



LESSON 1

Revelation 1

PLEASE USE THE QUESTION paradigm from pages 353–54 as you work through the following. See the introductory comments there that explain each part of the process below in more detail.

- **Pray.**
 - **Ponder the Passage.** Read Revelation 1 once a day from different translations for the entire week, looking for its:
 - Point
 - Persons
 - Patterns
 - Persons of the Trinity
 - Puzzling Parts
 - **Put It in Perspective.**
 - Place in Scripture
 - Passages from Other Parts of Scripture
1. Based on your observations of the text, what is the basic content of this passage? Try to summarize it in your own words, using a sentence or two.
 2. Whose revelation is this (Rev. 1:1)? What is the purpose of the revelation (Rev. 1:1)?

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3. What five parties are involved in the chain of communication (Rev. 1:1–3)?
4. What does the word “must” convey in Revelation 1:1?
5. Since John was living in the first century A.D. and it has been more than two thousand years since “what must soon take place” was written, what does this phrase mean (Rev. 1:1)?
6. What is the blessing in Revelation 1:3? Look up “blessed” in a concordance. Where are the other blessings in Revelation? How many are there total? Make a list of them.
7. Look up each of the seven churches in a Bible dictionary and write down what you learn (Rev. 1:4).
8. What type of genre does Revelation 1:4–8 convey that the book of Revelation is?
9. What person of the Godhead is “the seven spirits who are before his throne” (Rev. 1:4)?
10. Explain in your own words the titles used of Jesus Christ in Revelation 1:5.
11. What has Christ made us by his action on the cross (Rev. 1:6)?
12. Compare Revelation 1:4 with 1:8. What similarities exist?
13. When will the tribulation and the kingdom occur, according to Revelation 1:9?
14. Where was John? Why was he there and when (Rev. 1:9–10)?
15. What was John commanded to do (Rev. 1:11)?
16. Look up *trumpet* in a Bible dictionary or concordance. What did a trumpet usually signify in the Old Testament (Rev. 1:11)?
17. What are the “seven golden lampstands” in Revelation 1:12 (compare with Rev. 1:20)?
18. Compare Daniel 3, 7, and 10 with Revelation 1:13–15. What do you find?
19. What was John’s response to the vision of Revelation 1:12–15 (Rev. 1:17)? What was Christ’s response to John’s response (Rev. 1:18)?

20. Compare Revelation 1:4 and 1:8 with 1:19. What similarities exist?
21. Go back and interpret Revelation 1:12 and 1:16 in the light of 1:20.

- **Principles and Points of Application.**

1. It is so easy to read Scripture without hearing it. It's also easy to hear Scripture without doing anything about it. We can observe, but not interpret. Or we can observe and interpret, but not apply. But the Lord is telling us here in the introduction of Revelation that we must observe, interpret, and apply his Word in our lives. Use your lesson's questions to spend time this week in Revelation 1 observing, interpreting, and applying.
2. Make a list, title by title or description by description, of the names of God presented in Revelation 1:4–8. What does each name tell you about Christ? Which one is most meaningful to you? Most comforting for your season of life right now? Hardest for you to grasp? Easiest for you to understand?
3. How are you demonstrating your kingship and priesthood in God's kingdom? In other words, how are you ruling over that which/those whom he's put underneath you (children, those who are under your leadership environment, etc.) and how are you worshiping God and leading others to worship him? How are you interceding for others?
4. How does Revelation 1:9 make you feel connected to your brothers and sisters in Christ in the past? How does this encourage you? Read Hebrews 11 and then read verse 1:9 again. Pray that one day your life too will be an encouragement to others long after you've passed away. Then live each day in light of this.
5. When have you "seen Jesus" in such a way that you have fallen "facedown"? Write about the circumstances and pray about whether to share it with your group this week.
6. As we move through the book of Revelation this year, it will aid our worship to write down the names of God in each chapter

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as we study. I have separated the page into names for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Of course, some names apply to all three. At the end of each lesson, fill out the names you have seen in that lesson's text. Keep this page nearby and use it often as a reference for worship and adoration of God during your individual and/or group prayer time. Add as many pages of your own as you need to complete the list of names found throughout the book. I have done the first chapter for you below as an example.

- *Father*, you are God (Rev. 1:1), the One who is and who was and who is to come (Rev. 1:4, 8), the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 1:8), the LORD God (ibid.), the Almighty (ibid.).
- *Jesus*, you are Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:1), the faithful witness (Rev. 1:5), the firstborn of the dead (ibid.), the ruler of kings on earth (ibid.), the one who loves us (ibid.), the one who has freed us from our sins by your blood (ibid.), the one who has made us a kingdom of priests to God the Father (ibid.), the one to whom belong glory and dominion forever (Rev. 1:6), the one who is coming with the clouds (Rev. 1:7), one like a Son of Man (Rev. 1:13), the first and the last (Rev. 1:17), the living one (Rev. 1:18), the one who died and is alive forevermore (ibid.), the one who has the keys of death and hades (ibid.).
- *Holy Spirit*, you are the seven spirits who are before God's throne (Rev. 1:4).

NOTES FOR REVELATION 1

Aim: Ponder the aim of this lesson concerning our:

Mind: What do we need to know from this passage in Scripture?

That John is instructed by Jesus to write to the seven churches in Asia concerning his vision on Patmos of the things that he's seen, that are, and that are about to take place.

Heart: How does what we learn from this passage affect our internal relationship with the Lord?

It prepares us to be kingdom disciples who read, hear, and keep the Word of God given through Revelation.

Hands: How does what we learn from this passage translate into action for God's kingdom?

It enables us to:

1. Make a list of the descriptions of God presented in Revelation 1:4–8 and meditate on them, thanking God for who he is and what he has done.
2. Demonstrate our kingship and priesthood in God's kingdom by leading those under our care in a Christlike way by the Spirit's power, and by interceding for those in our lives who need prayer.
3. Live each day in light of the fact that after we die our life legacy should be an encouragement to others in the faith.
4. Rely on the Holy Spirit to "see Jesus" in such a way in our lives that we fall "facedown" and worship him and lead others to do the same.

INTRODUCTION

The music began as a cue for people to stop talking and take their seats before the worship service. After a time of Scripture reading and singing, the pastor assumed his position at the pulpit to preach the Word of God. As he got under way, I purposefully looked around me to see what people were doing. Some were sleeping. Some were yawning. Others were reading their bulletins. A few were taking serious notes. A couple were tending to antsy children. Several were looking straight ahead at the preacher. I wondered how we looked to the One who was supposed to be the center of our worship. Was he pleased? I

couldn't help wondering if he was offended at our conduct. It seemed to be another Sunday morning that we showed up at church because we knew that was where we were supposed to be, but it seemed as if we were not impressed with the One we were worshiping. Perhaps we had grown too familiar with the church building and the preacher. Perhaps we were tired from the week before and trying to figure out how we were going to make it through the next one. Or maybe we were still thinking about this whole God idea and if we really bought into it. But few of us seemed overwhelmed to be in the presence of the Holy and Almighty God.

I knew it wasn't all of the many trials and pains and hardships that kept us from being overwhelmed. One of the ladies in the audience was on the verge of physical death and she looked more radiant and more engaged than anyone. She had battled cancer—a cancer that would take her life in a week—but she was ready to go home to be with her Lord and Savior. No, the difference among the people, biblically speaking, was, first, the presence (or lack of it) of the indwelling Holy Spirit. I knew that not everyone in the seats was saved. The second difference had to do with whether or not we had quenched the Holy Spirit in our lives or were attuned to the Spirit and ready to hear what God had to say to us through him. I knew that few of us had taken the time to prepare our hearts for worship before coming to church. And the third difference was in knowing God through knowing the Word of God so that we were able to worship in spirit and in truth. I knew that many had not opened the Word of God since last Sunday. These three differences—the indwelling of the Spirit, being attuned to the Spirit, and knowing God through his Word—are important for opening our eyes to the spiritual things taking place around us and preparing our hearts to worship God as he deserves on Sunday mornings.

Revelation 1 has much to say about embracing Christ, being attuned to the spiritual things around us, and knowing the Word of God. And the response is not to stay comfortably seated. John's response in this chapter is to fall at Christ's feet as though he, John, were stricken dead.

When is the last time that we saw Jesus and fell at his feet as though we were dead? When is the last time that we were so overwhelmed with who he is and what he has done that we have fallen facedown to worship him? When was the last Sunday that we spent time preparing our heart to meet with the Living God and worship him?

We will study this chapter by dividing our lesson into three main sections:

- I. The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:1–3)
- II. John’s Greeting to the Seven Churches in Asia (cf. John 1:4–8)
- III. God Gives John a Vision on Patmos (Rev. 1:9–20)

I. The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:1–3)

Revelation 1:1. The first thing we see is that this is a revelation of Jesus Christ—that is, it is about him and comes to John through him. It has been said that every book in the Bible whispers Christ’s name; in Revelation, we have a book that shouts his name. But that shout does not originate with Christ; it originates with God the Father. And God the Father had a purpose in giving his Son this revelation. The message was not only for the churches in Asia Minor during John’s day; it was for you and me as well, to show us the things that must soon take place. The word “must” here is an imperative. If we say this word in our own lives—“this must happen”—we reveal that we are being selfish and prideful. But for God to say it reveals that he is Sovereign over all things and that his plan and purpose is certain to come to pass. This should instill great hope in us that our Father’s plan and purpose will, indeed, *must*, come to pass. God made this known to believers like you and me by sending an angel to his servant John who recorded what he saw for the church. So, we see that there is a chain of communication involved here that looks like this: God the Father to Jesus Christ to his Angel to John to all believers.

Old Testament Background to Revelation 1:1. Daniel 2:28–30, 45–47 says, “But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries,

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and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days . . . thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be . . . just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this.” This background helps us define “soon” in 1:1. What was future for Daniel, who is looking toward Christ’s first and second comings, has already been inaugurated in John’s day. John has been an eyewitness to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and is now living in a time when the kingdom has been inaugurated but not consummated, just as we do today.

Revelation 1:2. John was faithful in his task. He was a faithful servant and obeyed God’s command to write down the visions that he saw. How much we would have missed if John had not been obedient to his calling! How important it is for you and for me to be sensitive to the ministry that the Lord has for us as we join together to serve the kingdom of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. What is the “testimony of Jesus Christ”? It is defined by its parallel phrase in the verse, “the word of God.” John 1:1 tells us that the Word was God and this Word was Christ and he came to earth to be a witness to God’s Word, that we might know the Father since the Son has revealed him to us in our world. He stands as a witness to the truth of God’s Word.

Revelation 1:3. We see here the first “blessing” of seven in the book. John uses the number seven to connote completeness. Thus, the seven blessings in Revelation convey that the ones who follow the exhortations connected with the blessings will be completely and fully blessed in glory. The seven blessings in Revelation can be found in the following verses:

- Revelation 1:3: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.”

- Revelation 14:13: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”
- Revelation 16:15: “Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”
- Revelation 19:9: “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”
- Revelation 20:6: “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!”
- Revelation 22:7: “Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”
- Revelation 22:14: “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.”

All of the blessings have to do with embracing and persevering in faith so that we will receive the promise of eternal life. These blessings are important because they are glimmers of hope for us. The church in John’s day that was undergoing persecution and the temptation to compromise with the world especially needed to be reminded of the blessing that was theirs if they remained faithful to Christ. But we need such a reminder just as much today, as we are tempted to compromise our own faith with the world of materialism and false ideology around us.

Let’s look at the first blessing: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy . . .” We should not skim over that instruction too quickly. So many people find the book of Revelation difficult to study. They make it through the first few chapters and then put it down when the “weird visions” begin. But if we were to sit and read this out loud to our children and grandchildren and add pictures alongside it, ask them if they understood it, they would look up at us with wide eyes and say, “Yes.” They would say this because children are so good at seeing the big picture and using their imaginations and not getting

stuck on details. For example, when my son, Caleb, was four, we began reading *Dangerous Journey*, which is a children's book based on John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.¹ Each page is illustrated with some of the most disturbing pictures to convey our journey through this life to the next. But Caleb loved the book and even when he was four understood the majority of the message. He wanted it read to him over and over again. So we would do well to pick up Revelation and read it all in one sitting, out loud, and if we have children or grandchildren, to read it to them too. Don't get caught up in the logic of it all; rather, remember that this is more like a piece of great art or a symphony composed by a master musician. It is to be read with emotion and flare, but the truth behind it is not embellished. The truth behind it is *truth* and will certainly take place.

The second part of the first blessing of the book is also found in this verse: "Blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it." We are not just supposed to read John's message; we are to hear it. That is a great difference. We can read something and not hear it, in the sense that the content quickly leaves our minds and we move on to the next bit of information in our world. But John tells us that we are to hear it in the sense that it touches our hearts and minds in such a way that we are moved to action to keep the exhortations written in it.

Our motivation for persevering in the faith is because "the time is near." This phrase will confuse us here and throughout the whole book if we think of it only in terms of the second coming of Christ. But Revelation is not only concerned with the second coming. The book is concerned with the period of time between Christ's first and second comings. We see in the book of Revelation what we see elsewhere in Scripture, the tension between the already and the not yet. Christ has already come and won the victory over Satan at the cross, but Satan is still allowed to roam around the world looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). He is not yet confined to the "lake of fire" for all eter-

1. *Dangerous Journey: The Story of Pilgrim's Progress*, selected from John Bunyan's original work by Oliver Hunkin, illustrated by Alan Parry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

nity. So, too, Christ has already inaugurated his kingdom with his death and resurrection, but it will not be fully consummated until he comes again. So, we can say that Christ will “come quickly” because this refers not just to his visible second coming, but also to the comings of judgment depicted in chapters 2–3, in which Christ removes those in the church who do not serve him faithfully. Of course, we should always recognize that the time of his second coming is near in the sense that it is the next main event in the history of redemption that God has revealed in his Word. And, we should always recognize that because we do not know the day or the hour of Christ’s return, it could take place any day of our lives and we need to be found faithful. Only if we are found faithful will we receive the blessing. And we should be faithful not only because of what Christ has already done for us through his death and resurrection, but also because of what he will do for us when he returns to establish his eternal kingdom in its fullest form and allow us entrance into it.

II. John’s Greeting to the Seven Churches in Asia (cf. John 1:4–8)

Revelation 1:4–5a. These verses clearly display that the book of Revelation is first and foremost an epistle. The book does use prophetic and apocalyptic genres, but it is primarily a letter to seven historical churches in Asia Minor, although these are most likely representative for all the churches in Asia Minor at the time and for all churches of all times.² We must not forget that Revelation not only had an application for the readers of John’s day, but has a message for the church of our day as well. Thus, the book is not just about the future, it is about today and yesterday and forever. We must be discerning as we try to understand which parts of Revelation apply to the past, the present, and the future. And we must hold our conclusions humbly and loosely, as we acknowledge that many in the church who love the Lord and seek to know his Word hold to different interpretations of the book.

2. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 37–39.

Figure 1.1. The Seven Churches in Asia³

The Asia Minor of John's day was an oppressive place for Christians to live. No longer did they enjoy the protection of being considered an offshoot of Judaism, which was tolerated by Rome. By this time, Jews had become increasingly intolerant of Christians as the beliefs of the two groups separated them from one another. In fact, Jews most likely were the ones accusing Christians before the Roman government of disturbing the peace, not being part of Judaism, and refusing to worship Caesar. The imperial cult of ancient Rome, which acknowledged the emperors as having divine authority, infiltrated every area of life at the time so that Christians who did not participate were left at a severe economic and social disadvantage. Penalties for not worshipping the Roman emperor would involve exile and death.

Ephesus was a significant city because it had been the center of Paul's ministry and because John had lived there and been influential in

3. I am indebted to Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 67–115, for specific information on the cities and churches.

the church. Geographically, it was located at the best entry point from the port in that region of Asia Minor. Three trade routes met at the city and a wide, column-lined street led from the port to the center of the city, which contained a stadium, market, and theater. The Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and several other temples built to emperors were a significant presence in the city.

Smyrna is the only one of these seven ancient cities that remains active and vital today (as Izmir). It too had a great entry point from the Aegean Sea and contained an important road to get exports out of the region. It contained a well-known stadium, library, and the largest public theater in Asia. Like Ephesus, it too had a large population. It too built temples in honor of emperors and gods. It held strong allegiance to Rome and was mainly made up of Jews who persecuted Christians. Polycarp, one of the early church fathers, was the twelfth martyr of Smyrna.

Pergamum was about ten miles east of the Aegean Sea. It was the capital city of Asia Minor and known as the most distinguished city of the region. Its library was the largest and it was the center of worship for the pagan cults of Zeus, Athene, Dionysos, and Asklepios.

Thyatira was the least elaborate and known city of the region, but did have a large number of trade guilds that developed and succeeded there. Since trade guilds were closely linked with allegiance to the imperial cult, it was difficult for Christians to be involved in these guilds without compromising their faith, which hurt them economically.

Sardis was a famous and wealthy city, as it was the first to strike gold and silver coins and discover how to dye wool. The environment was pagan, but there appeared to be no heresy or outside opposition coming into the churches.

Philadelphia was known as the “gateway to the East” for commerce and a “missionary city” for Greek culture to Lydia and Phrygia. It had many temples, cults, and religious festivals.

Laodicea was the wealthiest city in Phrygia. It was famous for the soft, glossy black wool it produced from its sheep. This fame and wealth brought the banking industry to the region. The city was also famous for its medical school and physicians. Two famous medicines invented

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in Laodicea were an ear ointment and an eye-salve. However, the city had to bring its water in from an outside source through stone pipes, which could be cut off and did not provide the freshest water.

The phrase “grace and peace” is seen frequently in the New Testament letters, as the author knows that it will only be by God’s grace that readers will be able to keep and apply the words they are reading that were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and it is only the peace of God (which he alone can give) that will get them through external pressures. But grace and peace are theirs from “him who is and who was and who is to come.” This is an allusion to both Exodus 3:14 (“I AM Who I AM”) and Isaiah (multiple verses in which God refers to himself in a similar way) and would have instilled great confidence in the readers that the same God who was with believers in the Old Testament is with them today and is holding all of their tomorrows in his hand as well. This allusion serves the same purpose for us today. The God of the Old and New Testaments is the same God who today is bringing his promises to pass, filling our lives with his grace and peace as we walk through this world that is not our home. Not only are grace and peace and the book of Revelation from God the Father, but also from the Holy Spirit, “the seven spirits who are before his throne” (Rev. 1:4). The “seven” connotes perfection and completion. The Holy Spirit is not only the one who assists John in writing Scripture (2 Peter 1:21), but also the one who applies God’s grace and peace to our lives. We see in verse 5a that this grace and peace are also from Jesus Christ, who is given three descriptions here. He is the faithful witness because he has been sent from the Father to testify about the Father. If we know the Son, then we know the Father (John 10:30). He was faithful even unto death on the cross. Thus, despite the persecution that he faced, Jesus stood strong as a faithful witness to God in the midst of it, never wavering or compromising his faith. He is the example that the churches in Asia Minor were to follow and that we are to follow today. He is also the “firstborn of the dead.” Christ’s resurrection inaugurated the new creation, and thus he is the firstborn of the new creation in whose footsteps all believers will follow. Finally, he is “the ruler of kings on earth.” At the cross he defeated all of his enemies and thus rules over them.

Old Testament Background to Threefold Description. Psalm 89:27, 37: “And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies.”

This psalm speaks of David as the anointed king who reigns over his enemies and whose seed will be established on the throne for eternity. Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of the ideal Davidic king who reigns forever on his throne that was established at his resurrection (Rev. 1:5b–6).

Now John breaks into worship, a theme we will see throughout the book. John’s worship stems from three things. First, Christ has loved us. The epitome of his love was shown to us on the cross. Second, he has freed us from our sins by his blood on the cross. He died in our place. Third, he has made us a kingdom of priests to his God and Father. Upon his ascension, the kingdom of which we are priests was inaugurated and we are thus participants in his kingdom as priests now although not yet in the fullest sense. It is because of these three actions that Christ is to be worshiped; his will be the glory and the dominion forever.

Old Testament Background to Revelation 1:6. Exodus 19:6: “And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Christ fulfilled what the Passover lamb could never do. He was the final and complete sacrifice. Christ’s death not only made him priest and king, but also made all believers priests and kings with him. Believers function in these two offices now by being witnesses to the world around us of Christ’s office of king and priest so that others, too, might become a part of the kingdom. We do this by standing firm in our testimony despite any persecution and temptation to compromise our faith. This will be revealed to us throughout the pages of Revelation. The church functions as the new Israel, which no longer has to offer the Passover lamb but proclaims and testifies to the true Lamb of God. And he alone is worthy to receive glory for the salvation that he accomplished for the people of God on the cross.

Revelation 1:7. This one who has loved us and freed us from our sins when he came the first time to accomplish his work on the cross is

coming again. But this time it will not be as a baby; this time it will be as the Son of Man coming with the clouds. And he will not be hidden in a stable, but every eye will see him and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. However, his ultimate coming is already inaugurated as all throughout the history of this interadvent age he continues to bless and to judge.

Old Testament Background to Revelation 1:7.

- Daniel 7:13: “And behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.”
- Zechariah 12:10: “When they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him.”

Revelation 1:8. All three titles in Revelation 1:8 convey the same idea. God is over all of history. He was at the beginning and he will be at the end, and consequently he will be over all that is in between. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and omega is the last. He is almighty over all things and is directing its end to accomplish his purposes.

Old Testament Background to Revelation 1:8.

- Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12: “I am the first and I am the last.”
- Haggai repeatedly uses “Almighty” to refer to God, as do Zechariah and Malachi.

III. God Gives John a Vision on Patmos (Rev. 1:9–20)

Revelation 1:9. John’s words here remind us that he is our brother as much as he was the brother of the Christians in the churches of Asia Minor. Also, the tribulation and the kingdom are spoken of as present realities so we know that they have been inaugurated. He is also a partner with his readers in “the patient endurance,” as is clear by his location on the island of Patmos. He was there because he had stood firm in his faith and testimony, which means he had probably been banished to the island because of his faith.

Revelation 1:10–11. Evidently John had his heart attuned to worship by the Holy Spirit’s working on a certain Sunday when he received this vision. What an appropriate model for us today who

have largely forgotten what it's like to be in the Spirit on Sunday morning. Rushing about trying to get ourselves and our children ready in order to fly out the door to make it to church on time, sometimes even having an argument with our spouse on the way, leaves us in a poor condition to hear from the Lord or worship him. But thankfully, John had prepared his heart and was able to hear from the Lord, and because he had done this and heard, he was able to bless the church with one of the most encouraging books of the New Testament. How many blessings we must miss on the Lord's Day by not having our hearts prepared!

The loud voice like a trumpet alludes to the many instances in the Old Testament where trumpets were associated with judgment (Ex. 19:16, 19–20 and Josh. 6), and thus gives us an idea that the book of Revelation will deal with judgment as one of its themes. Just as the Old Testament prophets were commanded to communicate to the people of Israel their visions, which also had judgment as one of their themes, so too John is asked to write down his visions for the seven churches of Asia Minor, and ultimately for the universal church.

Revelation 1:12–16. John turns and sees seven golden lampstands, which represent the church and in the midst of them, one like a son of man.

Old Testament Background to Revelation 1:12. Zechariah 4:2–6: “A lampstand . . . and seven lamps on it.”

Note that there was only one lampstand in Zechariah, whereas here there are seven. This is due to the fact that John is now applying the lampstands to the church universal and to all peoples, not just Israel. The long robe and golden sash (Rev. 1:13) around Christ emphasize his priestly role of tending to the churches. He is the one who speaks words of promise, words of affirmation, or words of warning or rebuke to them. The hairs of his head being white not only convey wisdom, but purity as well. His eyes being like a flame of fire describes Christ's judicial role (Rev. 1:14). His feet that were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace (Rev. 1:15) display his moral purity and set the precedent for what his followers should reflect as well.

Old Testament Background to Revelation 1:13–15. See Daniel 3, 7, 10. Note that the attributes of God the Father (Ancient of Days) is

here ascribed to Christ (“one like a son of man”), thus solidifying the deity and place of Christ alongside the Father on the throne. The seven stars in Christ’s right hand are the angels of the seven churches (Rev. 1:20), conveying that Christ is not only Lord of the earthly church, but the heavenly church as well. The sharp two-edged sword continues to convey his role as judge (Rev. 1:16a).

Old Testament Background to Revelation 1:16a.

- Isaiah 11:4: “And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth.”
- Isaiah 49:2: “He made my mouth like a sharp sword.”

The idea here is that his face was like the sun shining in full strength, which reveals a victorious warrior.

Old Testament Background to Revelation 1:16b. Judges 5:31: “So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might.”

Revelation 1:17–18. John’s response to the vision was to fall face-down, as though dead. Isn’t that the response that God’s Word should evoke in us? When we are attuned to the Spirit as John was and are ready to hear his Word to us, we are overwhelmed by it. John lay before him as though dead, but you can almost hear Jesus say to John, “I died so that you don’t have to. Because I live you will live too. Because I broke the bonds of death, you do not have to fear. Because I am the first and the last, you do not have to worry; I have everything under my control. Because I have the keys of Death and Hades, Satan and his powers cannot destroy you. Thus, do not fear!” I don’t know about you but there have been moments in my life when I have been seized by fear. The news of layoffs coming in the company leaves us wondering if we will be next. The doctor leaves a message on the voice mail saying the test results are not good and we need to come in immediately. The pregnancy doesn’t seem like it’s going well and there is the possibility of miscarriage. The neighbor down the street tells us she’s seen our husband with another woman. We have reason to believe that our child has disabilities. We have evidence that our teen is struggling with an addiction. Our adult

child has abandoned the faith and is on the road of destruction. But Jesus takes us by the shoulder and lays his right hand on us, displaying his kingship over our lives, and speaks to us, saying, “Do not fear. I have died so that you may live. I am sovereign over your circumstances. I am almighty over the events in your life.” And he invites us to live as kings and priests with him.

Old Testament Background to Revelation 1:17–18.

- Isaiah 22:22: “And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”
- Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12: “I am the first and the last.”

Revelation 1:19–20. Again John is commanded to write. He is to write “the things you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.” In light of the threefold description of Christ in Revelation 1:4 and 1:8, it seems likely that this verse is referring equally to the entire book. “What will happen after these things” may very probably be an allusion to Daniel 2, which provides an already and not-yet tension, as we have seen exists in the book. To understand this verse as separating the book into three different chronological sections does not do justice to the literary genre of Revelation, the biblical text, or the already and not-yet tension found in the New Testament. The “mystery” in 1:20a further confirms the use of Daniel 2 in these verses.

Old Testament Background to Revelation 1:19–20. Daniel 2:29, 47: “Of what would be after this” and “a revealer of mysteries.”

Now the seven stars and seven lampstands are defined as the angels of the seven churches and the churches themselves. The angels here refer to the earthly church that they represent as well. They are in a sense accountable for the churches and the churches benefit from the angel’s activity on their behalf. They have heavenly assistance for the churches’ earthly trials. The churches are already seen as taking part in the heavenly realm, and the angels remind them of this. Though they are struggling on earth, they are already in a

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sense taking part in the heavenly worship of heaven. Thus, it is even more imperative that they stand firm as witnesses.

CONCLUSION

John saw Jesus and fell at his feet as though he were dead. He was so overwhelmed with who Christ is and what he has done that John fell facedown to worship him. He was prepared to be in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. He was prepared in his heart to meet with the Living God and worship him. He had allowed exile to soften rather than harden his heart. He had joyfully embraced suffering for the cause of Christ. He was ready to be used by God to build up the churches. And he was able to do all of these things because he knew the one that he worshiped and he recognized the enablement of the Holy Spirit. He knew that Jesus was the Christ who had died and rose again. He knew the grace and peace that only comes from God. He knew that Christ was the faithful witness and he wanted to follow in his Master's footsteps. He knew Christ was the firstborn of the dead and that he too would receive a glorified body. He knew that Christ was the ruler of kings on earth and that they could not harm him even if they put him in exile. He knew that Christ loved him and had freed him from his sins by his blood and he wanted to be willing to give his blood for the cause of Christ as well. He knew that Christ had made him part of a kingdom and made him a priest to his God and Father. And he knew that his whole life was to glorify the Lord. He knew that one day Jesus would come with the clouds and every tongue would confess that Jesus is Lord. John knew Jesus and because he knew him, he was a faithful witness.

May we follow in the footsteps of John and see Jesus in such way that we fall at his feet in worship and stand as faithful witnesses for him in the midst of our world.