

A popular belief about the Book of Revelation is that it is about cataclysmic judgments being poured out on the earth. However, these judgments of God are merely preparation for the true focal point of the book: the revealing of Jesus Christ in power and glory as He returns to take His rightful place as King of kings and Lord of lords.

¹ The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: ² Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

“The Revelation [to reveal or unveil] of Jesus Christ” - The Greek word for “revelation” (*apokálypsis*) is where we get our English word “apocalypse” which invokes images of catastrophic destruction in our minds, obviously due to the cataclysmic events predicted in the Book of Revelation. However, the original meaning of the word here refers to revealing of Christ to the world as the true King of kings and Lord of lords. When Christ returns the world will see Him in a way they have never seen Him before. The same Greek word is used elsewhere in reference to Christ’s “coming” (1 Cor. 1:7) and “appearing” (1 Pet. 1:7).

“which God gave unto him” - As a reward for His perfect obedience, God has given Christ this gift of glory and honor: **Phil. 2:8-11** (speaking of Christ) ⁸ *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* ⁹ *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: ¹⁰ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; ¹¹ And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

“to shew unto his servants things which must shortly [quickly] come to pass” - God does not want to keep His servants in the dark concerning the Christ’s return. The words of this prophecy are intended to bring us joy and hope as we await His return (see v. 3). The Greek word for “shortly” does not indicate how long it will be until these things happen but that once they do begin to happen it will not take long for them to complete.

“and he sent and signified [to indicate; to make known] it by his angel unto his servant John” - The message John is conveying to us was sent to him and “signified” (indicated or made known) to him by the means of an angel. This angel may be the one that showed him the New Jerusalem, the river of life, and other things from Rev. 21:9-22:5. **Rev. 22:6** says *“And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.”* Jesus also spoke of this angel in **Rev. 22:16** - *“I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.”* Apparently this angel is instrumental in showing John the things he sees during his vision.

“Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw” - John is giving his testimony of three things: (1) the word of God, likely as revealed in this prophesy; (2) the testimony of Jesus Christ (what John heard Christ say); (3) all the things that he saw. John is giving us eyewitness testimony of everything that he saw and heard.

³ Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

“Blessed [happy] is he that readeth” - Although many view the book of Revelation with a sense of fear or trepidation, there is a blessing to those who read it and understand its message, for it is one of joy and hope for those awaiting Christ’s return.

“and they that hear [comprehend; give attention to] the words of this prophecy” - The blessing does not depend on merely going through the motions of reading or having the prophesy read in our hearing. The Greek word for “hear” carries the idea of listening, understanding, and accepting what is being read. “Understanding” does not mean perfect comprehension but studying to understand it as much as possible.

“and keep [guard; observe] those things which are written therein” - Once we have read and understood the prophesy we should be motivated to be ready for Christ’s imminent return. **1 John 3:2-3** ² *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.* ³ *And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”*

“for the time is at hand” - Christ’s return could be at any moment and we should be ready. **Luke 12:40** *“Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.”*

⁴ John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;

This greeting from John to the seven churches in Asia is in obedience to the Lord’s command in v. 11 that this prophesy be written down and sent to seven churches in Asia. John wishes them grace and peace from the Trinity: (1) “him which is, and which was, and which is to come,” a reference to God the Father; (2) “the seven Spirits which are before his throne,” a reference to the Holy Spirit; (3) Jesus Christ, as described in v. 5. Seven is the number of completeness, so the “seven Spirits” may be referring to the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

⁵ And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

“And from Jesus Christ...” - John describes Christ in three ways:

- **“the faithful witness”** - Jesus bore witness to the truth of salvation through His words and His works: **John 5:36** *“But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.”* **John 18:37b** (Jesus speaking to Pilate) *“...To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”*
- **“the first begotten of the dead”** - Jesus rose from the dead, paving the way into life for all believers (1 Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18).
- **“the prince of the kings of the earth”** - Christ reigns above all earthly rulers as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

“Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” - Christ loved us enough to give His life for us on the cross.

⁶ And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

“And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father” - John seems to be referring to our role during the millennial kingdom: **Rev. 20:6** *“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”*

“to him be glory and dominion [power; strength] for ever and ever” - There will be no end to Christ’s glory and power.

“Amen” - The Greek word means “firm” or “faithful.” At the end of a sentence it traditionally means “so it is, so be it, may it be fulfilled.”

⁷ Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

“Behold, he cometh with clouds” - This statement echoes what Daniel said in **Dan. 7:13** - *“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.”* These clouds are the Shekinah glory associated with the physical presence of God. It may be that the clouds shield human observers from seeing the true glory of God and dying as He told Moses (**Ex. 33:20** *“And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.”*).

“and every eye shall see him” - No one on earth will be able to miss seeing Christ’s glorious return.

“and they also which pierced him” - The Jews, the ones who crucified their Messiah, will also see Christ at His return and realize what they have done (Zech. 12:10).

“and all kindreds of the earth shall wail [mourn] because of him” - There will be two types of mourning concerning the return of Christ. The Jews will mourn in repentance as predicted in Zech. 12:10-14 because they will realize that they have crucified and rejected their Messiah for centuries. The remainder of the inhabitants of the earth will mourn because they know they are guilty of sin and their judge has just arrived. **“Even so, Amen”** - So let it be.

⁸ I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord” - John is quoting Christ. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Christ might have said in English “I am the A and the Z.” As God, Christ is saying that everything begins and ends with Him, for He is the creator and sovereign ruler over the whole earth. **Matt. 28:18** *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”* Nothing preceded Him and nothing will come after Him for His existence stretches from eternity past to eternity future. There was never a time before God and there will never be a time after God.

“which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty [all powerful; ruler of all]” - Christ is using identifiers associated with God. He speaks of His own eternity (“which is, and which was, and which is to come”) and omnipotence (“the Almighty”). See vs. 11, 17-18.

⁹ I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

“I John, who also am your brother” - John begins his testimony of what he saw and heard (v. 2) by identifying himself. He points out that he is a brother (fellow believer) to the recipients of this letter, believers in the seven churches of Asia referenced in v. 11.

“and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience [steadfastness; endurance] of Jesus Christ” - John had suffered for Christ like they had, and again like them, he is also steadfastly waiting for the kingdom of Christ to arrive.

“was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” - Patmos was a small 10 mile long island located in the Aegean Sea some 50 miles off the west coast of Asia Minor. It was the location of a Roman penal colony and John had been exiled there by Roman authorities as a punishment for preaching the Gospel of Christ.

¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹ Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day” - The phrase “the Lord’s day” appears in many early Christian writings as a reference to Sunday, the day of Christ’s resurrection. On this day the Holy Spirit takes control of John’s physical senses so that he sees and hears what the Spirit wants him to see and hear. John experiences the same type of vision that OT prophets such as Ezekiel and Daniel experienced.

“and heard behind me a great [mégas: mighty; powerful] voice, as of a trumpet” - The Greek word for “great” (mégas) is where we get the prefix “mega” for many English words like “megaphone” or “megahit.” John doesn’t seem to be saying that the voice was musical like a trumpet but that it was loud and distinct and could not be ignored. Trumpets are easy to hear, which is why they are used on battlefields to signal troops.

“Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last” - The One speaking identifies Himself as the Lord Jesus Christ. Later in the chapter (v. 18) He gives us further identifying characteristics so that we know that it is the Lord Jesus Christ speaking and not God the Father.

“What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia” - This command is reason John is writing this prophecy and why it is addressed to the seven churches in Asia (v. 4). “Asia” is not the Orient that we call Asia today, but is a reference to the western end of Asia Minor, where the modern day nation of Turkey is located.

“unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea” - There were many more churches in Asia in John’s day, so why were these specific churches chosen? That question has been debated by theologians, but a few possibilities seem most likely. First of all, seven is the number of completion in the Bible, so apparently these seven churches were representative of the major issues the Lord wanted to address in the universal church. Second, the conditions in these churches provided the occasion for the rebukes and commendations that God wanted expressed within this book. Finally, it may be that these churches were adequate venues for promoting the circulation of the book so that its content would be preserved.