
dressed in linen,	Similar	clothed with a garment down to the feet and
with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz		
around his waist.	Similar	girded about the chest with a golden band.
his eyes like flaming torches,	Similar	and His eyes like a flame of fire;
his arms and legs like the gleam of		
burnished bronze,	Similar but different	His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a
and his voice like the sound of a		furnace,
multitude.	Similar but different	and His voice as the sound of many waters;
		His head and hair were white like wool, as white as
		snow,

He had in His right hand seven stars,
out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword,
and His countenance was like the sun shining in its
strength.

This certainly indicates that this individual is divine, but the biggest defence is Bronze and Brass. Bronze is distinctly darker than Bronze which has a general golden finish. While the voice can be excused between waters and a large group of people, this is the clearest demonstration that the character in Daniel 10 – Gabriel – is clearly not the same as in Revelation 1 – Jesus. What's more, the next verse reinforces the authority of this character being Jesus.

The other important thing here is that “[out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword](#)”. This is the clear start of the symbolic language in Revelation; although there are elements before, and it is from this that we must take an extremely important lesson. The Roman sword – the Gladius – was a double-edged sword, so its important that John brings out the reference here to this being a “[sharp two-edged sword](#)” rather than just saying “a sword”. He is engaging with the imagery of a sword that cuts both ways – a common phrase which we have adopted to mean something that impacts the deliverer as much as the receiver. This is the one part of Christ that Satan will not impersonate when he takes the form of Jesus. He cannot and does not feel the pain a parent experiences when they deliver discipline to their children for his care as his intention is to remove them from Christ's protection.

This 'two-edged sword' is therefore a rather interesting metaphor for John and for those who preach the Revelation. Revelation is a collection of concepts debated over heavily for near 2 millennia, and will continue to be debated until all the events are fully concluded. Jesus recognised that hearing and experiencing the message of Revelation – things like “are you unfaithful to Jesus” and “are you lukewarm” are just as painful to us as they are the God who is being impacted by them.

It also stands – as is demonstrated by the Candlesticks – that the book is full of symbols, but symbols that are not difficult to understand if we are faithful and if we listen to the two-edged tongue that reveals things to us. The book is full of symbols and those will be both a joy and a curse as we go through.

[17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.](#)

18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

Unlike in Daniel Chapter 10, when the character who is similarly ordained (Gabriel in 10:5-9) stipulates that he is supplicant to God, this character instead states to John that he is the Jesus. He has the qualities of creation and conclusion, but also adds a layer of humanity.

Now, Jesus reminds John that he is the one who lives, died, and then rose again. The inclusion of the word 'amen' – as above examined – again indicates to John that he can trust the truth of these statements, and therefore goes further than this. He is almost claiming that to say 'amen' is actually to say 'God has certified my faith in this'. He's not quite going that far in this statement, but that is certainly where he is leading.

The statement that Jesus is holding “[And I have the keys of Hades and of Death](#)” indicates that, owing to his resurrection, he is now the arbitrator or judge of who is resurrected and when. Jesus is claiming that he has paid the ransom for the world and now the authority of paying that ransom is given to him to decide when the prisoner will be freed. The use of both Hades – the Grave – and Death itself indicates that Jesus is claiming the authority over all who have lived at some point, not just those with physical graves somewhere.

19 [Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.](#)

The construction of this verse would seem to indicate that Jesus has, effectively, dictated the next 2 chapters to John without him seeing him. John is told to write, he then writes Chapters 2 and 3, then he turns around and sees Jesus who tells him that there is about to be a lot more he will see and a lot more he will need to write. Whether or not this is the case is, frankly, not important as the presence of Jesus here is the authority John needs to write to the 7 Churches from Jesus and in His name. Nevertheless, John knows his writing is not complete.

20 [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 which you saw are the seven churches.](#)

These Churches are protected by and certified for the work of Jesus and of God. Remembering that Angels are also translated 'Messengers' it's clear that John has put this in this way so that he can address those churches individually, as well as the world-church as a

collective. John is not told to send these messages to individual churches, but to all 7 Churches. This is evidence that there is a message included in them, not just for those groups but for all the world Christians.

As we work our way through Chapter 2, we will see that the message to each church can be taken in 3 ways.

- Firstly, it is a message at that time to that Church.
- Secondly, it is a broader message to the world church that lasts over history, as will be interpreted in the next Chapter.
- Thirdly, each member of both those churches and all Christians throughout history should look at these messages and see if they apply to them specifically. Are you tolerant? Are you unfaithful to God? Are you lukewarm etc.

While understanding these 3 is important, we will focus on only the first 2. We will first give historical context to the Church and see if the message referenced by John to them applies to their 1st Century group, and secondly to the Church as a whole throughout history.