**COMMENTARY**

**Chapter 1**

**Prologue (Opening Statement) 1:1-3:** *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, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. 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.*

1:1 *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, The title of the book. *Revelation* (Gk, *apokalupsis*) means an unveiling, revealing, or uncovering of something hidden (Luke 12:2); it is the making known of something we could not know on our own. It is the supernatural revelation of divine truths unknown to men and incapable of being discovered by them (Rom 16:25; Gal 1:12). It is not a book of human wisdom or of human origin. *Of Jesus Christ* can be interpreted one of two different ways: objective or subjective. As objective, Jesus is the object or content of the revelation. It is a revelation about him, the unveiling of him and the events surrounding His coming in glory to establish His kingdom on earth (I Cor 1:7, II Thes 1:6; I Pet 1:7). As subjective, Jesus is the source of the revelation, the one who unveils all the end-time events surrounding His coming to earth. Both of these views are right, but the subjective view is best since it is the revelation that *God gave him to show his servants.* God the Father is the source and fountainhead of all revelation; God the Son is the agent through whom this revelation is made known to men. *Servants* (*doulos*) is better translated throughout the NT as “slaves” and refers appropriately to our true position in Christ. We are slaves of Christ in the truest sense of the word. In context, it refers to all Christians in general or to the believers who were the messengers to the 7 churches in chapter 2 and 3.

*Things which must shortly take place* (*a dei genesthai ev taxei*); or, *events which must quickly come to pass*; *shortly* (*taxei* and related words*);* used 39 times in Scripture and translated as *quickly* (16x), *swift* (2x), *hastily* (1x), *shortly* (11x), *soon* (3x), *suddenly* (1x), *outrun* (1x), *with all speed* (1x), *speedily* (1x), *lightly* (1x), *the sooner* (1x). Suggestions for the meaning of this phrase are:

1. Fulfillment of the events are expected in the very near future, i.e., shortly or soon (best). In context, it refers first to the vision of Jesus Christ in the 1st chapter (1:12-20), then warnings and exhortations in the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, and, to the events surrounding the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Day of the Lord, in chapters 4-19 (combined Preterist/Futurist viewpoint).

2. Certainty of the events in question; refers to the Lord unfailingly bringing them to pass in His time not ours.

3. Suddenly, without delay when the time comes. Includes the idea of swiftly, once they begin, they come quickly

4. Blending of near/far prophecy into one event; the distant future is seen in terms of the immediate future.

*And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John*; He could be either the Father or the Son. Probably, it is Jesus since the revelation was first communicated to Him by the Father; then he, in turn, communicated it to his angel who gave it to John. Thus, the revelation was not made directly by God to John. The revelation came in 4 steps: 1. God to Jesus; 2. Jesus to his angel; 3. the angel to John; and, 4. John to his readers. *Signified* (samaino) means to make known or indicate; but, the Greek word implies difficulty in understanding Revelation since it is given in signs and strange imagery (“sign-ni-fied”).

1:2 *Who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw.* John, referring to the entire book of Revelation (i.e., “*all things that he saw*”), affirms that what he wrote is his testimony to the authenticity of the word of God which was the testimony given him by Jesus Christ. It affirms that his testimony as true to everything he was told by Christ and to everything he saw (very strong statement to the authenticity and accuracy of the book of Revelation).

1:3 *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.*  This is the 1st of seven beatitudes (blessings) scattered throughout the book (1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 14). A blessing or beatitude (*makarios*) is pronounced on the person who reads the words of this prophecy publicly to the church and upon those believers in the church who hear and obey it. The context strongly suggests that “read” means to read aloud and in view of the context (7 letters to 7 churches), there is little doubt that reading it publicly to the churches is meant. Reading the Scriptures publicly was necessary in John’s day since the vast majority of people could not read. At first, the reader was chosen from the congregation. But, later the office of reader became an official position in the church. The beatitude virtually reproduces the words of Jesus in Luke 11:28: “*Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it”.* John expected the congregation to keep the words of Revelation’s prophecy. He considered that what he wrote was Scripture on par with the prophetic books of the Old Testament. It was prophecy, but it possessed a moral authority that required the obedient response of all believers. KEY: It requires that the book was meant to be understood and obeyed. Allegorists, idealists, and other interpreters ignore this truth.

*For the time is near,* adds incentive for immediate obedience. Although the beatitude is true in a general sense because it already is a promise of Scripture, here it is given added significance in view of the fact that “*the time is near”.* John is saying we should really take the prophecy to heart and consider its implications for our lives because its fulfillment is *“near*” or soon. The warnings, precautions, and encouragements in chapters 2 and 3 could occur soon. E.g., the church at Ephesus is warned about forsaking their “first love” (2:4). If they don’t repent, the Lord warns, he will come and “remove (their) lampstand.” This could happen any time after the Lord gave them adequate time to repent. And unless they repent, they should expect the Lord’s promised chastisement. Therefore, “for the time is near” does not mean imminent. This should be understood in the same sense as the phrase in 1.1, i.e., *“things which must shortly come to pass”*. See the notes above.

**Greeting to the Seven Churches 1:4-6:**  **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 loosed 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.***

1:4: *John, to the seven churches that are in Asia*. In the NT, Asia normally refers to the Roman province that occupied the entire western portion of Asia Minor (modern day western Turkey). It is the area represented by the ancient kingdom of Pergamum, which fell to the Romans in 133 B.C. It is not clear why Revelation was addressed to these 7 churches. There were other churches in Asia (Troas, Acts 20:5; Colossae, Col 1:2; Hierapolis, Col 4:13) of equal importance. Some suggest that the Asian church had gradually evolved into an organization of 7 groups and that at the center of each group stood one of these churches to which John writes. Also, these 7 churches were on a great circular road (possible postal route), which bound together the most populous, wealthy, and influential parts of the province. Also, the number 7 should not be ignored, since it is the often-used symbol of completeness or perfection, i.e., these seven churches potentially represent the spiritual condition of all churches. *Grace (xaris) to you and peace (eirene)* is a typical Christian greeting (similar to Pauline greetings) found in New Testament epistles; the emphasis is upon the love and care of God for the churches. This epistolary greeting reflects the epistolary content found in chapters 2 and 3 which contains God’s correction and instruction addressing the needs of each individual church (Fanning 79).

*From the One who is, the One who was, and the One coming.* This lengthy, tri-fold reference to the name of God the Father is different from the usual epistolary greetings to him (e.g., “God our Father”). Here, it denotes the eternity of God, based upon Ex 3:14-15; the first part is “the One who is”, the OT “I am” (‘o ’wv: present tense participle of the verb “to be”); the second part is “the One who was” (‘o ’nv: past tense verb of “to be”; unusual combination of an article as subject of a past tense verb); the third part is “the One coming” (‘o ’erxomenos: present participle of “to come” with implication of a future coming) which appears to be a reference to the future 2nd coming of God (as Christ) which is the dominant theme of the book (Fanning 80). *and from the* *seven spirits* (*pneuma*) *which are before his throne,* which refers to the seven-fold spirit of God, i.e., the Holy Spirit (Is 11:2; Zech 4:8-10), making this a reference to the Trinity; or, possibly, to 7 angels (Rev 3:1; 4:5; 5:6; II Chron 16:9; Luke 9:26; I Tim 5:21) who are a heavenly entourage/escort to the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:5: *And from Jesus Christ, the* *faithful witness* (emphatic, Gk: “the witness, the faithful one”); Jesus was faithful unto death enduring the cross, Heb 3:1-6; 12:2; to the Asian Christians in a time of persecution, Jesus is presented as an example of unfailing faithfulness. He is the model of how to stand firm and never compromise the truth of God (I Tim 6:13). *firstborn from the dead*; the first to rise from the dead, which is prototypical of believers, the first-fruits of the future resurrection of believers (I Cor 15:20-21); it could emphasize our guarantee of resurrection, which would have been very encouraging to persecuted Christians who could face death; *the* *ruler of the kings of the earth,* Christ now rules the earth, but not yet in His glory or fullness which occurs when He returns to establish His kingdom (at the end of the 70th week of Daniel, Matt 25:31, Rev 11:15).

John is addressing two related ideas:

1. Outwardly, Rome appeared to rule without a rival, with sovereign might of its own. Human history, interpreted by some historians, is the clash of nations and the rule of the strongest. However, behind the chaotic events of history, John is pointing out to the believer that Jesus Christ, who chose the way of obedience and humiliation, has been exalted to God’s right hand where he sits as Lord, sovereignly ruling over the powers of the earth. So, although Rome’s rule is mighty, Christ sovereignly rules over Rome.

2. Roman emperors were beginning to use titles of deity. Julius Caesar, Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian, and Titus had been officially declared divine after their death by the Roman Senate, and the last 3 had used the name *DIVUS* (divine) on their coins. However, Domitian, the emperor when John wrote, had requested that he be addressed by all people as *Dominus et Deus* (Lord and God). Thus, John’s purpose was to remind the churches in the face of increasing threats and Roman persecution that Caesar is not God and behind the power of Rome is the Lord who is sovereign and rules over all the kings of the earth. So, in spite of increasing persecution and threats, the churches needed to follow Christ’s example and live lives of faithfulness and obedience to him.

*To him who loved us* (better, *loving*, present participle emphasizing continuous love); *and released us* (*loosed or released us, or set us free;* aorist tense emphasizing a completed event). John’s emphasis is upon Christ’s death releasing us, loosening us, freeing us from sin’s enslavement and misery (Rom 6:7). (KJV has “washed us from our sins”. The Greek manuscripts have either *luow* (washed) or *luw* (loosed). The best manuscript evidence favors *luw.*)

1:6: *And he has made us to be a kingdom.* The kingdom of God was a primary topic in the teaching of Christ and we find here that the kingdom is those who are Christ’s. It is not like an earthly physical kingdom or country, where there are peoples and borders. It is a spiritual kingdom that consists exclusively of those who have been loosed from their sins (through Christ’s sacrificial death) and now are free from sin and enabled to do His service. (NOTE: The order is important: John, first, refers to Christ’s redeeming work to loose us from sin’s grip; and, then, secondly, we constitute his kingdom). *Priests*, (I Pet 2:4-10); in apposition with *kingdom* is a further explanation of those in the kingdom, i.e., a kingdom of *priests to serve His God and Father* (cf. Ex 19:5-6, in Mosaic Covenant Israel is chosen to be God’s priests)*.* Christ’s kingdom consists of believers who are priests. This is every believer’s vocation. Notice it is ordinary Christians who are called *priests*, not some privileged hierarchy. *Priests* have access to God. They speak to God on behalf of men and speak to men on behalf of God. Believers are assigned this responsible task on behalf of God. They are to pray to God for the world and witness to the world of what God has done. *To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* John is overwhelmed with praise. To Christ who has done so much for us, he ascribes glory and power and praise for ever. There are several doxologies in Revelation (4:11; 5:9; 12-13; 7:10, etc.). John delights in the Lord and loves to bring this out in his doxologies.

**The theme of the Book 1:7-8:** *Behold. He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Amen. I am alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. Says the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty”.*

1:7 *Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him;* this is the theme of the Book! This verse combines Dan 7:13 and Zech 12:10-12; it also appears in Matt 24:30-31. *Behold* means “certainly” or “indeed” and is used to validate the statement that follows. *Clouds* are often mentioned in the OT in connection with divine activity (Ps 104:3; Is 19:1; Nu 11:25; see NT references I Thes 4:17-19; Mark 13:26; 14:61-64; Luke 21:27; Acts 1:9-11); here, we are to think of a scene of triumphant majesty as the Lord Jesus returns to earth in the clouds and great glory (II Thes 1:9-10). The triumphant return to earth of the Lord Jesus will be open for all to see and will be the reversal of things at his first coming. In the days of his earthly life, Christ’s Messiahship was not self-evident. When Jesus was on trial before the Sanhedrin, he was asked by the high priest, *“Are you the Christ, the son of the blessed* (Mark 14:61)?” Jesus answered, *“I am, and you will see the son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven* (Mark 14:62)*.”* His reply said in effect, “Today, you can challenge and reject my Messiahship, but the day will come when it no longer will be in doubt but will be evident to everyone.” In other words, the lordship which is His now, but recognized only by believers and confessed by faith, will be inescapably evident to the whole world when He returns. KEY: The important point is that the return of Christ will be a public, visible event, which every person on earth will see. *Every eye will see him* refers to the vivid, cosmic Day of the Lord event described in the OT, the synoptic gospels, and Revelation (Is 13:6-13; Joel 2:30-31; Matt 24:30-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-28; Rev 6:12-17). *Even they who pierced him,* refers to the prediction of Zech 12:10 concerning the Jews, partially fulfilled at the crucifixion (John 19:37); but, it extends to unbelievers of every age, Jew and gentile alike, whose indifference and rejection of Christ was included in the act of piercing Jesus on the cross. At his coming, *all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him.*  This is not the 12 tribes of Israel but, is a reference primarily to the non-Christian gentile world, represented in terms of ethnic divisions. Here, it refers to the mourning and wailing that occurs when the unbelievers understand it is too late to repent and all they have to look forward to is divine judgment. The thrust of the verse is that at the 2nd coming of Christ, unbelievers will wail and mourn at the impending judgment of Christ against them because of unbelief (Lu 21:25-28). *Mourn because of him* in the context of Zech 12:10-12, however, refers to the genuine repentance of a significant number of Jews, leading to the salvation of one-third of Israel’s population at the end of the 70th week of Daniel (Zech 13:8-9). *Even so, amen*, means so shall it be, amen. This is a vigorous statement of approval by John, which some have criticized because it follows *all the people of the earth will mourn because of him.* It is felt that this enthusiastic approval is unkind and “less than Christian” and that, perhaps, John is being vindictive toward unbelievers, “rubbing their faces in defeat”. However, John is not being vindictive. When Christians are persecuted their God is rejected and their cause is hindered. However, when John describes the overthrow of the wicked and the triumph of God against unbelievers, he is very enthusiastic. He is whole-heartedly committed to the cause of God and is eager and happy when that cause finally succeeds. He exults in God’s success against the wicked. Their overthrow means the triumph of good and the vindication of Christians who have suffered so much!

The coming of Christ mentioned here is controversial. There are several possible viewpoints:

1. The coming of Christ at the rapture, I Thes 4:17; Titus 2:13 (note: there are five views on the timing of the rapture)

2. The coming of Christ to begin the eternal state, Rev 19:11-21

3. The coming of Christ at Armageddon, Rev 19:11-21

4. The coming of Christ at the Day of the Lord (rapture and wrath commencing on the same day after the Great Tribulation), II Thes 1:3-10; 2:1-5; Matt 24:29-44; Rev 6:17; Is 13:6-13; Joel 2:30-31

1:8 *I am the Alpha and Omega*, *the Beginning and the End, says the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.* This is the divine response to what was just spoken about Christ and his 2nd coming and his relationship to believers and unbelievers. As *Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End* (the same title appearsin 21:6) God is set forth as the sovereign Lord over everything that takes place from the beginning to the end of human history. Alpha is the 1st letter and omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. He is stressing His timeless sovereignty for the encouragement of Christians who are facing persecution for their faith. *Who is and who was and who is to come* refers to the eternality of God*,* (see comment on 1:4). As the sovereign Lord, He is the *Almighty.* Although this title occurs extensively throughout the Greek Old Testament, it is found only 12 times in the New Testament, 9 of which occur in the book of Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22). Like the other titles in the verse, it is intended to encourage and support believers in a time of crisis. The reference is to God’s sovereign control over all things, including persecution from ungodly governmental authorities, and the suffering of believers. It assures us that everything God has promised concerning his Son and his church and individual believers will occur.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY ESCHATOLOGICAL EVENTS

1. Eschatology: Study of the last days including events, persons, and chronology of events

2. 70th week of Daniel: The final week of 7 years that is part of the vision of Daniel 9:24-27. This is a 7-year period preceding the Millennium, which includes all the key events relating to the antichrist, tribulation, the seal, trumpet, and bowel judgments, the return of Christ, the salvation of Israel, and Armageddon.

3. Millennium: The kingdom of God on earth with the physical reign of Jesus Christ over all the nations of the world, centered in Jerusalem, existing for 1000 years (Rev 20:2-7).

4. Premillennialism: The view that Jesus returns to the earth to rapture his saints and to judge unbelievers and the world before the Millennium begins.

5. Postmillennialism: The view that Jesus returns to earth after a “Millennial” period. The people of the world and its governments progressively become morally better through the preaching of the gospel. However, at the end, the world suddenly becomes worse, Jesus returns in judgment, raises the dead, and begins the eternal state.

6. Amillennialism: The view that there is no 1000-year millennial kingdom on earth. That the kingdom of God exists right now, having begun immediately after Jesus’ ascent into heaven where He sits on His throne and rules over earth and in the hearts of believers; that Jesus’ return is imminent at which time he will raise the dead, judge the wicked, and establish the eternal state.

7. Pretribulationism: The view that Jesus will return to rapture his saints and raise the dead before the 70th week of Daniel begins. This view understands the entire 70th week of Daniel to be a week of 7 years of tribulation.

8. Midtribulationism: The view that the return of Christ and the rapture of the church is at the midpoint of the final 70th week of Daniel.

9. Posttribulatonism: The view that the return of Christ and the rapture of the church is at the end of the 70th week of Daniel. In this view, the church rises to meet the Lord in the air then returns immediately to earth to witness the battle of Armageddon and establish the Millennial Kingdom.

10. Prewrath rapture: The view that the return of Christ and the rapture of the saints is immediately after the tribulation but before the Day of the Lord judgment. The rapture of the church and the Day of the Lord begin on the same day, immediately after the 6th seal, sometime after the midpoint of the 70th week of Daniel.

11. Great Tribulation: The period of great persecution of saints and unsaved Israel that begins at the midpoint of the 70th week of Daniel and continues for an indefinite period of time until the Lord cuts it short (Matt 24:22).

12. Day of the Lord: The most prophesied event in the Old Testament concerning the last days. It is characterized by God’s fiery, judgmental wrath against the wicked. It is also called the “end of the age”, the “final harvest”, the Day of God, and the “7th seal”. Many believe that the Day of the Lord is initiated by the second coming of Christ to rapture the church and to begin judging the wicked that remain on earth. This time of great judgment begins with the 7th seal and includes the 7 trumpet and 7 bowl judgments, culminating in the final Battle of Armageddon.